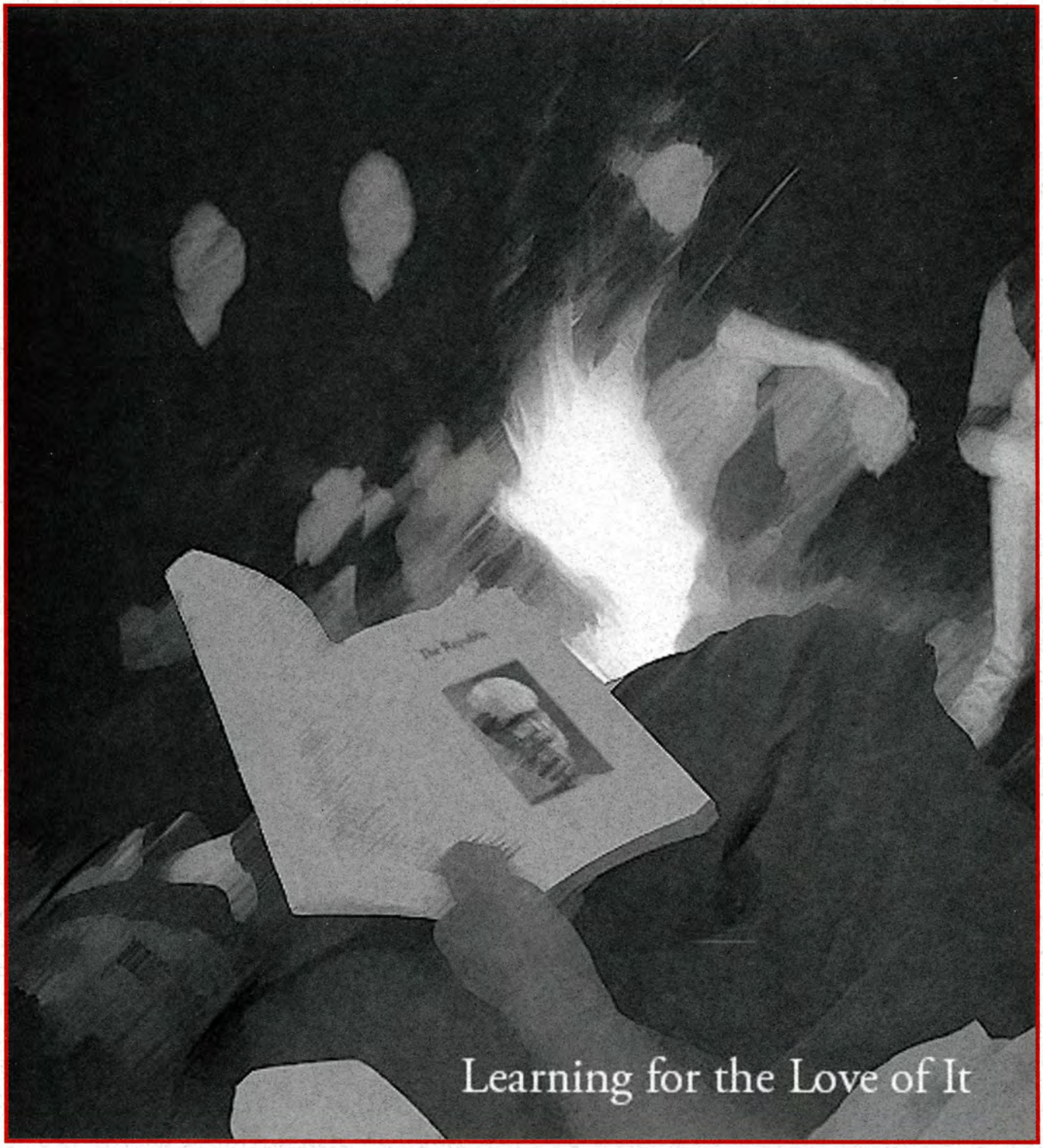
A forum for Christian school educators

Christian Educators Journal

Volume ~~45~~ 44 No. ~~1~~ 2 December 2004



Learning for the Love of It

Editorial


Bert Witvoet

The Joy of Being Kept by Froebel's Vision

I started going to school in the Netherlands at the ripe age of three. The name of the school was *Bewaarschool*, which can be literally translated as "keep" or "take-care-of" school. Oh, you say, that must have been a version of daycare. Not really; it was a school with classrooms and a teacher, and we learned things, mostly through play. There were three grades, and by the time I had graduated and majored in weaving thin strips of colored paper and the traditional "cuttin' and pastin,'" I was ready to go to the Christian elementary school across the road.

The *Bewaarschool* was also referred to as a Froebel School. Dr Fredrik Froebel, a German educator, was the founder of the Kindergarten and one of the most influential educational reformers of the 19th century. Froebel's most important contribution to educational theory was his belief in "self-activity" and play as essential factors in child education. The teacher's role was not to drill and indoctrinate but, rather, to encourage a child's self-expression through play, both individually and in group activities.

Childhood memories

Of course, I was not aware of all these lofty goals when I took my first hesitant steps into the first-year Kindergarten playroom. I remember a sizable wooden airplane that was suspended from the ceiling and that we could have a ride in as it circled the room above us. Behind the school was a huge fenced-in sandbox (the size of three classrooms), which functioned as playground. Each of us could avail ourselves of a wheelbarrow, a shovel and rake, or we could lay claim to short wooden logs, the size of a rolled-up sleeping bag, that we would use to put boards on for a teeter-totter and for building other things.

Next to the fenced-in yard stood a tall pole with a wheel sitting on top. Every year a pair of storks would build their nest there. (Do you remember Meindert De Jong's *The Wheel on the School*? His story takes place about 30 kilometers from my hometown). Whenever we saw a stork flying to the nest or sitting on it, we would sing out: "Stork, may I have a little baby?" (*Ooievaar, mai'k 'n lietse poppe?*) Sometimes the stork answered our request favorably. Those were three pleasant years for me. The school certainly achieved Froebel's goal of combining self-activity and play.

Choice of art

It was a public school, and the Froebel philosophy probably caused a few frowns in our Reformed circles. The strong reliance on self-expression may have been too single-minded for some. It reminds me of what John Taylor Gatto writes in his book *Dumbing Us Down: The Hidden Curriculum of Compulsory Schooling*. "Teaching'" he writes, "is nothing like the art of painting, where, by the *addition* of material to a surface, an image is synthetically produced, but more like the art of sculpture, where, by the *subtraction* of material, an image already locked in the stone is enabled to emerge. It is a crucial distinction." Gatto recommends that teachers get out of the way of the student as much as possible rather than try to deposit so-called wisdom into the child. This ultimate faith in what lies submersed in the human mind and soul does not take into account the reality of sin, of course. It's a humanistic faith, one that does not answer to the call to raise a child in the fear of the Lord.

Joyful activity

I don't think Froebel would go that far, but certainly there are echoes in his theory. His theory is explained this way:

The mind grows by self-revelation, while in play the child ascertains what he can do, and discovers his possibilities of will and thought by exerting his power spontaneously. Froebel's self-activity is necessarily coupled with joy on the part of the child. To him joy is the inward reaction of self-activity. (See website: http://tfschool.bizhat.com/info_system.html.)

Somewhere else I read:

Friedrich Froebel believed that humans are essentially productive and creative — and fulfillment comes through developing these in harmony with God and the world. As a result, Froebel sought to encourage the creation of educational environments that involve practical work and the direct use of materials. Through engaging with the world, understanding unfolds. Hence the significance of play — it is a creative activity, and through it children become aware of their place in the world. He went on to develop special materials (such as shaped wooden bricks and balls - gifts), a series of recommended activities (occupations) and movement activities, and a linking set of theories. His original concern was the teaching of young children through educational games in the family. In the later years of his life this became linked with a demand for the provision of special centres for the care and development of children outside the home. (See website http://www.infed.org/thinkers/et-froeb.htm)

Self-expression?

There is much to be commended in this theory. It certainly applies well to the Kindergarten scene, I would think. This is where Froebel exerted the greatest influence.

Kindergarten is a wonderful means for securing the development of the child between the ages of three and six years

— a period when it is not yet ready for the conventional studies of school. It was all that for me. My parents must have liked the playful option. Or was my mother motivated by the fact that it freed her for other options?

I do remember an interesting event that took place just before World War II broke out. We had relatives from the big city of Amsterdam staying at our house. They had taken along their German shepherd, of all things. I remember playing hooky from Kindergarten one day while walking the dog (actually the dog walked me most of the time as I remember being pulled along). It was a brave act for a four-year-old, and I fully expected to get punished for it. But my parents never mentioned it. Maybe it fit the Froebel philosophy of self-expression and play. At any rate, it got the dog out of my Mom's hair for a day, too.

Stifling environment

Why am I bringing all this up in an issue that deals with the joy of learning? Because that joy did not always stay alive while I entered elementary and secondary school in the Netherlands. Quite often I felt cramped. Lessons in art, for example, consisted of copying the same drawings that my older siblings had copied the years before. I expressed my restlessness a few times by engaging in pranks. One time, using calcium carbide, I blew up an inkwell in the desk of our pastor's son. I was coaxed to do this by sixth-grade students (I was in grade three and felt honored by the request of older students.) My cousin, who was in an upper grade, betrayed me. Consequently, I was punished by the principal, the teacher of our pastor's son and my own teacher. Years later, I was ashamed of this action, but it was too late to apologize. My point is — I looked for ways to create excitement and to escape the confinement of a somewhat stifling system. Maybe there was not enough play in our classrooms. Not enough self-expression?

Froebel, by the way, was influenced by a difficult childhood. "His mother died when he was a baby, and his father, a pastor, left him to his own devices. He grew up, it is said, with a love for nature and with a strong Christian faith, and this was central to his thinking as an educationalist. He saw, and sought to encourage, unity in all things." (See previous website.)

That sounds like something we could easily adhere to in our Christian schools. One thing I know — from what I see in our local Christian schools, there's more room for self-expression today than I experienced in the teacher-oriented system of the past, and unity in all things curricular is generally valued. That's not to say that we have solved all the problems of institutionalized learning. Lack of curiosity present in far too many students is a testimony of failure somewhere. The fault may lie with our schools, it may lie with the families represented or the student himself, or it may lie with our culture. Perhaps compulsory formal education up to age 16 is a mistake. It's good to ask these questions. Somehow the school experience is too far removed from where the student's heart is.

I'll leave you with one more question. As a teacher, do you think of yourself as a painter or a sculptor?

Bert Witvoet

Christian Educators Journal

Published four times a year:
October, December, February, April

Reprint Policy:
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What Shakespeare Teaches Us About Education

"Why do our children need music, literature, history?"

by Steve J. Van Der Weele

Dr. Van Der Weele is professor emeritus of English at Calvin College, Grand Rapids, Michigan. This article first appeared in the September 1966 issue of the now defunct Reformed Journal.

To anyone who wishes to consult Shakespeare for wisdom as a new school year gets underway, the bard's most famous passage about schools is not very promising. Perhaps reflecting his own experience, he describes a student as "...the whining schoolboy, with his satchel/And shining morning face, creeping like snail/Unwillingly to school." *(As You Like It,* II, vii, 11. 145ff.)

But we should not give up too easily. If he has said anything relevant to and about children, teachers, and parents of students, we ought to avail ourselves of his insight, for educational statesmanship has never been more imperative. Despite the vast sums of money being spent on education, despite the rapid growth of the whole educational enterprise, and despite the feverish experimentation with the processes of education, the widespread confusion and disagreement about the ultimate goals and aims of education is a stark reality of contemporary life.

Understanding our condition

There is in one of Shakespeare's plays a situation which seems to me rich in implications for parents, educators, and students as we begin the new academic year. It appears in one of Shakespeare's great tragedies, *King Lear.* This situation is not directly related to the classroom, nor does it speak specifically to educational theory and practice. But it has something to say about humanity, and about our situation and condition. And once these have been defined and agreed upon, such matters as curriculum and pedagogy are primarily details of strategy — decisions about the most effective means to achieve the desired goal.

Faulty judgment

The setting for the passage I wish to discuss can be set forth briefly. King Lear, who has ruled his kingdom responsibly but whose preoccupation with his kingly duties has kept him from acquiring a thorough knowledge of himself, decides to abdicate his throne and divide his kingdom among his three daughters and their husbands. But he insists, as a condition of his resignation, on retaining a retinue of one hundred knights to serve him. And he will live with his daughters, by turn. He has already decided who will rule which part, but he wishes to make the assignment with due ceremony and ritual. At the occasion of his abdication, he asks each daughter to express the extent of her love for him, with the promise that he will award part of the kingdom on the basis of her expressions of affection.

But two of the sisters are calculating and insincere, and their exaggerated statements are hypocritical. Cordelia, Lear's favorite, and the only one who genuinely loves him, is so taken aback at their hypocrisy that she is all but mute when it is her turn to praise her father. She loves him, she says, as any daughter ought to love her father — not less, but not more. She adds that the sentiments that her sisters have expressed display loyalties which a woman owes to a husband, not a father. Lear is so enraged by this supposed disloyalty that he banishes Cordelia from the kingdom.

The remainder of the play serves to uncover the treachery of Goneril and Regan and the genuine love of Cordelia and her husband for the king. (These themes are reinforced by the subplot of the play, in which another father chooses for the wicked son and against the proper one.) Goneril and Regan conspire against him, and in a crucial scene they lock their palace gates and drive him out into a violent storm. Step by step, Lear comes to know himself, to reflect on his career as a king, and to understand his limitations and his faulty judgment about his daughters.

Lack of gratitude

The immediate reason for the falling out between Lear and the two evil daughters is his insistence on keeping the hundred knights. This was probably not a wise decision on Lear's part. A hundred men do make demands upon the resources of a court, and it did seem somewhat superfluous for the daughters to support a band of knights who served a man no longer king. But certain prerogatives did attach to royalty, and Shakespeare makes it clear that the daughters and their husbands, in return for their share of the kingdom, ought to have stretched a point and permitted their father the whim of enjoying these

vestiges of his former power and authority. If he is not entirely judicious in setting up these conditions for his retirement, his daughters are gravely at fault in demanding — as they come to do — the peremptory dismissal of the knights.

The sisters proceed to break their agreement by diminishing the number of retainers to which they had earlier consented. Regan says (II, iv, 11. 250ff.):

...I entreat you
To bring but five and twenty. To no more
Will I give place or notice.

At this point, Lear's reminder "I gave you all" ought to have stopped their mouths. Instead, Regan replies, "And in good time you gave it." Lear's reply, in a tone of astonished disbelief, wins our sympathy entirely:

[I] made you my guardians, my depositaries,
But kept a reservation to be followed
With such a number. What, must I come to you
With five and twenty, Regan? Said you so?

But the full extent of their ingratitude is yet to come. Goneril goes a step further:

...Hear me, my lord.
What need you five and twenty, ten or five
To follow in a house where twice so many
Have a command to tend you?

But it is Regan who completes his humiliation: "What need one?" Whereupon Lear replies to his daughters, in one of the crucial statements of the play:

Oh, reason not the need. Our basest beggars
Are in the poorest thing superfluous.
Allow not nature more than nature needs,
Man's life's as cheap as beast's. Thou art a lady.
If only to go warm were gorgeous,
Why, nature needs not what thou gorgeous wear'st,
Which scarcely keeps thee warm. But for true need —
You Heavens, give me that patience, patience I need!

This reply, I think, is a noble vindication of the dignity of human beings.

Going beyond nature

To be sure, one must make allowances for the differences between the structures of the society of Shakespeare's age and of ours, but these differences must not be allowed to obscure the permanent insight which Shakespeare expresses through the king. Lear has ruled out of order certain questions about humanity, the answers to which ought to be obvious intuitively, and should require no demonstration. To urge such questions shows a serious defect in the character of the questioner. What Lear insists upon, and what should be beyond debate, is that human beings are creatures who must rise above mere nature. We do bear certain relationships with the natural, but we are creatures with capacities for loyalty, obedience, love — qualities which go beyond instinctive life and partake of the spiritual. Human beings are no mean creatures. They are not to be "cabined, cribbed, confined." They are the principal actors of the cosmic drama. But they must continually vindicate this dignity and this status. They must perpetually maintain their superiority over lower levels of created reality. They must express themselves in ways appropriate to their humanity. The stuff of nature, and the possessions human beings require, are to be used to display the range and the quality of the human spirit. Although, obviously, no license is granted for unbridled acquisitiveness, and although the obligations to charity remain, the resources of nature are nevertheless available for human beings to extend their humanity and to exhibit their personality by responsible stewardship.

We have a spirit that has been intended for dominion....

Created to rule

What Lear is insisting upon is that however crucial our physical needs (he is reduced to begging his daughters for food, and a bed), our more basic needs are those relating to our status as human beings. Our needs go beyond those that merely insure survival. To accept debate on Regan's ground — that of crude need — is to pulverize the distinction between human and animal. The rituals of human life, for example, must be adequately observed. The graces and adornments of character — qualities which spring, ultimately, from religious and philosophic soil — must be honored. To deny human life its proper poise, its ceremony, its decorum — to deny, in short, the importance of style, that dimension which goes beyond the merely utilitarian — is a negation of the centrality of humanity on the stage of the world. We have a spirit that has been intended for dominion, for lordship over a magnificent estate. To have to justify all distinctly human enterprises on the basis of naked need is to walk into the devil's trap.

Other examples crowd in. What need have we for a state, except Hobbes' tyrannical one before whom all must cringe in abject obedience? But without a state and its creative function, humans lose continuity with their political and social ante-

cedents. Why need a home? A cave can keep us dry and warm. But, of course, a home must be, ideally, a sort of seminary, a cultural center, a spiritual community.

The relevance to education of Lear's reply has by now become apparent. Questions about the use and value of studies and disciplines which deal with the dimensions of the spirit are always in the air. Sometimes these questions strike at the heart of the reason for the existence of schools. Why study history? Why should we teach art? Why do our children need music, literature, the discipline of logic, norms of written and spoken rhetoric? Why should the methodology of science, as well as the history of this discipline, be a part of the curriculum? Because without these we abrogate our human responsibility and live in a shrunken, atrophied world, one in which life is reduced to merely instinctive living. What need have students to know anything about beauty, goodness, order, design? Because without these, ugliness and beauty, truth and falsehood will be on a par, and the true glory of creation will be obscured — a state of affairs which constitutes an affront to a God who created a good world.

Descent to bestiality

Lear chokes as he begins to explain to his daughters what they should have understood intuitively, and prays for patience. And well he may. For the world of the play has become monstrous, reptilian, cannibalistic. It is not accidental that as the play proceeds the vocabulary of animals and animality increases. "Tigers, not daughters," is Albany's description of Regan and Goneril. For the path the daughters have taken leads them to a denial of their humanity and a preference for the bestial. This degeneration reaches its climax as the sisters compete with each other to yield themselves lecherously to the power of Edmund, another force of evil in the play.

The tragic avalanche passes by. Humanity reasserts itself, the bestial is contained, and the sun of the sympathetic characters lights up the world once more. But even so, it is difficult for us to forget completely the frightening insight we have had of a world so debased and brutish that the image of God in human beings is all but obscured. Such a world spawns hunger for power, treason, assassination. Such a world will see no need for schools, except, perhaps, for the power that utilitarian skills can yield. Such a world will have little use for any orderly explorations into reality. Such a world will suspect — or, worse, display — utter contempt for the dimension of value. In such a world, as Lear puts it, "Man's life is as cheap as beast's."

It is true that Lear's words are based on human insight rather than derived directly from Christian revelation. One must insist that these observations are ultimately true only when properly buttressed by the biblical givens about humans in creation and in redemption. But what Lear speaks is not inimical to Christian revelation; it rather amplifies, corroborates, exhibits biblical wisdom. And the remarks which Shakespeare assigns to Lear serve to vindicate the educational enterprise and can give us all direction for the next academic year.

Swimming in the deep end

by L. Gregory Jones

L. Gregory Jones is dean of Duke University Divinity School in Durham, North Carolina.

The principal of the Catholic high school was taken aback by the phone call. It came from an inmate in a nearby prison. He was known to be wealthy, but had been incarcerated for having acquired some of his wealth by fraudulent means. Now the man was offering to make a significant donation to the school.

In return for this donation, the inmate wanted the high school to make it possible for his adult son, a high school dropout, to receive a high school diploma. As the principal inquired further, it became apparent that the inmate did not want the son to have to do anything to earn the diploma. He simply wanted the son to be sent a diploma.

The principal was flabbergasted. Why, she asked the inmate, did he care so much that his son, now in business for himself, receive his diploma? "Because education is important," replied the inmate.

Why important?

The reply is humorous, but at the same time tragic, because it was spoken in utter seriousness. It points to a cultural crisis: people believe and continue to assert that education is important, but the assertion is increasingly disconnected from the ends at which education aims or the process by which students learn to care about those ends.

Why is education important? Is it simply a formal certification that acknowledges having made it through a certain number of years of school? A way of designating that people have done their time?

Or perhaps, less pejoratively but no less problematically, education is important only as a means of certifying that people have some basic skills necessary for minimal job performance. While such certification is important to a community's ability to function, it does not foster communities of people who care about teaching and learning — nor is it likely to produce the next generation's teachers.

Painful process

I believe that education is important because human flourishing requires that we undertake a lifelong process of formation, of seeking to understand and master a variety of modes of inquiry. Only through a patient, often painful process of learning disciplines do we begin to cultivate the character, shape the habits, acquire the virtues and discern the truth that students and teachers alike need.

> ***"Too much of the noise is coming from the shallow end."***

Education is important not only in its formal settings, but also — and more determinatively — in its lifelong commitments. Diplomas and degrees are not the aim of education so much as they are markers of achievement on a longer and richer journey.

If the ends of education can be discovered only through a lifelong journey, then perhaps we need to focus less on the markers — standardized tests, diplomas and degrees — and more on the ways we shape one another's habits through our practices of education in schools and congregations. Perhaps we need richer conceptions of formation to accompany our convictions about education.

Slow integration

We seem to understand the importance of education only retrospectively, as the fruit of habits learned over a lifetime. Initially, we learn how to do things by means extrinsic to us. We learn to spell, to add or to say the Lord's Prayer by repeating the words, numbers or phrases that others teach us. Similarly, we learn to play the scales of a piano by having another show us how to move our hands.

Over time, we transform those extrinsic modes of learning into intrinsic habits. We begin to understand the ways in which the alphabet is used to create words, and grammar to construct sentences. We learn how the dynamics of addition and subtraction are linked to multiplication and division, and eventually to theorems of algebra. We begin to discover how the Lord's Prayer shapes a relationship with God and an understanding of God that invites other patterns of prayer and worship. We master the rhythm of the scales and begin to explore the chords and patterns of beautiful music.

Eventually these modes of practice and inquiry become a part of our lives. We then continue to learn by making new connections between practices, between disciplines, between modes of inquiry. Over time we become equipped to advance our understanding even further by criticizing poor theories, challenging false constructions, correcting distorted practices and seeing possibilities that others have not seen.

No shortcuts

Our education proceeds toward increasingly intrinsic patterns of inquiry, practice and discipline. We discover that our ends are being transformed and our

understanding of the truth is being deepened through our lifelong commitment to learning. There are no shortcuts, whether in our mastery of language, our understanding of mathematics, our knowledge and love of God, or our musical theory and practice.

Anglican theologian W. H. Vanstone once observed that the church is like a swimming pool in which all the noise comes from the shallow end. Most of the wisdom is to be found in the deep end, among those who have taken the time, and cultivated the habits and disciplines, to learn to swim in deeper waters. Vanstone was particularly concerned about the shallow spirituality in the churches, but his comments are also true of our knowledge and our love of God, of the world and of the disciplines we seek to understand and practice. If we are to love God with all of our mind as well as our heart, soul and strength, then we need the kind of sustained learning that leads us into the deep end of the pool.

Unfortunately, in our culture — inside and outside the churches — too much of the noise is coming from the shallow end. We laugh at a wealthy man trying to buy his son a degree, but how different is he from our own attitudes and actual practices about education? Do we care more about the degrees or the certification than the habits of learning? Do we really want to understand, to live, the importance of education?

A Tale of Two Grouchos,
or What We Talk About When We Talk About Motivation

Jan Kaarsvlam is on an extended leave of absence from his tenth-grade teaching position at Pella Christian High School to write a novel. This work, which Jan has tentatively entitled O'er the Green Fields of Scranton, *will follow an itinerant systems analyst in his quest to find companionship and lifelong meaning at a Harley convention.*

Zelda Roberts walked into the Bedlam staff room with the sort of intense expression she wore in moments when she was questioning her very purpose in the classroom. Unfortunately, in her mental distress, she had forgotten that she was still wearing the Groucho-glasses with the little mustache that she used in her physics class to dramatize the life of Nicolae Tesla. She stood a moment and prepared to address her fellow faculty members. Then the hush which had initially fallen over the room was obliterated by a cascade of guffaws, hoots, belly laughs, chuckles, and snickers. Zelda was puzzled for a moment, then, realizing the source of all this hilarity, she ripped the fake glasses from her face and flung them to the ground. She stared at the nearest faculty member, portly Gord Winkle (who was, at the moment, bent over and making the snorting sounds one might expect from a hyperventilating walrus).

"Can't you be serious just for one minute?"

Wounded, Winkle whimpered, "But Zelda, you were the one wearing those fuzzy glasses."

Zelda was just getting started. "Tony Barducci just told me that he could care less about my stupid subject. What does he care about how the world fits together? Is that knowledge going to get him a big shack in the suburbs with a pole barn out back to store his jet-skis, his vintage cars, and his two snowmobiles?"

Just then P.E. teacher Rex Kane entered the lounge. He nabbed the glasses from the floor, stole a carrot from Cal VanderMeer, and began pacing back and forth, bent forward at the waist and occasionally puffing on the carrot as if it were a cigar. He had become Groucho Marx.

Trying to ignore his friend, Winkle asked Zelda, "What's wrong with snowmobiles?"

"Nothing," she replied. "I like snowmobiles as much as the next guy, but ...."

Rex thrust his head over her shoulder. "Then move over and let me talk to the next guy." He wiggled his eyebrows and returned to his pacing.

Zelda shook her head in an attempt to return to her train of thought. "What was I saying?"

"That rampant materialism strikes again," school board president Armando Rigatoni said. As he reached for his coffee, the two carat diamond on his pinky ring caught the light and nearly blinded Zelda, who smiled at the irony completely lost on the speaker. "All kids care about these days is money."

"That's not true," said resident softie and head counselor Maxwell Prentiss-Hall. "I talk to kids in the guidance office every day who have noble goals, kids who want to become doctors or politicians or missionaries so they can serve others, not just so they can buy fancy cars and wear Armani. I think you're both being too hard on our students."

"You know," said Rex as he jabbed Max in the chest with the end of his carrot, "I used to wear Armani, but my tailor moved out of town. Now it's Their-mani."

As Rex again started pacing, Rigatoni chuckled and turned to continue his talk with the school's athletic director about the possibility of adding a football team to the school's 26 athletic offerings. Looking defeated, Zelda plopped down in a chair next to Max.

"You're right, Max, I'm not being fair. But even among my best students there seems to be a single-minded drivenness that I find unhealthy. Take George Mitchell, for example. He wants to be a missionary. He is sincere and devoted. He dropped my physics class last week. When I asked him why, he said that he won't need physics to do missionary work."

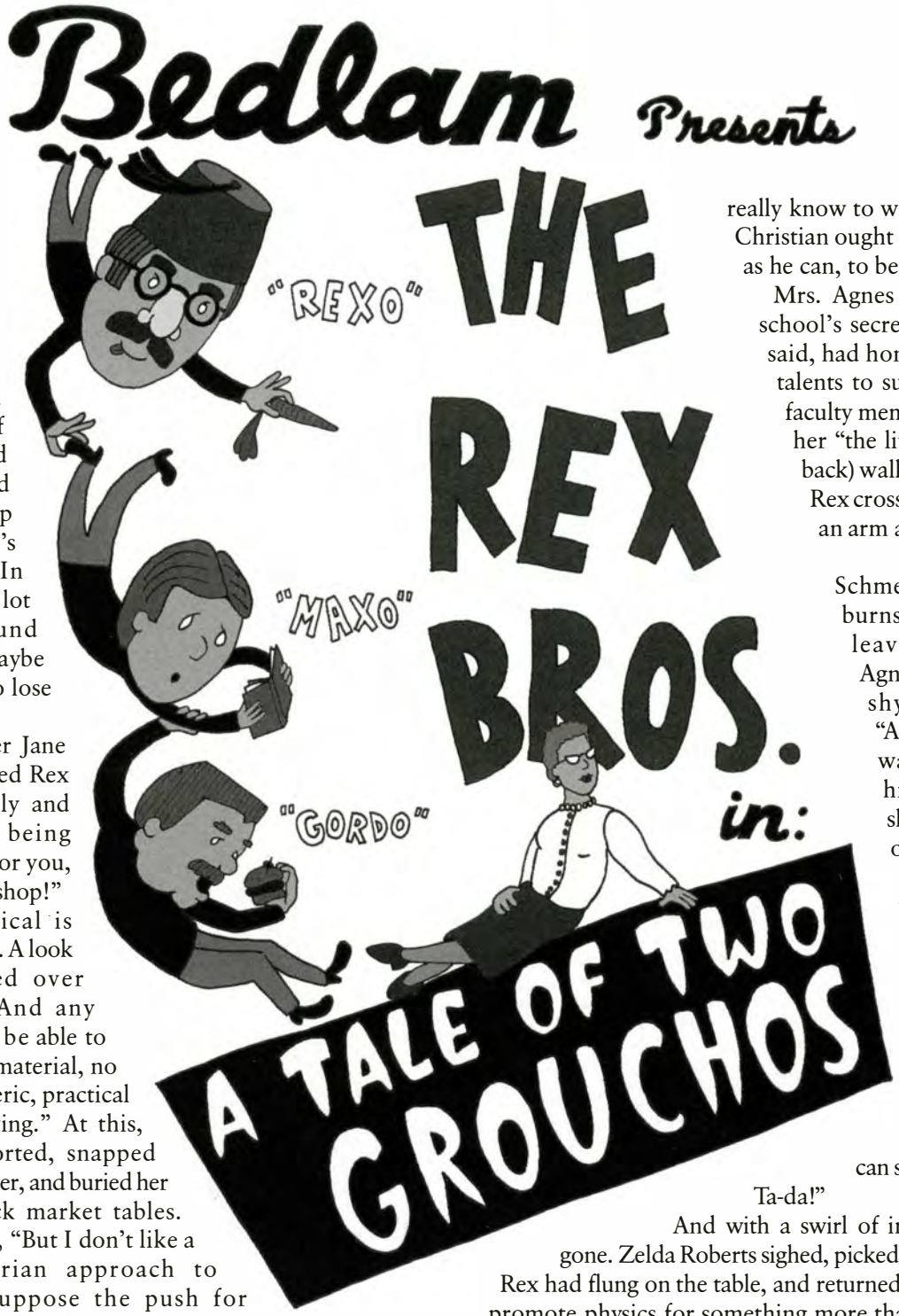
A look of confusion passed across Max's face. "Well, he won't, will he?"

Zelda gave the counselor a serious look. "Of course he will. Missionaries flying into remote areas must be trained in the mechanics and physics and aerodynamics of airplanes, boats, and automobiles; in case of emergencies, they must be able to design and build their mode of transportation from whatever materials are at hand."

A look of childlike wonder passed across Max's face. "Wow! Is that really true?"

Cal VanderMeer pulled up a chair, winked at Zelda, and joined the conversation. "Even if it is true, that is missing the point, Max. Physics is about being curious about the world around us and trying to figure out how this amazing creation fits together. You ought to be interested in that no matter what your career is going to be. How can we get our students to realize that not everything they learn has a bottom line? Some stuff is just fun to learn and know."

Gord Winkle, who had been trying to ease himself out of the combat zone, had a rare moment of courage. He actually raised his voice loud enough to be heard, simultaneously dislodging a small piece of cheese caught in a fold of his cheek and sending it flying. He lurched back into the conversation. "But isn't it good to tie your class into something practical? When I do that, the kids seem to pay more attention."



"Tell 'em, Gordie," Groucho said as he slapped Winkle on the shoulder. "You carry a lot of weight around here." Rex stepped back and looked up and down Winkle's beefy frame. "In fact, you carry a lot of weight around everywhere. Maybe you should try to lose some of that."

Algebra teacher Jane VanderAsch waved Rex away dismissively and opined, "But being practical is easy for you, Gord; you teach shop!"

"Being practical is good," Zelda said. A look of relief passed over Gord's face. "And any teacher ought to be able to make his or her material, no matter how esoteric, practical to every day living." At this, VanderAsch snorted, snapped open the newspaper, and buried her face in the stock market tables. Zelda continued, "But I don't like a strictly utilitarian approach to education. I suppose the push for standardized tests and the No Child Left Behind Act have made all of our schools turn more and more to such a model. But something is missing from that model. We lose, first of all, the sense of community. I may not need to know biology, per se, but the student sitting next to me who will become a doctor or a naturalist does. And while one student won't use geometry much in the future, the future carpenter and engineer a few seats over will. Can't we pass along to kids a sense of community responsibility?"

"Although," said Cal, "It's not like any of us, students included, really know to what God will call us. A Christian ought to try to learn as much as he can, to be useful to his God."

Mrs. Agnes Schmetonyovski, the school's secretary (who, it must be said, had honed her organizational talents to such an extent that the faculty members sometimes called her "the little Stalin" behind her back) walked into the staff room. Rex crossed the room and threw an arm around her shoulder.

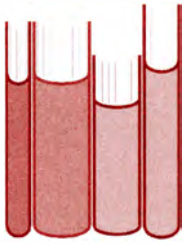
"Ah, my little Schmetonyovski, my heart burns for you! Your beauty leaves me breathless!" Agnes blushed and smiled shyly. Rex continued, "And frankly, that's no way to treat a guy—leave him heartburned and short of breath. Shame on you."

Agnes's face fell. Rex took her hand and pumped it vigorously. "Anyways, good luck, kid. Write when you get work." He turned to the rest of the faculty, took a puff on his imaginary cigar, and said, "Well, I can say, it's been interesting. Ta-da!"

And with a swirl of imaginary tails, he was gone. Zelda Roberts sighed, picked up the Groucho glasses Rex had flung on the table, and returned to figuring out how to promote physics for something more than its future pecuniary potential.

WHY BECOME EDUCATED?

BUILDING ALL THINGS TOGETHER WITH CHRIST



by Robert W. Bruinsma

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The Greek philosophers believed that the acquisition of certain forms of analytic knowledge would set a person free. And thus were developed the Trivium & Quadrivium or the seven liberal (or liberating) arts of the ancient and medieval curriculum. Studying these liberal arts, it was believed, would free a person from ignorance and lead, instead, to certain knowledge of the Good. From this Greek notion came the belief that a liberal arts education is somehow essential to the making of good people.

I want to make clear that I reject all notions that education of any sort (liberal or technical) is essential to the making of good people. I reject such notions because the Bible does. Scripture makes clear that education of any sort cannot save us from evil. Educated and well-trained people are not better people than uneducated or technically illiterate ones. In fact an educated and well-trained evil person is often more dangerous than an uneducated one. So going to university has never and will never save anyone irrespective of whether one majors in philosophy or computer engineering. Only the sacrificial death of the Lord Jesus can and does do that.

So why attend a university at all, and, especially, why attend a Christian university? Because while an education never saved anyone, once someone is saved, he or she ought to take every opportunity to become educated. Why? Because, as Colossians 1: 15-20 makes clear, the whole universe was made by God through Jesus and *for* Jesus.

He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy. For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.

Jesus, in turn, loves the world so much that he died for it, and continues to hold it together, moment by moment, for his glory. But what's even more wonderful than this is that we humans are privileged to partner with him in holding all things together. And to do that it helps if one knows something about all the things (both visible and invisible) that go into making this universe. For if we love Jesus, the Maker, we will

Liberal arts threatened by technology?

Although in our day we still pay lip service to a liberal arts ideal (King's still advertises itself as a Christian liberal arts college), the flip side of the arts, i.e., technology, has gained the upper hand in our cultural dream of attaining the "good" life. Although Plato and Aristotle relegated technology to the "mean" or lesser pursuits, one has only to look at the budgets of today's governments and universities to realise where the real hope for education and salvation lies today.

Modern prophets such as the inventor Ray Kurzweill tell us that by 2030, microscopic robots, called "nanobots," will be able to make a blueprint of your brain after you swallow — yes, swallow — a few of them, thereby enabling a computer to replicate your brain in hardware and making it 10 million times faster than the sluggish, old-fashioned grey stuff inside your cranium. The result will be an artificial intelligence immeasurably more clever than you are.

Vernon Vinge, San Diego State University Professor of Mathematics and Computer Science, thinks computers will be more intelligent than humans within 20 years, after which humans will be left in the dust by machines that get exponentially smarter by the day — if not by the nanosecond. That will be the day of post-humanity.

Carnegie Mellon University roboticist Hans Moravec thinks it will take a little longer for robots to exceed humans in all respects, from running companies to writing novels. He predicts robots will be that advanced by 2040, later evolving to such lofty cognitive heights that the gap between robots and humans will be as great as that which now exists between humans and primitive single-celled organisms. Many others in artificial intelligence predict the same sensational future, unfolding on about the same schedule.

On the educational front we see governments like those in Alberta planning to spend about 10 times more money in the next 5-10 years on computers and technology in schools than on human personnel (read: teachers). The paeans of praise to the unlimited benefits of distributed education via the Internet,

love the things he has made — including algebra and ale, babies and bassoons, computers and chaos theory, ecology and economics, families and fan jets, hearts and heartaches, cabbages and kings, land and linguistics, mice and men, poems and 'possums, sailing ships and sealing wax, theology and thistles, zithers and zoology, and every***thing*** in between.

All are things

So, what are things, anyway? Isn't it strange how hard it is to define such a common word as "things"? I mean, things are ... well, just *things*. Like everything is a *thing*. Rocks are things, trees are things, planets are things, people are things, families are things, governments are things, essays are things, poems are things, theories are things, computers are things, universities and colleges are things, and students and professors are things (though not just any old things).

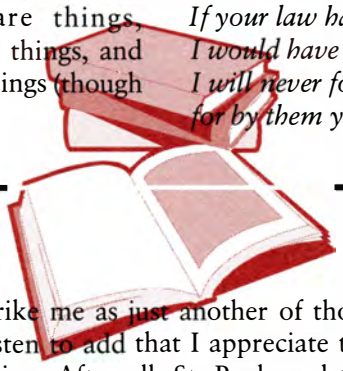
The Bible has some*thing* to say about things in a number of places. We've seen in our Colossians passage that in Christ "all things hold together." Psalm 119 tells us clearly what *things* are. Psalm 119 is all about the glories of God's Law. Unfortunately, because it is such a long psalm, we seldom read much of it, and we hardly ever get as far as verse 89, but let's start there and read through to verse 93 with a special focus on verse 91:

> *Your word, O LORD , is eternal;*
> *it stands firm in the heavens.*
> *Your faithfulness continues through all generations;*
> *you established the earth, and it endures.*
> *Your laws endure to this day,*
> *for all things serve you.*
> *If your law had not been my delight,*
> *I would have perished in my affliction.*
> *I will never forget your precepts,*
> *for by them you have preserved my life.*

Notice especially verse 91b: "for all *things* **serve** you." Servants. That's what things are. Servants of God. Notice that the psalm doesn't distinguish between living or non-living things, or human and non-human things; no, it says that *all* things are God's servants. Rocks are servants, trees are servants, planets are servants, people are servants, families are servants, governments are servants, essays are servants, poems are servants, theories are servants, universities and colleges are servants and technology is a servant.

The university college I teach at is *The King's* University College. Our name confesses that our institution belongs to King Jesus and that those of us who work and study here are servants of this King. Not only are the people-things servants of the King; so are all the other things as well.

It is the calling of the teachers and the business of the Christian educational service institution to help students come



which I have often read, strike me as just another of those towers of Babel. Let me hasten to add that I appreciate the potential of distance education. After all, St. Paul used the technology of writing and the Roman postal system to spread the gospel of Jesus Christ throughout the Roman world, and thereby to my pagan ancestors. It is also true that the communitarian nature of the traditional classroom has been highly over- rated. Many such classrooms are barren of any shared discourse. Shy students, who might never venture an opinion in a face-to-face class, may find the relative anonymity of a chat room a liberating experience.

But I still find it difficult to conceive how I would hug a student via computer or even pray with him or her. Further, there is a question of social justice here as well. We speak of the potential of distributed learning via the Internet to reach the global village with unlimited potential. Well, the so-called global village is not as global as we might think. The majority of people in the world have no access to a telephone let alone a computer. What is more important, and tragically so, billions of the world's people lack access to something as fundamental as safe drinking water. It is estimated that it would take only about 10 billion dollars to rectify that situation. How many years of Microsoft profits would that represent? (It represents only about a week of the Pentagon's defense budget.)

As we Christians in the first world are bent (hell bent, perhaps?) on participating in the wiring of our world, and providing ever more powerful and sophisticated educational technology, are we certain that we are being good servants, and that our fascination with things high tech is truly the stewardly and serviceable thing to do? I trust that this conference has helped to think about these things as well.

Scholars as disparate in vision as Jacques Ellul and Neil Postman have pointed out that technology is never just a neutral tool, but that every technology will inevitably and unalterably change the way we think and live, for good or ill.

Robert Bruinsma

to understand, for example, that a science experiment is a thing that can serve God and neighbor, or it can serve an idol of human pride.

All must serve

They can try to make students see music as a thing that God has created for service and praise to him and his people and demonstrate how an English essay is a thing of words intending to be of service in reflecting clarity, economy and felicity of communication. They can discuss how a government is a social thing called to do justice; how human relationships studied in psychology and sociology are things that are intended to bring shalom and grace to our lives; how an economic market is not an autonomous thing that we must serve, but how it is to be a thing that must serve God by allowing for a fair distribution of God's good gifts to all people. And the students should come to grasp and know how the Bible is not a thing with which to beat unbelievers over the head, but God's written invitation to all people to his party of grace.

In the end, the task of any Christian educational institution and the people in it, is to help students (and professors and administrators) understand how all of the *things* at our school, from a poem to a cafeteria meal, from an abstract theory to a smile in the hall, are, or should be, good servants of Christ the King.

Now there are several things we might notice about servants. First of all, being a human servant is not all that popular a thing in our "me first," individualistic society. Servanthood smacks too much of servitude, of having to forego personal gain and pleasure for the benefit of others. For example, the motto of the 30,000-member Alberta Teachers' Association (ostensibly a professional service organization) is: "Masters, not servants." And, our experience with civil servants is often that they are neither civil nor do they serve. But whether we like it or not, all things are servants of God. Things can be faithful or unfaithful servants of God, but servants they are. The non-human creation serves God unwittingly, though, because of the brokenness brought into the world by sin, not always perfectly. Human servants can choose to serve God or some other god, and they can use the non-human creation to aid them in this service to God or to another idol.

The supremacy of Christ

Colossians 1: 15-20
"He is before all things and in him all things hold together."

Is your Jesus big enough?
Does he tower far above
All the high and mighty institutions?
Does his saving power comprise
Politics and enterprise?
Or does he not care about pollution?

Is your Jesus broad enough?
Does he call a tyrant's bluff
While he scans the laws of every nation?
Does corruption need to cease?
Is he working for world peace?
Or is he just tuned in to your salvation?

Is your Jesus strong enough?
Do you dare to call his bluff
When he promises you power in the courts?
Are you bold to speak his name
In the public halls of fame?
Or do you not crown him king of sports?

Does your Jesus play a part
in philosophy and art?
Does his Ph.D. in mercy shine enough?
When the mighty call a scrum
Will you join him in the slum?
Or are you embarrassed by his love?

Is your Jesus chief of all?
Is he more than ten foot tall?
Is he master of world trade and education?
Is he Chairman of the Board?
Is he CEO and lord?
Does he hold together all of this creation?

Bert Witvoet

Eureka Moments Each Day

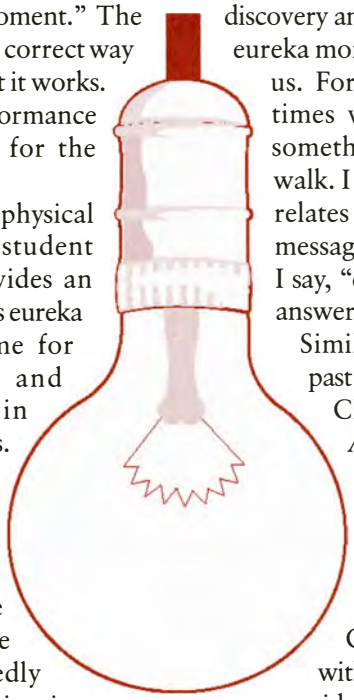
by Kim Gall

Kim Gall (kgall@calvin.edu) is a professor of HPERDS (that's Health, Physical Education, Dance and Sports for the athletically challenged) at Calvin College in Grand Rapids, Michigan.

According to the dictionary.com website, "eureka" is a word "used to express triumph upon finding or discovering something." Its origin as a stock exclamation is said to have originated with Archimedes who used it when he found a method to determine the purity of a gold object. He is said to have shouted "eureka," or, "I have found it." I have used and have heard others use the word "eureka" in a broader sense, almost similar to saying, "Yes, I get it," or "Yes, that's it." Using this broader definition, we will likely notice many "eureka" moments that occur within our classrooms or in our life each day.

I teach physical education activity courses for college students, as well as methods courses for students who are going to become physical education teachers. While teaching such beginning physical education activity courses as tennis, basketball, and badminton, I notice that students experience many eureka moments. In a course such as tennis, beginning students find that a proper serve is sometimes a difficult skill to acquire. After working with a student who is having trouble getting the tennis ball to land in the proper service court while using good form, I have heard students exclaim "eureka" when they accurately serve two or three tennis balls in a row. I have likewise shouted "eureka" to a student in that situation. My exclamation is usually accompanied with a smile and a thumbs up.

Again, in tennis, I have similar experiences while teaching the proper footwork, positioning, and technique of volleying. For some beginners, standing in the volleying position close to the net is a bit scary. After instruction and practice, it is rewarding to have a student consistently demonstrate the proper footwork and technique and to see the tennis ball volleyed correctly. Either I or the student may exclaim, "Yes, that's it." It's but another example of a "eureka moment." The student has discovered the correct way to volley and finds out that it works. This leads to more performance success and enjoyment for the student.



For students who are physical education majors, the student teaching internship provides an environment for numerous eureka moments. This is a time for application of ideas and information studied in previous college courses. They have hands-on experiences of finding that the "book learning" works. In one supervisor visit this past spring, the student teacher greeted me with a smile and excitedly told me that he was experiencing exactly what we had discussed in a seminar. This was a eureka moment. It was as if "the light came on" and he was discovering the answer.

Students are not the only ones who can experience eureka moments. Teachers are equally susceptible. For me, a eureka moment occurred at the end of the semester. Student teachers in a class I had particularly enjoyed demonstrated their appreciation and encouragement to me. They said that I had impacted them. Truth is, they had also impacted me. Upon reflection I found myself smiling inside and out and saying, "Yes, this is it. These students have shown me why I am a teacher. This is what teaching is all about — impacting lives, and being impacted." Although I knew and believed this, it was as if I was expressing triumph anew.

Within our daily walk, eureka moments also occur when we consider that our total lives — our environment, our culture, and relationships present opportunities for discovery and learning. I believe God puts eureka moments before us to encourage us. For example, there have been times when I am struggling with something specific in my Christian walk. I go to church and the sermon relates exactly to that struggle. The message helps me meet that struggle. I say, "eureka, that's it — that's the answer. Thank you, God."

Similar examples occurred this past school year while reading two Christian books — *It's Not About Me* and *The Purpose Driven Life*. It seemed that, on occasions, as I was struggling with anger and discouragement, as well as with focus and meaning in my Christian walk, God hit me with words from these books. I consider these eureka moments times when God helped me discover his truth more clearly.

As God is continuing to work in my life, it seems I am noticing more eureka moments. Those moments occur in the formal school classroom setting as well as in the broader classroom we call life. Thank, you God, for allowing us to discover new things from day to day.

ROOM 219

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Developing New Perceptions

During the summer Olympic games this year, an elementary school age boy tuned in to a soccer game. He was impressed by the uniforms and the skill of the winning team. When he asked his friend what country that team was from, he was told it was the team from Iraq. His eyes widened, and he protested, "That can't be true! Where are those towels for their heads? Those guys look just like us!"

The boy's comment is one rather extreme example of **stereotype**, a word now very familiar to us. As our world gets smaller, we find ourselves confronted with a stronger consciousness of how important it is to teach our children to embrace all people with tolerance, curiosity, appreciation, and compassion. The word **stereotype** actually originated in the 18th century. It was associated with printing — specifically with the process used to duplicate pages of type. Since then it has evolved, fairly understandably, into an association with conventional beliefs or attitudes towards not just people, but also ideas and things.

It's hard to break stereotypes. We have been "carefully taught to be afraid," as that old song from some musical complained. And perhaps the most obvious arena for stereotyping can be detected in the hallways of our schools. Ninth-graders come to the bigger pond of high school, and for so many there is a kind of radar that immediately activates. They want to be able to determine who the "popular people" are so that they can start off on the right foot.

At our school, everyone knows that the upstairs lockers belong to the "cooler" students. So those who scramble to be first in line immediately claim these lockers. To counter this trend, our staff has proposed assigning lockers instead of allowing them to be chosen, even though we all know that this action will not eliminate the root of the problem. Students who feel they are similar "hang out" together, which is quite normal, except for the rather sad fact that many of them find their groups more by default or by the assumptions of their classmates. The categories are based on social standing, race, intellect, beauty (or the lack thereof), athletic prowess, and even economics.

Stereotypes are unavoidable. One of the dangers of stereotyping is that we take away the individuality of people by categorizing them into a group. In ninth-grade English our students read a powerful essay by Brent Staples, an editorial writer for *The New York Times*. Staples gives numerous examples of how difficult it is for him to overcome the stereotype our society has given to black men — namely, that they are aggressive, dangerous, and unreliable. When Staples jogs at night he often sees young women cross to the other side of the street in order to avoid him. He has taken to whistling classical music during his workouts in order to help eliminate the negative labels people automatically assign to him. Apparently this small act of protest is at least somewhat successful — passers-by often look at him in surprise, and some even join in.

We get into some fairly animated discussions after reading this essay, and I usually end by asking my students to write about a time when they have experienced some form of stereotyping. The following is one of the more insightful and articulate responses: "Although the burden of discrimination seems to fall primarily upon minority groups, most people, even those with my own waspish pedigree, are stereotyped.... I am seen as a member of the ever-growing mass of commercially infatuated 'teens.' Teens are seen as disrespectful, rebellious, naive, oversexed, over-privileged, and generally dangerous. Any time I walk into a higher-end retail environment, I am almost without variation either led to the used section, ignored (but closely watched), or, in extreme cases, ejected. Honest questions are frequently ignored by salespeople, and my knowledge as a possible buyer is insulted. Few humans fit the stereotypes which society forces them to wear, so I think the best way to shatter them is to prove to the world that you cannot be typified. Quote a little Shakespeare, use correct grammar, listen to world beat. The only classes to which you belong are those to which you admit yourself."

In order for us to promote justice in our schools, we have to examine our own assumptions about people. As teachers we like to think we are beyond stereotype: we know better. The truth is we are often as guilty of labeling and categorizing as our students are. Some of my best moments in teaching have been those times when students have, intentionally or unintentionally, stepped outside that invisible box which I have built around them, and in the process given me a new perception of who they really are. I think of the student who had been nicknamed "the criminal" by his classmates for reasons I will not go into, but who repeatedly proved himself a gentleman; the "lazy" girl who was actually tending to an ailing single mother and her younger sister; the "brain" who was pushing himself to the edge of a nervous breakdown.

We pick out samples of behavior to support what we believe to be true, and, in the process, we have given our students little choice or desire to permit us to see more. The end result? We all lose.

The Positive Power of the Negative Example

by Peter Boysen

Peter Boysen is an English and German instructor at Temple Christian School in Fort Worth, Texas. He has written a Master's thesis on how positive and negative examples affect students.

Christian conservatives spend a great deal of time discussing the "cultural war" that exists between evangelical believers and the secular world. For me, an English teacher at a Christian school, this discussion often centers on one hot topic with both parents and students: the definition of "appropriate" literature — when does subject matter become too mature for secondary students?

In the past at my school, parents have objected to the use of *The Great Gatsby,* because of all of the negative moral activities that go on — adultery and organized crime among others. Fitzgerald's cautionary tale about the abuse of relationships is only one of many novels and plays that have been stricken from curriculum lists at Christian schools for similar reasons. It was in a conference with my principal that the subject of this essay arose: the power of the negative example.

Anyone who finds the example of Jay Gatsby to be one worth emulating has, in my opinion, missed the entire point of the novel. But the fact that readers can sympathize with him and even learn from his tragic end is demonstrated by the enduring popularity of his story.

Vicarious experience

Why did God inspire the authors of the Old Testament to include such stories as Lot's drunken incest or the adultery of David and Bathsheba? I believe he did so for the same reason that many youth ministers will bring in converted drug addicts rather than deacons to discuss the potential evil of substance abuse; the negative example carries the weight of *experience.* One of the challenges I face as an English teacher in a Christian school is how to transform those negative examples into moral lessons without sounding judgmental. (It is important to remember that many high school students are going through the same temptations with regard to sex, alcohol, violence and other evils as the characters in the literature that they read.)

I have selected two works for discussion. The first, *Julius Caesar,* is included in the A Beka curriculum for tenth-grade students. The second, *Crime and Punishment,* is a novel with subject matter of a more troubling nature. In each case, I demonstrate how negative examples can be turned into positive lessons rather than reasons for removing the works from reading lists.

R-rated Shakespeare

A man turns to alcohol and repression to deal with the suicide of his wife. His group of so-called "patriots" stab the political leader of their country over thirty times and then strut around the capital city, with their arms and weapons "purpled and smoking," having been bathed in his blood. A civil war ensues, with more graphic suicide scenes.

If these scenes were shown at a movie preview, one might well expect an R-rated action movie. However, these scenes come not from *Escape From L.A.* but from Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar.* The protective effects of the author's name and, perhaps, the Shakespearean English often serve to dilute the intensity of the play for the tenth-grade reader. What is it about this play that keeps it firmly entrenched in Christian curricula across the country?

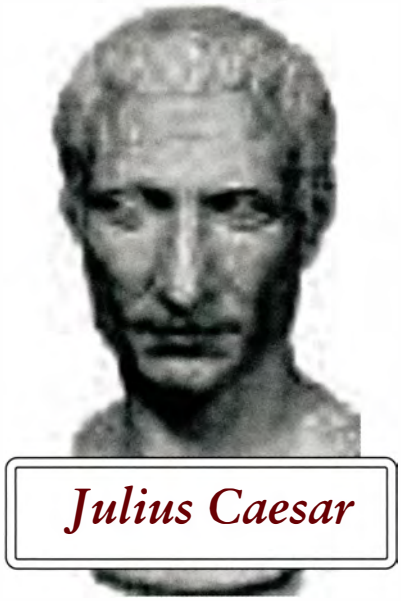
I believe that there are at least two reasons: first, the idea that students should be exposed to Shakespeare; second, that the themes and lessons in the play are applicable to readers in any century. Administrators and curriculum authors do not select *Julius Caesar* to glorify violence or treachery; they select it (one would hope) to show students how easy it is to fall prey to the temptations of the ego and how fatal selfishness can become. Julius Caesar's response to his victories in Gaul is to declare himself to be "as fixed as the Northern star" and to refer to his supplicants as "spaniel" in their affections. This pride makes him too macho to listen to his wife, too haughty to read a letter of warning from a teacher of rhetoric, and too arrogant to listen to the warnings of a psychic.

Marcus Brutus begins the play as a patriot for the Roman Republic, but he later succumbs to the flattery of Cassius and listens to his own pride — which makes him so self-assured as to foolishly allow Antony to speak after him at the emotionally charged funeral of Julius Caesar and to act almost pharisaically when confronted with Cassius' acceptance of bribes. This pride, combined with his Stoic inability to listen to his emotions (and to those of his wife) brings about his downfall.

These lessons can be compared to many people with whom today's young people can relate — from Kurt Cobain, whose egocentrism convinced him that suicide was the only answer, and, from President Clinton, whose alleged (and real) misdeeds have converted his presidency from a great opportunity to an eight-year episode of *The Jerry Springer Show,* to some of their own friends, who are too proud to listen to anyone else and end up ruining their lives, or the lives of others, with one stupid night.

Crazy talk

The novel *Crime and Punishment* is a classic example of a story that can be easily



used for Christian teaching purposes and yet is often mistaken for an unworthy story. After I had assigned this book as one option on a book report last year, I had a parent call me to complain about the title. In her opinion, any book called *Crime and Punishment* could not have anything Christian inside its covers. She also complained about the murder and what she termed "crazy talk" inside the book, referring to the examination of Raskolnikov's mind. It quickly became clear to me that she had not read the entire novel, because at the conclusion Raskolnikov accepts the gift of the New Testament and is converted to the Christian faith — quite a dramatic story of redemption, one that, in my opinion, every Christian should experience.

It is true that there are moments of violence in this book, but there are considerably more moments of literary significance. The liberal, humanistic and historical thought tossed around by the intelligentsia in Russia before the revolutions of 1905 and 1917 paralleled many of the ideas that Christian educators confront in the secular humanism movement today.

If we think that ethics are becoming more situational and less absolute in today's society, then we would shrink at the idea that spawns within Raskolnikov's mind — that his "superiority" to his victim makes her murder acceptable. Dostoevsky pulls this idea further and further apart with each of Raskolnikov's inner struggles; ultimately, it is a prostitute who shows him the way to Christian salvation — and surely a prostitute would also have been "inferior" to Raskolnikov before his conscience began consuming him from within.

I have several students who enjoy the work of Kurt Cobain — the lead singer of the band Nirvana who committed suicide. There are many parallels between the lives of Cobain and Raskolnikov — the feelings of inferiority, the anger at society, and increased isolation from their surroundings. However, Raskolnikov can be presented as an eventually positive example of redemption — he admits to his crime, accepts the Christian faith, and enters prison in Siberia, determined to live a better life.

After ten years of Bible classes, my students may find that familiarity with many positive role models in Scripture may indeed breed contempt. And while one could never say that *Crime and Punishment* is a better source of truth than the Bible, I have found this story to be an effective tool to share the gospel in class without having students perceive the period as "just another Bible class." As a Christian educator, finding new doors for the gospel in addition to teaching great literature is always a bonus.

The negative speaks

The power of a positive example is also important to demonstrate in a literature class. One of my favorite examples is Antigone, who holds so firmly to her desire to see her brother honorably buried that she is entombed alive by Creon. Her story is an emphatic testimony to the powerful reactions that conviction can inspire in bystanders, as well as to the extreme cost that such conviction can carry. However, sometimes the negative example is more powerful.

In *Crime and Punishment,* Razumikhin is a fellow intellectual of Raskolnikov's, but he does not descend into the mental and spiritual darkness with Raskolnikov. Instead, he hovers about Raskolnikov, hoping to help him out of his turmoil. Razumikhin's devotion is exemplary, but his story lacks the power of Raskolnikov's. There is an element within most of us that identifies with the negative example in different, somewhat deeper ways than with the positive example; for this reason, God placed negative examples in the Bible — and for this reason, there is no reason to shy away from them in the teaching of literature.

As a teacher, I can sympathize with parental concerns about the suitability of the content of their children's curriculum. After all, many parents place their children in Christian schools not only to escape the crime and drugs sometimes associated with public schools, but also to avoid the educational philosophy of secular institutions. However, it is important for this protective impulse not to assume the form of a knee-jerk response to negative examples in literature.

Take a biblical scenario. Joseph's loyalty to Mary is a positive example of a future husband's faith in God as well as in his intended bride. However, would David's marriage be as much of a lesson to the reader if it were not for the painful experience of adultery, murder, repentance and judgment associated with Bathsheba and Uriah? Similarly, any study of literature in the high school grades must include a didactic look at the consequences of the darker side of human nature.

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Do Christian School Teachers Themselves Need Christian Education?

Clarence Joldersma (cjolders@calvin.edu), professor of education at Calvin College, Grand Rapids, Mich., asked the Dot Edu panel the following question: "How important is it for teachers in Christian schools to themselves have an education from a Christian college? What are the advantages and disadvantages of hiring graduates from Christian colleges? Public universities?"

November 2, 2004


Pam Adams

Clarence, even though I am a graduate of a public university, I believe that attending a Christian college is important for teachers in Christian schools. That does not mean public university graduates should never be hired, but a greater degree of caution needs to be taken. Both Christian college and public university graduates need to be able to articulate their philosophy of education in terms that are acceptable to the school. We should also not make assumptions about either type of graduate. A Christian college graduate might have a very shallow understanding of what it means to teach Christianly. And on the other side, a public university graduate might have been silently challenging her professors all the way through the university experience, thus developing a mature understanding of Christian teaching. However, I believe that those who have gone to Christian schools all their lives often know a lot about many aspects of Christian schooling that the public school attendee will need to learn.

Pam

November 3, 2004


Johanna Campbell

Pam, I, too, am a graduate of a secular university, and agree that we should not come with assumptions or judge too quickly in these matters. The student teachers trained at Christian universities do learn how the Christian worldview affects all their teaching, how both student and teacher are created in Imago Dei, how to see the entire curriculum through biblical glasses, how to be a Christian role model for students; in short, everything we want a Christian teacher to be, we model and teach at a Christian university. If the student teacher has learned this material, and if that student has a personal, living relationship with Jesus Christ, I would say she is probably ready to teach in a Christian school. However, a pre-service teacher who has had a secular education may be very strong in her faith, since she has always fought upstream in the labyrinth of world philosophies and worldviews. This teacher may have a gift for apologetics or witnessing, since she can understand the mindset of non-Christians. Maybe this person has had to rely on God more to live out her faith. In short, I would like to be open and hire on the basis of the individual — her walk with God, knowledge of Scripture, Christian worldview, ability to discern the various philosophies "out there," compassion, love — all demonstrations of the fruit of the Spirit. Christian institutions do not automatically send out well-qualified Christian teachers.

Johanna

November 8, 2004

Pam and Johanna, Christian teachers should have a real commitment to Christ, to his kingdom and to his covenant children. They should not only know their subject area thoroughly but also have learned the art of teaching. Where they learn these last two things does not matter in the least.

Agnes

November 9, 2004


Tony Kamphuis

Agnes, it is precisely this notion that worries me: the idea that biology just is biology and that in and of itself the perspective with which it is approached matters not one whit. What worries me is that the model that


Clarence Joldersma

counts is the teacher as a good "spiritual" person. To me this often indicates that a biblical approach to the study of the world is tenuously held. Such an approach easily slips through our fingers. I worry that in this model we are happy to truncate Christianity by believing it involves only some Bible reading and "having a little talk with Jesus" now and again. But to me what is really important, and something we have a devil of a time figuring out, is how we can see God through his creation-based self-revelation.

Tony

November 9, 2004


Lois Brink

I wonder … if *all* a Christian school teacher needs is a Christian worldview and faith in Christ mixed into a bagful of knowledge and pedagogical techniques, will she be able to fulfill our Reformed Christian school vision? In our particular setting, will that be adequate to deeply prepare our students to be discerning and practicing servants of Christ in contemporary culture? The issue of the relationship between the Christian college and the public university is a big one.

First, I think we often presume that Christian colleges, with discerning knowledge and clear intention, do actually prepare teachers for a Christian school setting. This implies that college students who are becoming teachers can clearly articulate and apply an integrative Christian perspective and vision about schools, teaching, students, learning, professionalism, community interaction, and more. It assumes that they can ferret out with wisdom some of the assumptions that our society makes about education, students, and schools. Can they?

Second, let us ask questions about Christian school leaders trained at public universities. If they have public university training, are they adequately prepared to teach in or lead a Christian school organization? What assumptions about schooling, finance, fund raising, marketing and curriculum have they examined from a Christian perspective? What reading have they done on leadership and management of Christian schools? How have they examined current school issues from a Christian perspective? Where have they developed and critiqued student management and human resource development from a Christian philosophy of management? How have they meaningfully defined "effectiveness" as reflected in our principles? When have they examined from our viewpoint the structure and practices that drive school practices? I'm worried that they haven't done these things well enough or intentionally enough.

Third, I think this question challenges us to clearly define and bravely embrace our responsibilities for staff development, and particularly to understand the critical role of professional growth for Christian school organizations for teachers, school communities and leaders. As a community of learners, we need to constantly refine and redefine ourselves, examining our assumptions, integrating our vision into our practices, and realigning our instruction and curriculum very intentionally. Can our leaders provide this? If not, who will?

Will Christian colleges and Christian school organizations provide us with models, readings and research? Refine our vision and challenge our assumptions? I have more questions than answers.

Lois

November 10, 2004


Agnes Fisher

Pam, I would agree that we ought not to dismiss the possibility of a very good and well-informed Christian teacher who has gone through secular training. I find it more difficult to interact about educational mission with a teacher who has had a more fundamentalist background from a Christian college when it comes to world-and-life view than with a colleague who has gone to a non-Christian college or university but has come to a Reformed understanding of Scripture. I have taught in the public sector for a number of years and received my Masters and other post-graduate work from secular universities. I found them to challenge me as to my own understanding of faith and education. I would suggest, therefore, that a secular experience can help to focus a teacher on what the real mission of Christian education is — that is, to see God's creation as a way to understand him and ourselves, enjoy this creation and glorify him through it.

Agnes

November 15, 2004

Let me clarify my earlier posting. In Reformed thought the idea has been promoted that God's word comes to us in three forms: in the Bible, in Jesus, and in the creation. That means that the creation (and I don't just mean trees and rocks, butterflies and coyotes — I also mean rock music and Baroque art, clothing styles and other products of human creativity) is a way in which God has chosen to reveal himself. To me the strength of our schools is most closely connected with our commitment to that

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third way of getting to know God: through the study of his world. There are other "Christian" schools that encourage students to foster a relationship with Jesus (the second way in which the word comes to us), and there are plenty that constantly push students to Bible study (the first approach). But there are precious few that push students in the third way, i.e., urging them in every direction to study God's world in the light of his word. This can't be done properly if we act as if God's existence makes no difference to the whole endeavor. Only when we claim that all this creation study and gift development is itself "spiritual" activity and only when we work to point that out in intentional and honest ways, well, now, we may just have a justification for our existence as Christian schools! If our teachers need to be trained to lead students in this way (and I suspect they do, because it would be brutally hard to figure this out on your own in a setting committed to naturalism), then Christian college graduates are a valuable if not an essential resource. On the other hand, if they are boring and can't engage the students....

Tony

The panel consists of:

Pam Adams (padams@dordt.edu), professor of education and director of graduate education at Dordt College, Sioux Center, Iowa.

Lois Brink (LBrink@grcs.org), curriculum coordinator and media director at Grand Rapids Christian High School, Grand Rapids, Mich.

Johanna Campbell (ctabc@twu.ca), executive director of the Christian Teachers Association of British Columbia, Langley, B.C.

Agnes Fisher (agnesfisher@easternchristian.org) is a teacher of English, Humanities and Art at Eastern Christian High School, North Haledon, New Jersey.

Tony Kamphuis (TonyKamp@aol.com), executive director of the Niagara Association for Christian Education. He lives in Smithville, Ont.

A New Twist to Collaboration

by Ed Starkenburg

Ed Starkenburg (edstark@nwciowa.edu) taught third and fourth grades in Christian schools in Iowa before moving to teacher education at Northwestern College, where he is associate professor of education and director of teacher education. Northwestern College is affiliated with Christian Schools International and is located in Orange City, Iowa.

Collaboration between local schools and teacher education went a step further this past spring in Orange City, Iowa. The teacher education program at Northwestern College places many education students each semester at Orange City Christian School (OCCS) for pre-student teaching field experiences along with student teaching. But this time a new arrangement was developed, sparked by an article in the Summer 2003 issue of the *Iowa Math Journal.* *

Following this article's suggestions, I teamed up with Jackie DeGroot from OCCS to bring valuable individual instruction in one of the fourth-graders' toughest math concepts for the year, long division. Many of us remember how much fun it was to learn that process! Long division is typically tough for children to learn because we tackle the numbers differently than we do in addition, subtraction, and multiplication problems, and because we use division, multiplication, and subtraction repeatedly in order to get the right answer.

Because both research and common sense tell us that learning difficult skills can be enhanced by increasing the individual attention each student receives, my 23 elementary and middle-school math methods students from Northwestern College worked with individuals or pairs of Mrs. DeGroot's 25 fourth-graders to teach and practice long division. Mrs. DeGroot and I planned our approach carefully, deciding which concepts from the long division unit to teach, which method(s) to use, gathering and distributing manipulatives, and brainstorming ideas for expanding the concept for those students who caught on quickly.

The logistics

Finding a place in the school building for 23 small groups to work on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday mornings for two weeks was a chore, but Mrs. DeGroot arranged to use the fourth-grade room and storage closet, the library, art room, and a large storage room behind another classroom. Mrs. DeGroot and I circulated among the groups to observe and provide assistance. Worksheets were used sparingly while the students worked primarily with their textbooks and real-life division problem solving situations.

> ***"Like all teachers, they were forced to think at the highest level."***

The college students took careful daily notes of how each fourth-grade student was doing and weekly informed Mrs. De Groot about their progress so she, too, knew how each student was doing and could follow-up once the experience was over for the college students. She also found herself answering questions from parents who wanted to know what was going on and how it was working. Open communication with the classroom teacher is crucial. Mrs. DeGroot and I decided that the next time we collaborate like this, the college students should share their notes on a daily rather than a weekly basis. They will also inform the parents ahead of time so they know what to expect and possibly take the time to discuss the experience with their children.

The fourth-graders and college students worked well together, and both benefited from the experience. The arrangement allowed fourth-graders to have their own personal math teacher so they could progress at their own rate of learning and get the answers to questions almost immediately. The college students gained first-hand experience helping students learn and practice a difficult math skill while planning and directing the teaching and learning. It's challenging for a classroom teacher to know what each student in her class understands and doesn't understand. This experience gave the future teachers the opportunity for an in-depth view of how one student learned the skill. With this knowledge vividly imprinted on their brains, it will be easier for them to understand how a whole classroom wrestles with and learns this and similar math skills.

Detailed preparation

There are many factors that enter into the effectiveness of such collaboration. The college professor and classroom teacher need to work together to set up the experience with the goal of helping both groups of students to learn as much as they can. The college students need to agree to deliver the school's curriculum and utilize the methods and content the teacher and professor have articulated. Time is a major factor; the college students came during their math methods class time, the only way to ensure they would all be available.

Since class meets only three days each

week, Mrs. DeGroot carried out review and practice sessions on the "off" days. Because children catch on to challenging skills like long division at different rates, knowing how many class periods to dedicate to the topic was a challenge. While many of the fourth-graders appeared to have mastered the skill during the eight sessions (2.5 weeks), others were still approaching mastery. The detailed daily logs kept by the college students helped Mrs. DeGroot complete the instruction and practice with the students who still needed to demonstrate mastery. Truly individualizing instruction is a major challenge for a classroom teacher!

How and why

The pre-service teachers learned a lot about how students think about such a process as long division, and how they come to understand. They also experienced the friction between procedural and conceptual understanding, while hoping to achieve both. That friction seems especially hot in long division, since they learned some fourth-graders can DO long division without really understanding what's going on. As with many math processes, some students learn how to solve the problem — what questions to ask, and where the numbers go — without really understanding what they're doing and why. They simply apply the rules taught them, arrive at an answer, and hope for the best. Many students and adults today survive with this type of procedural knowledge in math and computation without truly grasping the concept of what they're doing and why they're doing it. Conceptual understanding that facilitates procedural finesse is one of the major goals of the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics.

Valuable learning

As the college students taught, assessed, and moved on, they struggled with finding the best way to spend their allotted time: working for understanding or just completing the problem correctly. While teachers typically want both, they don't always have the luxury of time or other resources necessary to accomplish both. Interestingly, the college students learned that base ten blocks, the manipulatives that most teachers use in teaching long division, didn't always seem to help the fourth-graders with either procedure or conceptual understanding.

The future teachers learned the priceless skill of weighing the various options and striving to make the most of the time and resources they had available. Like all teachers, they were forced to think at the highest level of Bloom's Taxonomy (analysis, synthesis, and evaluation) as they taught. While they didn't have the opportunity to teach an entire class at one time, their first-hand experience working closely with one or two students should help them better understand what all students are experiencing as they teach math (less is more, to borrow the current teacher education jargon!).

Mrs. De Groot and I are already planning how we might collaborate in the future. Other OCCS teachers were seen longingly thinking of ways college students might be able to help them in their classrooms, too! If there is a teacher education program located close to your school, contact them and begin to brainstorm how you may be able to collaborate in the future!

**Iowa Math Journal*, Summer 2003. "Collaboration in the Classroom - How a Teacher Utilizes a University Math Methods Class" by Vicki Oleson of Price Laboratory School and Glenn Nelson of the University of Northern Iowa, both in Cedar Falls, Iowa.

God Is Your Chief Fan:

It's How You Play the Game

by Janet Engel

Janet Engel (rjjkengel@aol.com) teaches elementary physical education and coaches eighth-grade girls basketball education at Ripon Christian Schools in Ripon, California. This article is an edited version of a speech she gave to athletes, coaches and parents at a senior varsity awards banquet at Ripon Christian High School.

Like many North Americans, my involvement in sports began at an early age — swimming out to the dock at Greenwood Lake without a life jacket, playing softball with the neighborhood kids in front of my house and one-on-one basketball against my brother, who was three years older than I. He always let me score just enough to keep me coming back so he could beat on me some more.

I remember when my parents *made* me take piano lessons. I used to set a timer for a half hour and put my softball glove on the piano bench next to me, just to keep me motivated. That way, I could get on to what I thought were bigger and better things. I barely gave my Dad enough time to get out of his work clothes so he could hit me grounders before supper. At the Christian school I attended, I played several years of volleyball, soccer, basketball and softball. In college I played a little bit of basketball and softball and had my first experience of being cut from a team. As a teacher and parent, I coach just about anything.

The older I get, the more I reflect. I wonder what it is that motivates me and you to play the game — to spend all those hours practicing, driving long distances and sacrificing our bodies for the sport. I dare say we love the game itself, otherwise there wouldn't be any coaches or parents in the room tonight. You must see value in participation or you wouldn't spend all that time coaching or cheering for your kids. Many lessons about life can be learned in the athletic arena. Let me highlight a few.

Focus on winning

Winning and losing is a very big issue in sports. At an early age, parents tell their children: "It's not whether you win or lose, it's how you play the game." We tell them the most important thing is to try your best. Learning more about the game, improving their skills, experiencing the concept of "team," and having fun — that's what we hope our kids come away with. What do

you remember? Can you still say that about your varsity experience?

I think the pressure to win becomes so great along the way that some of our original reasons for playing get lost. We tend to emphasize our season record, our wins and losses as a measurement for success. Sometimes we practice so many hours, it's not even fun anymore. Or we've lost so many games it takes the fun out of it. I encourage you to measure your success in the striving. Colossians 3:24 says, "Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving."

As coaches, I think we need to make a point of praising the effort of our players and their conduct rather than focusing on the final outcome of the game. When we get to heaven, God isn't going to ask us how many wins or losses we had. Rather, as players and coaches, we should focus on what kind of witness we were for him. And did our participation in sports bring glory to him or to us? Be honest with yoursel— doesn't a winning season demonstrate more success than a losing one?

As a coach, I've had two experiences that have shaped my thinking on this. In 1988, when we won the state championship in basketball, I was on cloud nine. This was the ultimate in terms of success. Two years ago, I experienced the opposite extreme — a 1-17 season with my eighth-grade girls basketball team. You know them as this year's freshman girls. The closest we came to winning each game was at the opening tip-off. The talent just wasn't there. It wasn't even realistic for me to expect them to win. As a team, we had to re-evaluate why we even came to practice every day. When I asked my team why they wanted to play, they said it was fun! I said FUN??? Then I had to ask myself, was it about them or about me? What about you? As players and coaches, is it about us or about bringing glory to God?

Trying is enough

In the devotional book *Lasting Victory*, Calvin College chaplain Dale Cooper and men's basketball coach Kevin Vande Streek talk about when we don't succeed. *"In sports as in life, including the spiritual life, it's important to distinguish between faithfulness and success. As a Christian, I am called to the former, but not to the latter. In other words, I am called to do as well as I can, to put forth my very best effort. But I am not required to make sure*

that things turn out always to be successful. Sometimes, despite my best efforts, failure happens. And that's okay. Simply that I was faithful in trying is enough. How freeing this can be for an athlete and a coach! Others may harshly insist that you be successful — that you must definitely win the game, capture the league championship, go on to conquer the state crown. Those who insist on success, of course, seem never to be satisfied with your present performance and accomplishments. They'll always keep raising the bar on you, and demand more success. And still more. But Jesus calls us all to live by grace. 'It doesn't bother me that you're not always successful,' he says to us. 'Simply that you were faithful — that you did as well as you could — is a wonderful delight to me.'" And that, to be sure, is very liberating news for us all.

In terms of winning, my state championship team was the more successful team. But in terms of life, both teams are at the same level in my book. Both teams are special to me for different reasons, just as each of us is specially gifted and loved by God for different reasons. By the way, the freshman girls won seven games this year, which is more wins than they had in any sport in junior high. I take great satisfaction in that accomplishment for them!

A good sport

A second aspect I'd like to touch on is the area of sportsmanship. By this I mean how we conduct ourselves in the sports arena. Does what comes out of our mouths as coaches sound negative and belittling, or positive and encouraging to our players' ears? As parents, do we get so worked up that we think and say things at a game that we would be embarrassed to admit if God were sitting in the bleachers next to us? He is, of course. We just don't see him. As players, think back on your reactions to bad calls by the officials or dirty play by opposing players. Were you able to handle recognition humbly or handle the lack of it honorably? Were you always faithful in your witness that you belong to Christ? Have you learned anything from your athletic experiences at Ripon Christian that you can carry on into your life?

I'd like to to tell you about a personal experience relating to this question. A little over 20 years ago, I was sitting at an awards banquet. Each year one boy and one girl athlete received the coveted senior athlete award. I had starred at my Christian high school in three varsity sports and had made significant contributions, such that I considered myself worthy of that particular honor. My varsity basketball coach began to describe the exceptional qualities and characteristics of the female athlete who was to receive the award. My heart raced as I was sure he must be describing me. I was so excited! When I heard the words "and the winner is..." I was all but ready to jump out of my seat to the applause of my classmates. You see, we had discussed who we thought was going to win the award, and my name was one of the favorites. Now, mind you, I wasn't so arrogant to agree with my friends when they told me they were sure I would be the winner. I humbly suggested other worthy candidates and knew it wasn't in the bag. But that night, my pride took over, and for a brief moment it was all about me.

When I heard the name of a teammate called out and not my own, my heart sank. I wanted to get up and cry injustice! I knew she hadn't lived up to the rules of the contract that we as athletes had signed. It all seemed so unfair. Like most of you, I would never tell the coaches what I knew. I simply cried the whole way home. Well into the night, I cried out to God and searched the scriptures for a reason. After all, I had worked so hard for him, had tried my best to honor him through my involvement in athletics in spite of my sinful nature. Didn't I at least deserve some recognition?

It was that night that the verse I quoted earlier, Colossians 3:24, became so meaningful to me: "Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving." As I reflect back on that experience, I realize that God had a more important lesson for me to learn than that, if I worked hard, I would be publicly acknowledged for my athletic efforts. This experience shaped me and my perspective on athletics in a way that would bring far more glory to God than if I had won the award.

Here's what I would like you to reflect on: can you learn from any of the situations God has provided for you at your school as they relate to sportsmanship? In my coaching experience over the past 20 years, each year at least one player or parent has cried "unfair." The reasons span anywhere from lack of playing time to my individual treatment of certain players. Like some situations in sports, life isn't fair. You won't always get what you want or even what you deserve. Whether it be a grade on a test, a college scholarship, the job you were positive you were qualified for, the relationship you had hoped would work out — the list is endless. God never promised that life would be fair, just that he would be faithful if we would but trust him. Take a look at your circumstances. Is God trying to teach you something?

Work together

The last aspect of the sports experience I would like to touch on is team play. A popular acronym for the word *team* is

"together everyone achieves more." Sports is not just about the game — it's about people. Being part of a team is very basic to the structure of society. You're part of a team at your job, your church, even within the family unit. Team play requires unselfishness. Yet there are so many opportunities in athletics for us that bring us closer to selfishness than selflessness.

For you starters out there, how did you treat the "bench" players on your team? Did you ever thank them for playing hard in practice to make you better, handing you a towel or water bottle with a smile, encouraging you while knowing that in their hearts they would like to be given a chance to shine, or, simply, for not becoming a cancer on the team because being part of the team was more important to them than individual success?

How about you subs out there? Was your attitude beneficial to team unity, or detrimental to the team structure? Were you encouraging to the players in the game, or did such jealousy come over you that you hoped they would fail in some way that would provide you with an opportunity to play? Did you begin to blame the coach for your status, or did you work harder to prove yourself?

Coaches, what about you? Do you take the time to promote team unity? Do you tell your players how valuable they are and emphasize that each contribution is important, no matter how small? Some of you are probably saying, "That's just for girls." I don't think so. We have a unique opportunity to influence the lives of teenagers and shape how they perceive themselves. What better way to build confidence in players and affirm them in being who God made them to be than by encouragement? I know for myself, that I sometimes get so caught up in coaching the game that I forget about the people who make the game what it is — the players.

Parents, you don't get off the hook here either. Do you support your son or daughter and encourage their involvement in athletics? Or do you cause dissension in their minds by openly criticizing the coach or other teammates at home? Do you emphasize "how they play the game" and stress having fun for the sake of playing, or do you nitpick their performance after a disappointing loss? Do you tell your child he or she doesn't get enough playing time to make it worth being on the team, or do you encourage participation simply for lessons learned that will help cultivate the heart of a servant?

Divine coach

I wonder what kind of player Jesus would be. Would he be the high scorer, or the last player on the bench handing out water bottles and offering encouraging words? If he were the coach, what kind of image would he portray to the public? In a sense, God is our coach every day of our lives, and we play for him. Are we up to the challenge?

I'd like to close with a meditation from the devotional I quoted from earlier, *Lasting Victory,* based on Ephesians 1:1-5. It's entitled "God's Longing."

No doubt about it: God takes a deep and warm interest in all the things that happen to us. After all, he made us with exquisite care and attention. Scripture describes God as our Father and us as his children.

If you know from experience how good it feels to have a parent, a grandparent, a friend, or a guardian who loves and cares about you come and watch you play as your chief fan, well, try multiplying that by infinity. Only then will you catch a faint hint of how much interest God your heavenly Father takes in your life as an athlete. He loves to watch you compete.

Above all else, however, God has in mind one other accomplishment for you. Even more than taking delight in watching you grow into the finest athlete you can be, God desires you to become like Jesus. He is eager that you grow in your love for Jesus. He wants you, too, to act more and more like Jesus. For, as God's first-born Son, Jesus models for us how to live in order to please God.

To put matters in a single word, God wants you to become "holy"— to become a saint. It's quite simple to explain what a saint is, really, but to become one takes a lifetime of diligent focus and practice. We expect you as students to become saintly scholars, educated believers. Now add athletics to the formula, and you really have a daunting challenge. It's harder than any drill or practice that any coach has ever thought of putting you through. Every day, it takes God's power and help to become such a person.

But no matter how difficult the task, saints strive diligently to conform to the image of Christ himself. They never tire of asking what Jesus would do if he were in their shoes. They try to shape their motives and ambitions, their speech and actions, by the example he set.

Nor is there ever an off-season. Every day God our Father keeps sending us 'stuff' for us to train and practice on — the people we meet, the choices he sets before us, and all the things that happen to us — each of these God intends as the raw material for us to become like Jesus.

Note:

Lasting Victory by Calvin College chaplain Dale Cooper and men's basketball coach Kevin Vande Streek (Calvin College Alumni Association, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 2002)

Query

Young Teacher May Speak Up and Advise

Tena Siebenga-Valstar is a principal at Fort McMurray Christian School in Aberta. We encourage all teachers and principals to submit questions for this column, even if they think they know the answer. Send your questions to Dr. Tena Siebenga-Valstar, 168 Windsor Dr., Fort McMurray, Alta., T9H 4R2, or email her at tvalstar@telus.net.

Staff is community

Question # 1:

I'm a relatively young teacher with a pretty large grade six class. Now a family in our school has taken on guardianship of a student who is being added mid-year, and he presents some real disciplinary problems. I feel put out by this easy acceptance of a new student, but I wonder if it is my place to say anything about this sort of decision.

Response:

As I listen to your question, I wonder if there are other issues which are behind the question. A number of factors could be part of the frustration that this question implies. I will focus on some key words in your question in order to answer it. The key words are: "relatively young," "pretty large," "grade six," "mid-year," "real disciplinary," "easy acceptance" and "my place."

You indicate that you are a relatively young teacher. You do not have to apologize for that in any way. All seasoned teachers were young teachers at one time. I value young teachers for the life, enthusiasm, optimism and ideals which they bring to the staff and the school. A staff is comprised of a community of believers who work together to build one another up. As a young teacher you may have your uncertainty in dealing with situations with which you are unfamiliar. Do you have a mentor or administrator who will coach you in dealing with a student who presents a challenge? Ask someone who exhibits wisdom in working with students. If this new student is your only student with disciplinary concerns, you will probably be able to face the challenge with assistance from others on the staff. Since you raise the issue, I assume there are other students who present behavioral challenges. Is your administration aware of the tone of your class and strength or fragility of the classroom dynamics which could be affected by the assumed non-compliance of the new student?

"Pretty large" is the next piece of the puzzle. Does your school have a class size policy or established practice? There is a wide range in what may be considered large by both teachers and school boards. Do you have a teacher's aide or reliable volunteers in your classroom? These situations could affect the decision. Maybe the administration sees you as a capable teacher who has exhibited qualities that indicate you can readily handle this new situation.

The new student is entering a sixth-grade classroom. Although I believe that parents, in their role as parent or guardian, have the ultimate responsibility for a child's education, the sixth-grade child also must take responsibility for his task as a student. Ideally the guardians have discussed with the child that he will be attending a Christian school, the expectations of the school, and the responsibilities of the student. Given the information you cited, I suggest that the student, as well as the parents, should be interviewed by the administration and the teacher before the student is admitted to the school. I believe we respect the student by making him aware of what the school offers, the mission of the school and the role and responsibility of the student at that age. In that way the student has an opportunity to ask questions and realizes that he is a valued member of this Christian community. Expectations are then clear to all parties involved.

Having a student enter your class mid-year can have both advantages and disadvantages. He is now entering a classroom community that has been established. In order for him to become familiar with classroom and school expectations, partner him with a responsible class member once you have made him aware of expectations. There is much to learn coming into a new situation, and suggestions from a classmate may be a gentle reminder.

You indicate that this student comes with "real disciplinary" issues. Rather than labeling the student, you or your principal may want to contact the previous school to establish if the assumption is real. I have worked with students who, although they came with a negative reputation, did not exhibit that behavior once they entered a caring classroom environment, where boundaries were known. I would assume that, since they have chosen to care for this child, the family setting is also a loving environment. I encourage you to adopt an attitude that this student will succeed considering the positive, loving, Christ-centered community you have already established in your classroom. Remember that the teacher plays a key role in setting this environment.

I don't believe that any application into a Christian school can be an "easy acceptance" unless the school society does not value the mission of the school. Each student who enters the school is a person created by God in his image to love and serve him. Yes, that has been distorted, but we are called by God to act as healing agents in this broken world. Every principal has the responsibility to carefully consider each application and then make recommendations to the board. Boards with which I have worked

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consider the applicant for enrollment on the following criteria: the effect the school will have on the student, and the effect the student will have on the classroom and the school.

I believe it is "your place" to not only speak to the situation but also advise in the decision making. Your initial interaction with the parent and the student is crucial in setting the tone for a positive relationship. You are on the front line in providing a positive learning environment in which this child can reach his God-given potential. A teacher may not have time to be involved in the interviews when students enter the school at the beginning of the year, but a situation such as you describe warrants the involvement of the teacher. Count on God to answer your prayer by giving you wisdom and strength in each new situation.

Not everyone can do it

Question # 2:

We are about to start our process of salary negotiations. I think every staff member should take a turn being one of the representatives, just so we all know what it is like. What do you think?

Response:

My understanding of a salary negotiating committee is that it is a working committee composed of representatives from the board, society and staff. The number from each facet of the society is dependent on the size of the school. These representatives have the expertise and the trust of the society. The task of this committee is to see the "big picture" for the society and to come up with an equitable agreement which meets the common good of all parties involved. Not everyone is gifted to be a representative on the salary study committee. One needs to be able to work with configurations of numbers. There must also be continuity from one year to the next for the committee to work well and training an individual will likely impede the progress of the committee.

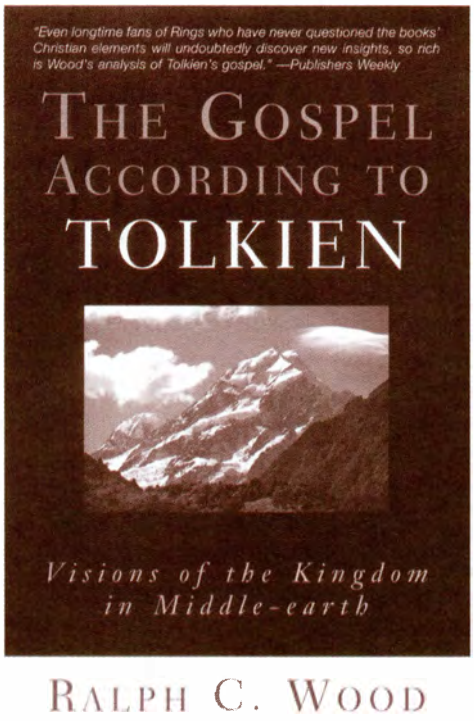
Factors involved in salary negotiations include the salary grid and various benefits such as pension, health care, and insurance. The representative from the teachers must be able to explain these, effectively gather information from the staff, and present this information to the committee. At the same time, being a representative for the staff, she or he must be able to stand back from the information and become part of the working committee. The representative must also be able to assimilate the information and report back to the staff, seeking further input as needed.

Having previously been on a large staff, I was happy to allow those with greater expertise in numbers to serve on the committee. As a part of a small school presently, establishing the salary grid has become one of my responsibilities. I know God has blessed me with gifts, but this assignment taxes my brain. I am thankful my husband, who is now a pastor but was previously an accountant, is kind enough to offer his help. Not being a beneficiary of the negotiations also makes it far easier for me to advocate for the staff, because, not being emotionally involved,I am dealing at arms length with the issues being negotiated.

Book Reviews

Ralph C. Wood, *The Gospel According to Tolkien: Visions of the Kingdom in Middle-Earth.* Louisville, London: Westminster John Knox Press. 2003. 169 pages.
Reviewed by Steve J. Van Der Weele, Calvin College (Retired)

In this fine book on Tolkien, Prof. Wood has carried out T. S. Eliot's requirement of a literary critic, namely, that whatever one does by way of analysis of a given literary work, he needs to complete that critique by the use of theological criteria. In fact, Wood calls his careful study "a theological meditation," and asserts as his purpose "to make the Christian dimension of this great book accessible to the ordinary interested reader of Tolkien." And this he does. He demonstrates that Tolkien, whose imagination was nourished by his sympathetic reading of the literature of pre-Christian Northern Europe, who was immersed as well in the philosophy of classical Greek and Rome, was also disciplined by the magisterial wisdom of the Catholic faith, in which he was an ardent believer. In addition to these acquisitions, he had the gift of myth-making, of creating (sub-creating he would call it) worlds upon worlds — an entire cosmos, complete in its geography, history, culture, ethics, and the hierarchy of ordered priorities by which the inhabitants of this world succeed and fail. He contends that, though Tolkien maintains aesthetic consistency in his epic work, time and again his characters express beliefs, emotions, attitudes, and behaviors which derive from a transcendent, even Christian, source.

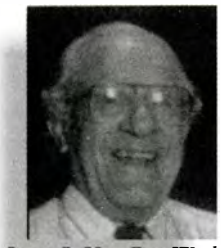


Wood's opening chapter introduces us to Tolkien's world — its origins, its composition, its creator. What infuses the world he fashions is Tolkien's deep desire to honor his nation through an epic that would express the noblest virtues, aspirations, and traditions of his beloved England — a country which, after all, constituted the northwest corner of the Christian world. His world is a world of great diversity, of delightful order, of splendid harmony — a Great Symphony, as Wood calls it. It was hierarchical, ceremonial, consisting of a chain of being which connected the dullest mineral to Iluvatar, the creator himself. For all the joy, a pagan sense of Doom pervades his world; Fate and Death are everywhere. The universe was made essentially good, however, and the melancholy which now enshrouds it developed later. Large areas of this world have been devastated; they are ruled by despots, whose reign has resulted in a culture of sterility and death. Still, the cosmos retains some of its original splendor: its flora and fauna — especially things which grow slowly, like trees — the gifts of play, of speech, of imagination (he said he had not devised his world so much as he had found it; it all came to him quite uncalled for, he reported). And the world had a purpose, a destiny. It was to be an arena for quests — intentional missions for everyone, as contrasted (so Wood points out) with mere adventures prompted by restlessness or idle curiosity.

What happened to this world's harmony is indicated by the title of the next chapter, "The Calamity of Evil: The Marring of the Divine Harmony." Tolkien may borrow from Genesis the fact of the Fall, but his resort to the myth of the ring adds dimension and power to this ancient catastrophe (Plato refers to a similar myth in his Republic). Sauron has forged one ring out of nine to consolidate the power of this coercive force. But the evil and the good are not symmetrical. Evil is parasitic to the good. Sauron and his minions can only undo what was originally good. They cannot create anything new. They can only rip, plunder, devastate, uproot what was once part of a good creation.

But though evil at times seems to go unchecked, powerful counter-forces are present to contain and destroy this malignancy. The four cardinal virtues — Prudence, Justice, Courage, and Temperance — discussed in the chapter "The Counter-Action to Evil" — are alive and well. The good characters — the hobbits, Gandolf the Wizard, and Aragorn, the true king, among others — maintain the Company among themselves, time and again thwart the intents of the evil-doers, and, though in an unexpected way, achieve their assignment to destroy the ring in the fires of Mt. Doom. Their behavior puts one in mind of a number of Renaissance works called, generically, Courtesy Literature" — such works as Ascham's *The Schoolemaster*, Thomas Hoby's translation of *The Book of the Courtier*, Henry Peacham's *The Complete Gentleman*, Edmund *Spenser's The Faerie Queene*, and, in their way, Shakespeare's history plays.

Through the admirable qualities generated by the classical virtues, together with honor, loyalty, truth-telling (says Bilbo, after he has been rebuked by the wizard for giving a false account of how he had obtained the ring: "The wizard seems to think the truth important" (83), the deep instincts of human nature and the basic goodness of the creation are affirmed. No wonder, as Wood



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reports, students "feel clean" after reading *The Lord of the Rings*. What a wonderful resource for showing the young how to direct their way!

But in Christian terms, Plato's cardinal virtues lack ultimate sufficiency. They remain earthbound and lack authentic theological credentials. Wood aptly entitles his final chapter "The Lasting Corrective," where he now defines, and illustrates from the epic, the biblical virtues of faith, hope, and charity. In a summary of sorts, "Consummation," Wood points out several passages from Middle Earth which point to an Incarnation which will bring an ultimate resolution to the evils of a world gone awry.

Wood has the right credentials to discern Tolkien's intent. He has so lived into the epic that he discerns very keenly the varied nuances of both the virtues and vices I just alluded to. These virtues are not one-dimensional, but multifaceted. Thus, drawing illustrations from the ocean of episodes in the work, he gets to treat such themes as motivation in the practice of the virtues (Boromir does the right thing for the wrong reason, as does Eowyn when she eloquently sets forth the rights of women but betrays herself when she acknowledges that she wishes to fight for renown rather than for the cause itself). Wood reconstructs from a scattering of episodes (he can do this very deftly) a pre-Christian theory of the just war. War must be fought — and sometimes evil must be met with physical force — under tightly restrained conditions, must not have a retaliatory purpose, and must be fought in the cause of freedom and civility. But even a just war can inflict injustice. When it comes to the cardinal virtues, Wood is masterful in searching out the complexities of forgiveness. For one thing, charity inspires forgiveness, not only follows it. Charity, moreover, tries to elicit what is salvageable in a person (even Gollum — sneaky, untrustworthy — deserves some respect for his desire to be friends with the hobbits). Sauron exhibits an extreme of perversity when he flies into a rage after he is offered pardon. He has been deprived of the luxury of his spiteful self-adulation, the source of all his fiendish energy. And throughout, the ideal of servanthood as a contrast to the quest for coercive power is upheld as the source of personal and communal shalom.

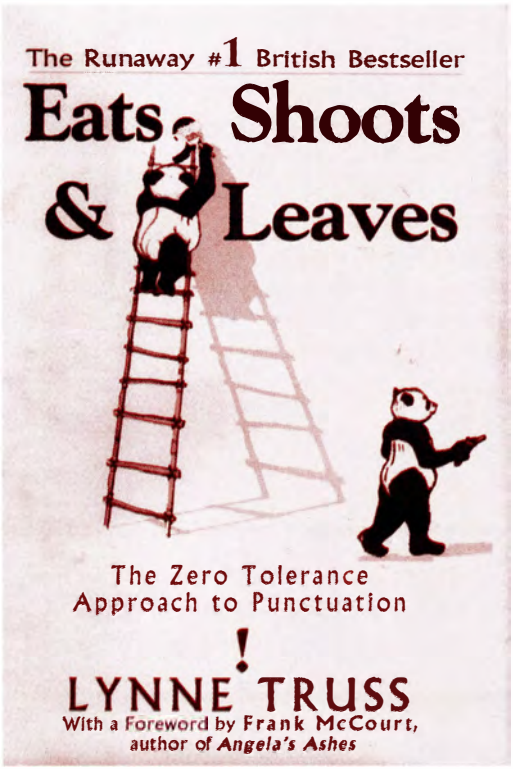
Some may say Wood has been too aggressive in pointing out the moral dimension of Tolkien's work. Let them have their say, and enjoy the work, including the powerful video productions, at whatever level suits them. For my part, I find the discussion illuminating, not only as he defines the various moral categories but also as he enlivens the narrative episodes by showing why the characters act as they do and what consequences flow from those actions. What a splendid demonstration of the traditional formula for literature: it must teach as it delights.

Lynn Truss, *Eats, Shoots & Leaves: The Zero Tolerance Approach to Punctuation.* New York: Gotham Books (Penguin Group). 2004. 209 pages,
Reviewed by Steve J. Van Der Weele, Calvin College (Retired)

Confronted by punctuational anarchy, Lynn Truss sets forth what she supposes is a rearguard action to preserve those symbolic notations that have served writers and readers for so many centuries — for many civilizations, in fact. But it may well be that through her wit, her learning, her passion, and her high spirits, her book will succeed in bringing about what she describes in her subtitle as "The Zero Tolerance Approach to Punctuation." She is a strong champion for all English teachers. She needs to persuade, of course, the lazy, the semi-literate, commercial artists, (*Why Lands' End*, for example?) But the more serious juggernaut, obviously, is the new technology, Netspeak, which Naomi Baron describes as "an emerging language centaur — part speech, part writing...." (191) This industry threatens not only punctuation but the whole world of print, of books, of the act of reading itself, where we encounter the word in a linear mode, working our way as if on a journey, appropriating the words in an orderly sequence in a medium that is static and fixed — all very different from reading unedited discourse through scrolling a movable medium.

It is hardly necessary for me to provide the rules for punctuation which she outlines — traditional and defensible — though one might quarrel with several of her judgments. One can find these rules in any standard rhetoric textbook. What sets her book apart from a college handbook is her lively respect for the fine art of civilized writing and reading and the crucial importance of punctuation in facilitating these processes. Punctuation marks have long histories and have been refined over the centuries so that, as she puts it, "Proper punctuation is both the sign and the cause of clear thinking." (202) She animates these marks, makes them actors on a stage, introduces them, plays with them, provides their antecedents, demonstrates what difference they can make

when used or abused. (When it comes to hyphens, for example, she lets us savor — in a whimsical mood — the difference between "an extra-marital affair" and "an extra marital affair"; "a long-standing friend" is not the same as "a long standing friend"; "a cross-section of the population" is not the same as "a cross section.") And so on. Her sense of the drama in punctuation appears already in her dedication, which reads, "To the memory of the striking Bolshevik printers of St. Petersburg who, in 1905, demanded to be paid the same rate for punctuation marks as for letters, and thereby directly precipitated the first Russian Revolution."



After a lively introduction by Frank McCourt (author of *Angela's Ashes*), Truss devotes a chapter each to "The Tractable Apostrophe," the "That'll Do, Comma," the semicolon and colon in a chapter entitled "Airs and Graces," "Cutting a Dash," (several marks), "A Little Used Punctuation Mark" — the hyphen, and a playful conclusion, "Merely Conventional Signs," in which she informs us, among other things, of a tongue-in-cheek essay launched by a Bob Hirschfield in 1999 in *The Washington Post*. He alerted his readers to the Strunkenwhite Virus, which makes it impossible for the computer to deliver e-mails containing grammatical mistakes. One message would read, "Your dependent clause preceding your independent clause must be set off by commas, but one must not precede the conjunction." (199) The whole venture envisioned a never-never rhetorical land, a utopia which is not, alas, to be attained in this life. She starts another chapter by regaling us with the plot of a Chekhov short story, "The Exclamation Mark" — a parody of Charles Dickens's *A Christmas Carol*. Perekladin, a collegiate secretary, has always prized himself on his self-taught prowess in punctuation. But one day someone at a party challenges this acquisition. He is troubled, and during the night he is haunted by specters representing punctuation marks. Flying commas, colons, semicolons, even question marks present themselves to his mind. He can withstand all their accusations. But suddenly an exclamation mark appears, and he comes to realize that in his forty years he has not once had recourse to an exclamation mark! He does not even remember its purpose — a clear indication that his life has been so bland that his writing is devoid of the great passions — rage, delight, joy, and the rest. He makes his peace by a bold act of defiance.

Here is some wisdom one should take away from reading this sprightly book:

1. All punctuation marks have a history and are, thus, already deserving of respect on that account, as we respect any set of traditions and conventions that have added to the quality of civilized life. They provide a continuum with the past and the future.

2. Punctuation marks are not interchangeable. Each one has its own way of affecting the flow of the discourse — expectation, timing, cueing, interpreting, explaining, herding some words together, keeping others apart, guiding the reader in a friendly and helpful way on his journey through your document. Thus, one needs to master them all.

3. Joseph Robertson states it well: "The art of punctuation is of infinite consequence in writing; it contributes to the perspicuity and, consequently, to the beauty, of every composition." Lynn adds, "If colons and semicolons give themselves airs and graces, at least they also confer airs and graces that the language would be lost without." (131)

4. Even if one would not find it necessary to phone in a semicolon from Moscow to his publisher in New York, or confess on his dying bed that he had not used enough commas in his writing, still, we who are custodians of these matters ought not to let the art of punctuation perish on our watch.

P.S. The title has its own charm. A panda orders a sandwich in a cafe and, after eating it, draws a gun and fires two shots into the air. When confronted by the waiter about his strange action, he produces a badly punctuated wildlife manual and tosses the book at him, with the statement, "I'm a panda. Look it up." The entry for panda reads, "Large black-and-white bear-like mammal, native to China. Eats, shoots and leaves."