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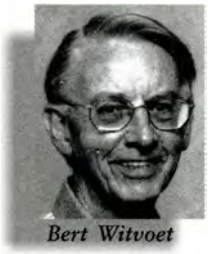
From Marching Band to Jazz Band

Editorial


Bert Witvoet

Leaning Into the Postmodern Winds of Change

Let it be said of me in the annals of history that I was born a kicking and screaming modernist and that I departed this world a kicking and screaming postmodernist. When I opened my eyes in 1934, there were telephones, though not many (we had number 110 in a town of 6,000 inhabitants), there were radios, cars, airplanes, motor-driven washing machines, and my father plied his trade of hairdressing with equipment that was energized by electricity.

All was relatively well with the world. The First World War had taught us never to engage in war again. Behind the Kindergarten I attended a stork's nest assured me that our family could expect addition. People in our town were safely ensconced in their various spiritual homes and were known to be either Catholic, Reformed, Christian Reformed, Baptist, Pentecostal or Nothing. No sense evangelizing, because things were pretty stable. Pews in our church were reserved for the faithful, until five minutes before 10 a.m., when lights on the pulpit went on to indicate that strangers could now take whatever seats were left.

Of course, we Calvinists owned most of the truth, but that was to be expected. John Calvin had given us a leg up with his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, and Abraham Kuyper had more or less sealed our lofty status. Not all Calvinists could claim that, of course, because the Reformed folk down the road had slipped rather precariously, what with all the hymns they were singing and the freethinkers that were allowed in their pulpits. Discipline was rather shoddy, too, come to think of it.

A moving rug

And then came the Second World War, which shook us up considerably. People of various faiths ended up in the same underground movement or concentration camp. Even the communists were our comrades in arms. Then, for many of us immigration followed, which was also an unsettling experience. In a way, immigration protected us for a while from the secular winds of change that were blowing in Holland, but they did eventually also penetrate our community. And by now we have lost a good deal of cockiness and certainty. I dare say we are less modernist than we used to be.

Actually, the annual Unionville (Canada) conferences in the 1960s, sponsored by what now is called the Institute for Christian Studies, already opened our eyes to the fact that rationalism and the enlightenment spirit were suspect. Being Reformed, we were told, meant that we should continually reform our thinking and our institutions — a rather postmodern idea, come to think of it.

But apart from all that, our society around us is changing, and we cannot help changing along with it. It's hard to label what we have become as postmodern, though, partly because the term is used so loosely. If by "postmodern" we mean that we reject modernism or that we live in a period that follows modernism, then I have no problem calling myself a postmodern person. But if by "postmodern" we mean a philosophical movement, or the prevailing cultural expression of the spirit of our time, then I prefer to distance myself from the label.

For the purpose of this issue, however, we will restrict ourselves to the cultural expression of our time. Two authors, Shiao Chong and Chris Steenhof, help us understand the challenges that this cultural expression brings along. According to Chong, the key words that characterize postmodern are freedom, creativity, improvization, imagination, individual expression, variety and diversity. Chris Steenhof paints a darker picture with his references to cynicism and pessimism and a blatant disregard for truth. Both have important points to make.

Life is a mystery

In my introductory comments I painted myself somewhat into a corner by saying that I will depart this world a kicking and screaming postmodernist. That is not exactly what I hope to be known for. Yes, I acknowledge that I cannot possibly isolate myself from the times I live in and that I have been influenced for better or worse by this new wind blowing through our societies. But I protest, kicking and screaming, because I don't want to be pushed along by every wind and doctrine that comes along. There is at the core of my being a steady and firm conviction that God holds the center of life together.

I agree with Kevin O'Donnell, an Anglican priest in England, who says that "Christianity has never claimed to have a cast-iron, watertight, all worked out doctrine of things. At heart, the faith is about mystery: 'the mystery of faith,' as Christian texts put it" (*Postmodernism*, Lion Publishing, 2003, p.139). He's right. We cannot claim to have all the answers. Nor can we prove faith, or else it would not be faith. Nor can it be faith without the possibility of doubt.

Our understanding of reality and of God is limited. As the apostle Paul so eloquently stated in 1 Corinthians 13, "Even if I speak in the tongues of men and angels [which I don't]... and have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge [which I can't] ... but have not love, I am nothing.... Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully,

even as I am fully known." Paul's statement is a clear renunciation of modernism. It seems to fit the postmodern mode better.

Need for discernment

But does Paul's confession fit the postmodern mode? Most postmodern people no longer believe that God is at the center of life, and they believe not only that we know in part, but also that we don't really know anything for certain. A postmodern person is someone who knows for sure that nothing is certain, and therein lies the contradiction of most postmodern thinkers. And here is where we must part company with those who would relativize our understanding of truth.

What we can learn from postmodernism is that truth is relational. Apart from a relationship with Jesus Christ, we cannot know the truth. The importance of relationship carries on into our relationships with our neighbor, too. How can we love and know God if we do not love our neighbor? According to O'Donnell, the doctrine of the Trinity seems to fare better in a postmodern world than in a modern one. It reminds us that God is relational and that "existence is relational and societal. We are all interlinked and dependent on everything else.... An old doctrine might live again in the light of postmodernism" (p. 143).

But there is more to God's truth than relations. I have noticed that many Christians, too, begin to elevate relations to the point of revelation. If God forbids divorce, it is not kind and compassionate to remind people of that, we are told. Anything that opposes even a wrong relationship is considered violence. To evangelize or engage in mission outreach is to impose our values on others and smacks of hegemony.

To the extent that postmodernism points to the limits of our knowledge, I can accept its claim. But when it goes so far as to say that God's revelation is totally dependent on our personal understanding, then what is left of the certainty of faith and faith knowledge? I believe and know that God breaks through and reveals enough of himself and life for us to be able to cling to his Word and on that foundation build our lives and our institutions.

Not a captive yet

So what am I, a modern or a postmodern Christian? I tried to answer the 30 questions that Chris Steenhof published in his article. The higher you score on that test, the more postmodern you are. I scored 17 out of 30. From that result I take it that I am neither modern nor postmodern, or pretty much half modern and half postmodern. Which is not a bad place to be, as far as I am concerned. I would like to believe that living in and out of the Kingdom of God helps me chart a course through life that answers to the words of Paul in Colossians 2: 6,7: "So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in him, rooted and built up in him.... See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy [whether modern or postmodern], which depends on human tradition and on the basic principles of this world rather than on Christ."

The phrases "rooted and built up" and "as you were taught" indicate that we have a center, a foundation, a source of truth available to us. Modernism and postmodernism are squarely founded on human tradition (humanism) and the principles of this world (secularism). We do well not to be seduced by the siren songs of "freedom," "openness" and the diva of them all, "spirituality." The Church's one foundation is still Jesus Christ, her Lord.

Bert Witvoet

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CHRISTIAN EDUCATION AND ALL THAT JAZZ

by Shiao Chong

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Modernism and post-modernism are labels that are increasingly bandied about and are used to mean various things in various contexts. As a result, readers may be either confused, alarmed, bemused or bored by them! At the risk of inciting any of the above-mentioned emotions, I am going to briefly reflect on our North American culture's transition from modernism to post-modernism and on how that might effect Christian education. As a pedagogical tool to simplify our understanding of modernism and post-modernism, I want to use the metaphor of musical bands.

The marching band

Imagine the changes in our culture as two different kinds of music bands. Think of the age of modernity as a marching band. The keywords for the marching band age are: order, rules, control, uniformity, marching to the beat of the same drum, everybody following the same leader — the drum major. In modernity, the drum major is most likely human rationality. So, where almighty reason leads us, we will follow, in unison.

In a marching band, improvisation is an obvious sin. You do not improvise, you do not break ranks, or march out of step; you need to conform to the rest of the band. There's a bit of room for differences since band members play different musical instruments. So yes, there is some variety, but everybody's playing from the same musical script.

The jazz band

Now think of the post-modern age today as a jazz band. Jazz, by definition, requires the freedom of improvisation. According to my Oxford dictionary, jazz is defined as "a type of music of African-American origin, characterized by improvisation, syncopated phrasing, and a regular or forceful rhythm." The keywords now are freedom, creativity, improvisation, imagination, no pre-written scripts, individual expression, variety and diversity.

No analogy is perfect, but this one is quite apt. The problem with North American Christianity today, as I see it, is that the Christian community is like a marching band stuck on a jazz stage in front of a jazz-loving audience. The world has changed and is changing all around us in many ways. People are playing a different tune these days. Unfortunately, Christians, by and large, are still marching to the beat of a drum from a previous era. What used to work for the church, our well drilled marching routines and rousing rhythms, performances which used to wow the crowds, are now totally out of sync on a jazz stage too small for marching and before a jazz crowd looking for tunes with more nuance and style. For example, our theological formulations, our rationalistic apologetics, our evangelistic methods, all honed and sharpened in dialogue with modernity, are now rendered impotent or irrelevant before post-modernism. At least, they seem useless and irrelevant to the post-modern audience.

Let me use an illustration from my campus ministry. I have observed that, while evangelical Christians on campus are still arguing about creation versus evolution, most non-Christians I have met are more interested in the question of world religions and global issues. Where scientific proof was the big question in modernity, religious and cultural pluralism has now taken its place in post-modernity. But evangelical Christians are, by and large, still fighting the old modernist battles with modernist weapons, while the post-modern generation has moved on to other battlegrounds. As a result, we find ourselves increasingly fighting ghosts, or

straw men, or, worse, each other. No wonder Christianity is increasingly seen as irrelevant and ludicrous.

So, what should we do? Simply put, we need to become a jazz band and learn to translate that old, old gospel song — which we previously turned into a marching band routine — into a jazz rhythm. Now, before I go on, some of you may think that it is good that Christians are not in tune or in sync with the rest of the world. Christians should be countercultural, you say. Well, if by countercultural you mean being like a fish out of water, then you are not going to survive very long. Let's try the swimming analogy. Swimming in a different pond creates a ghetto culture rather than a counter-culture. To be countercultural is more like swimming in the same water but in a different direction. Similarly, Christians should not be playing the same song as the rest of the world, but they should be playing on the same jazz stage to the same jazz audience. If we insist on staying as a marching band stuck on a jazz stage, we will probably soon find that we are playing to an empty house.

Jazzing Up Christian Education

What does all this have to do with Christian education? Well, I am not an expert on Christian schools, but allow me to suggest a few probing questions and issues (you can probably come up with more) that I believe Christian educators need to ask themselves and need to deal with in light of the jazz world in which we find ourselves.

1. How much has Christian education bought into the marching band routine of modernism? Is our philosophy of education, Christian though it is, shaped by modernist assumptions and values? Even if shaped in contradistinction from modernism, how much has that, therefore, shaped the tune we play? How much of our Christian curricula are really only Christianized versions of modernist values and standards?

2. Is our current Christian curriculum shaping our students to engage the post-modern world or the modern world? Are we geared for producing marching band

musicians or jazz musicians? Are we training our children to succeed against modernism, which ironically is to set them up for failure in a post-modern world?

3. Do we merely measure excellence in terms of order, conformity, and rationality or do we also encourage creativity, innovation and originality? Do we encourage or discourage thinking "outside of the box"? Is critical thinking defined as "thinking with the same rules but just better"? Or can we, perhaps, entertain the thought that critical thinking might be "thinking with different rules" or, at least, "asking deep questions about the rules for thinking"?

4. How much are we integrating issues of diversity and variety in our Christian schools — not only in terms of student and faculty demographics, but also in terms of curriculum content and pedagogical methods? Do we take diversity — God's creational diversity — seriously? Do we affirm the goodness of creational diversity by recognizing the diverse ways that students learn and process information? Do we employ or encourage our teachers to use a variety of ways of teaching — oral, visual, "hands-on," interactive, role-playing? Do we seriously take into account our increasingly multicultural and global world in designing our curriculum? I hope, for instance, that World History in our Christian schools is no longer simply *Western* (and *male*) history passed off as *world* history! I hope that the choice of literature studied in English classes is not limited to only those written by Western (and, often, male) writers.

5. On that note, have we North American Christian educators confused Christian with Western? Or, worse, Christian with North American? Are we discerning enough to distinguish how some of our Christian formulations are culturally influenced? And are we wise enough to pass that discernment on to our students?

6. Finally, how well do we know and identify our own Christian roots? How firmly rooted and well versed are we in our Christian worldview in distinction from the cultural influences? In a world characterized by plurality, diversity, freedom and innovation, the issue of one's own identity and rootedness are even

more important than ever. Going back to the jazz metaphor, you actually need to be a better musician in order to play jazz than to play in a marching band. You actually need to master the fundamentals even more in order to be able to improvise and innovate creatively. Any master artist or musician can tell you that their great skills at creative improvisation can happen only on the back of enormously hard work in mastering the basics of their art.

Deep rootedness needed

Surprisingly enough, dealing with the post-modern world also may require a greater level of awareness and grounding in our own worldviews and our own faith traditions than we now possess. This implies that we act and live not in a slavish, conforming, Xerox-reproducing way, but in such a way that we can draw from our roots to help us create new possibilities, to innovate as we face new challenges. In summary, we need to immerse ourselves in our Christian worldviews and Christian tradition so deeply that they resonate in our deepest being, somewhat similar to the way that the basics of playing music and of playing a particular instrument are almost second nature to first-class jazz musicians. The reason they can improvise without a script is that the script is in their hearts and minds. The traditions or worldview we embrace is not a script to slavishly follow as in a marching band, but is more like a powerful foundational jazz rhythm from which we can improvise and build on in creative ways, playing off the rhythms of other players. This kind of "Jazzy Christians" is what the post-modern world needs more of in order to hear the notes of God's amazing grace. This is also what Christian schools today need in order to encourage others and develop fresh ways of engaging our culture.

Facing the Approaching Storm

by Chris Steenhof

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Defining postmodernism is a difficult task but one that is essential for those interested in education. One of the main reasons is that the word "postmodern" is used to describe everything and anything, and its meaning has become vague and ambiguous. Explaining postmodernism is a problematic task summed up best in the proverb, "If you want to know what the water is like, don't ask a fish." Our thoughts, beliefs, emotions, and presuppositions are all part of the sea of postmodernism. Putting critical space between Christians in today's world and the idols of our time is difficult. But if we are to be effective educators, we must struggle to understand the seismic changes in the basic assumptions held by the students we teach. And it is impossible to be effective as Christian educators if we continue to pretend that our students believe the same things as students in past generations.

I will explore some of the central aspects of postmodernism and suggest some strategies that Christian educators can implement as they seek to understand the "changing tides." Some of these suggestions will be practical and pragmatic, while at other times I'll simply propose ways in which Christian educators must change the way they think about or approach a specific field or enterprise. In many ways, we have not experienced the full impact of the approaching storm of postmodernism. Ominous clouds are on the horizon and a cold wind is beginning to blow, but if Christian schools want to be better prepared for its coming, they can avoid the danger and, possibly, even allow the rains to wash away the idols of modernism. I will attempt to elucidate some of the essential aspects of postmodernism and suggest an appropriate biblical response by the Christian school.

What is postmodernism?

It is important to begin by giving a short definition of the term "postmodernism." Like other "isms," postmodernism refers to a system of belief or worldview. As Gene Veith writes in *Postmodern Times: A Christian Guide to Contemporary Thought and Culture*, "Modernism is being replaced by the new secular ideology of postmodernism. This new set of assumptions about reality ... is gaining relevance throughout the culture." [1] This changing tide of thought is evident in a number of areas, including the high arts, popular culture, philosophy, fiction, and in institutions like the church and school. Most philosophers argue that while our current society is undergoing a massive change, we are still influenced by both the ideas of modernism and postmodernism.

> *"The modern mind equates truth with facts."*

Before getting into the specifics of postmodernism, it is important to present a cautionary word. Christians have a legacy of dealing with changing times in two ways: capitulation and denunciation. It is important that we steer a middle ground between these two approaches. We must both seek to understand the critique of postmodernism and ask ourselves why the tenets of modernism are being rejected. We also must understand and reject the "idols of our time." We can do this only by steering a middle course between the two polarities of angry rejection and uncritical capitulation.

An epistemological shift

The key starting point to understanding postmodernism is in the realm of epistemology. Our society has begun to question modernist assumptions about science, knowledge, and objective truth. The modernist belief in scientifically verified, objective truth — which finds its roots in the classical era, developed throughout the past 2,000 years, and was given a "tremendous thrust forward" in the Scientific Revolution and the Enlightenment — is being attacked from all sides.[2] The modern mind equates truth with facts: information experienced through the five senses and confirmed through the scientific method. Tied to this is a central faith in technology, a belief that through man's knowledge, the world will become a better place.

Postmodernism rejects these epistemological assumptions. For the postmodern mind, rationalistic, scientific "Truth" is replaced by subjective, individual "truths." Tied to this is the dismissal of the idea that the mind is the only path to understanding the truth. Jewel, a popular contemporary recording artist, sings, "Follow your heart, your intuition; it will lead you in the right direction. Let go of your mind, your intuition is easy to find. Just follow your heart, baby."[3] The modernist dismissal of emotion and intuition as paths to understanding has in turn been dismissed by postmodernism.

Finally, the term "this is true for me" is a catchphrase for the postmodern individual; the objective is replaced by the subjective, the absolute by the temporary. In this world, toleration is the highest ideal.

Simultaneously, there has also been a

questioning of the assumptions of scientism and technicism. Popular artists are beginning to prod the assumptions of a culture that worships the scientific model. System of a Down sing the following in their song, "Science":

Science fails to recognize
the single most potent element
of human existence, letting
the reins go to the unfolding
is faith, faith, faith, faith.
Science has failed our world;
science has failed our mother earth.[4]

Much of this questioning of the place of technology and science in our society has come about because of the current environmental crisis. Global warming, air pollution, species depletion, and other environmental issues have caused today's generation rightfully to question the legacy of the modernist's unquestioning faith in technology and the scientific method.

The Christian school response

Understanding this revolution in epistemology is essential for the Christian school educator. Many students struggle to reconcile the relativistic ideas permeating society with the objective truth claims of orthodox Christianity. The day to day running of a school — as evident in issues such as dress code, discipline, and behavioral standards — is made difficult because students, and, often, parents, are heavily influenced by these postmodern ideas. This has become most clear in the area of dress code in the school where I teach. Often, students and parents are convinced that they are the final arbiters when deciding what is proper or not. It is essential for Christian educators to continue questioning the assumptions of the postmodern mind while at the same time rejecting a modernist definition of truth that pushes Christianity to the fringes of society. Students must be challenged to understand that "the earth is the Lord's, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it," while simultaneously rejecting the fact-versus-opinion dichotomy inherent in the modernist worldview.[5]

Because embarking upon this task is dangerous, educators need to apply patience and commitment. It is essential that they question someone's assumptions in a sensitive manner. Often, it is better to lead students to a place where they can recognize and question their own assumptions and beliefs. As well, this process is easier when it comes out of a strong mutual relationship in which teachers recognize that the assumptions of postmodernism affect their own worldviews as well.

For the postmodern individual, "the objective is replaced by the subjective."

Emphasis on wisdom

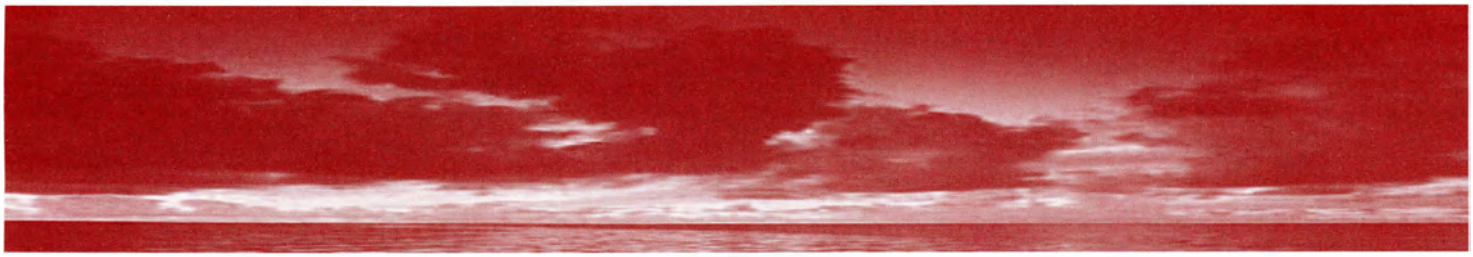
While attacking the relativism of postmodernism, this seismic shift in the concept of truth also allows Christian educators to place more emphasis on the biblical concept of wisdom rather than on the rote memorization of objective facts. The book of Proverbs speaks of both the immense importance and the active pursuit of wisdom. "Wisdom is supreme; therefore get wisdom."[6] The postmodern rejection of the heart-versus-head dichotomy — an idea that continues to negatively influence Christian thinking — will allow for a broader concept of truth, one that seeks to embody the Hebrew concept of "heart" knowledge, which includes all the dimensions of the individual. Christian schools that seek to understand this changing view of truth will be able to renew their calling to offer a curriculum that actively and vibrantly pursues wisdom.

Furthermore, educators must recognize the two-sided nature of postmodernity's emphasis on pluralism and toleration. Postmodern culture, with its insistence on relativism, masks the growing recognition that there are a number of competing voices in society, all of them expressing the need to be accepted. Thus, toleration becomes the central principle of postmodernism.

Christian educators must challenge this belief in light of biblical teaching. However, in some Christian schools where diversity is not a reality, toleration must also be stressed. It is quite possible to use the fear of postmodernism to reject differences, driving schools into a protectionist isolationism. Students in schools with a homogeneous culture must continue to be challenged to recognize and evaluate beliefs that are different from their own, thereby questioning their own beliefs and assumptions that are sometimes grounded in tradition and nothing else. Stefan Ulstein, in an article "G-Rated Education in a Leave It To Beaver World," warns Christian schools about the dangers of an isolationist stance towards the outside world.[7] We must not use postmodernism as an excuse to further disconnect ourselves.

Tell me a story

Tied to this rejection of objective truth and a distorted view of pluralism, the postmodern mindset rejects the concept of the metanarrative, the idea that there is any overarching story that explains and defines reality. In many ways, this philosophy is



similar to the existentialism of Sartre and Camus in the early 20th century. Stanley Grenz, a professor at College and a leading expert on postmodernism, explains that the reason for this change was the lessening of belief in the "myths" of modernity. In other words, people began to lose faith in the modernist confidence in human potential and progress.

This changing perspective resulted from the horrific events of the 20th century, including, but not limited to, WW II, the Holocaust, and the nuclear arms race. The resulting consequence was a skepticism of any system of belief — humanism, communism, Christianity — which sought to inject meaning into a seemingly absurd world.[8]

For the Christian educators, the resulting response is somewhat obvious. In the first place, we must continually affirm God's story, a story that gives meaning to the past, present, and future. Telling the story of God's continued redemption of his creation is even more essential today for Christian educators than in past generations. Of course, this wisdom must be taught across the board — from mathematics to English to social studies. But we must be concerned about the larger picture as well. Perhaps now is the time for Christian educators to reject the fragmented, specialized approach that characteristized modernist education and embrace a more holistic, integrated style of education. Christian educators must ensure that the telling of the biblical story permeates the entire experience of education.

Re-evaluate the system

This sentiment is expressed by Mike Goheen in an article entitled "Educating Between the Times" in the *Journal of Education and Christian Belief*. Goheen argues that postmodernity has given educators an opportunity to question an educational system guided and directed by the "idolatries of modernity." If there is a shift in foundational beliefs, then there is a need to re-evaluate the role and purpose of education. Education has been shaped by modernity; if modernity is failing, then, questions about every aspect of education must be raised.[9]

"Students and parents are influenced by postmodern ideas. This has become most clear in the area of dress code."

Goheen goes on to argue that now is not the time for educators to adopt a "nostalgia for modern forms of education ... or a fear of the future;" rather, they must seek to subvert current cultural realities with biblical reality. One area where this is becoming evident in our school society is in attitudes towards other educational philosophies or structures like homeschooling, distance education, the "unschooling" movement — philosophies that question current schooling structures. Some Christian school boards and education committees are failing to acknowledge that significant groups within society — and our own school societies — are in many ways legitimately rejecting the rigidity and dehumanizing elements of a modernist system of education. How important it is as teachers and those involved in leadership in our school to be at the forefront of this discussion — not by passively accepting or vehemently rejecting, but by careful, prayerful understanding.

Who am I?

Another aspect of the changing view of truth is the questioning of the concept of fixed identity. Christina Aguilera, a popular recording artist, sings these lyrics:

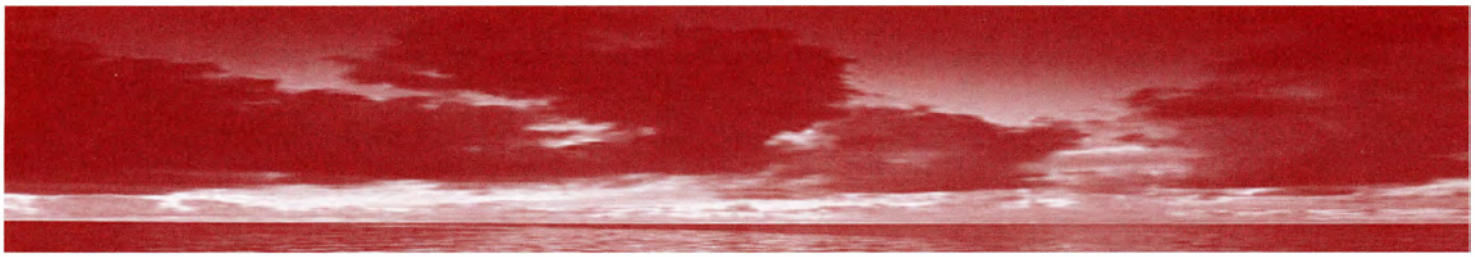
Look at me, you may think you see who I really am. But you'll never know me. Everyday is as if I play a part. Now I see that if I wear a mask I can fool the world.[10]

Other pop stars such as Madonna and Brittney Spears also communicate a similar message: the very concept of identity is being questioned, and humans become a perpetual mutating mirage of images. One author asserts that "the video screen has... become the new metaphor to describe human beings."

For the Christian educator, this aspect of the postmodern mind must be seriously evaluated in light of biblical teaching. According to Genesis, humans are "stamped" with God's image[11] and the New Testament talks of Christians being "new creations."[12] Christian school classrooms must be places where stability of identity is encouraged. One way this can be accomplished is by affirming different gifts both in and out of the classroom. By not overemphasizing academic and athletic strengths, for example, educators can help other students recognize and accept their identity in Christ.

Everyone's a critic

A related aspect of the postmodern mood is a vague but dominating pessimism, especially among today's youth. The death of the modernist story has left a vacuum in the lives of many of our students. This mix of pessimism and cynicism can be seen in the prevailing attitudes towards many of the structures of society; examples include



cynicism towards politics, politicians, organized religion and the institution of the church. This is because for postmodernists "all truth claims are suspect and are treated as a cover-up for power."[13]

Again, responding to this reality is for the Christian school essential but complicated and difficult. On the one hand, it is important to recognize the legitimacy of the questioning of many of the assumptions of modernism. Christian students who can point out the idols inherent in a system of belief are winning half the battle. According to Veith: "Francis Shaeffer's 'worldview criticism' — his practice of uncovering the worldviews implicit in culture, philosophy, and the arts — is a very postmodern approach.[14] Christian schools should continue to encourage discernment by guiding students to uncover "the idols of our time."

But Christian schools should be vigilant in their criticism of the overall pessimistic mood of the postmodern mind. Students are exposed to intense cynicism through popular music, television, and the computer culture. The Christian classroom must seek to counter these distorted themes by being fortresses of hope. It is imperative that in our effort to encourage discernment and critical thinking we do not ignore the tremendous joy and hope of the Christian life, not only in anticipation of "the new earth" but in the everyday existence of our students. Students need a continual reminder that the obedient Christian life is not morose and gloomy, but one characterized by complete joy.

Link with past

Christian schools can also guard against this encroaching pessimism by a renewed emphasis on biblical teaching about the past and the future. For the postmodern mind, the rejection of modernism equals the rejection of the past, and countless problems — environmental destruction, economic collapse, the threat of terrorism — have led to an ignorance of the future, leaving in its wake a situation one author calls "the tyranny of the present."

Christian schools must continue to emphasize the relationship between past events and present realities as well as a responsibility for the future. This can be done in both theoretical and practical ways. In class assignments, topics such as the environment and economics should emphasize how present behavior will affect future generations. In addition, students should be given opportunities to interact with different generations and age groups during the school year. This can be done through service work in the community, such as volunteer work in hospitals, or in assignments that require interviewing older relatives. Finally, it is vital that we continually tie the Christian faith to the past, reminding our students of martyrs and heroes of the faith, by singing hymns from past centuries, and memorizing creeds and writings from the early church fathers. By keeping both the past and the future before our students, we can help counter the current domination of the present.

"The Christian classroom must seek to counter [pessimistic] themes by being fortresses of hope."

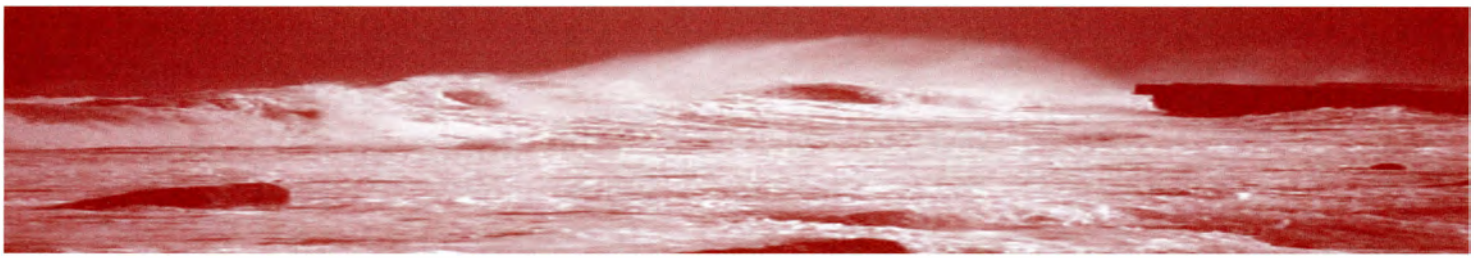
Agents of change

Tied to this is increasing cynicism in today's society towards institutions. This was evident during the recent federal election in Canada. Many individuals interviewed during the election race communicated unqualified skepticism towards politicians and politics in general. Voter participation was just over 55 per cent, with a much lower number for individuals under 25 years of age.[15] Churches, especially mainstream ones, are experiencing difficulty maintaining their membership. Some Christian schools are also dealing with families unwilling to make a commitment to Christian education.

It is imperative that Christian educators illustrate a belief in the power of institutions. This does not mean ignoring their weaknesses and idiosyncrasies. Rather, while acknowledging the fallen nature of any human construct, educators must explicitly and implicitly teach students to recognize how, through the grace of God, institutions can be agents of powerful change. This may be much easier in the case of the church, on which Jesus and the writers of the epistles place great importance in the New Testament. It is much harder to get students, parents, and teachers to recognize this reality when it comes to other institutions like the school or the political realm. It is essential that teachers do not give the message to students, parents, or other teachers that they are effective "despite the institution." By keeping students informed about current political events, especially in high interest times such as elections, teachers can help students see the emptiness of the postmodern cynicism towards institutions.

"Children of the Screen"

A final element of postmodern culture that has significant bearing on Christian schools is the influence of the digital age on today's youth. One author has labeled this generation "the children of the screen" because of the significant time youth spend



Are you a modern or a postmodern person?

Instructions: Read the following statements. Decide if the statement stirs up negative or positive feelings. In other words, do you more agree or disagree with the statement? Go with your first reaction to each statement. When you are finished, go to the scoring guide below.

1. Your personality is determined mainly by your experiences.
2. Technology makes the world a better place.
3. There is no reality; only what you believe is true.
4. Economic growth is good for the world.
5. World events are random and arbitrary.
6. Hymns are much more theologically sound than worship songs.
7. In decision making, you should follow your heart and not your head.
8. Classical music is the best music ever composed.
9. Music videos are entertaining.
10. Understanding is mostly about knowledge.
11. It is impossible for any jury to be totally objective.
12. The meaning of most biblical texts is self-evident.
13. I believe that life is mainly about choices.
14. The new interest in spirituality in today's world is not good.
15. I prefer the words inappropriate to wrong and appropriate to right.
16. Life has a central purpose.
17. The church needs to adapt to culture.
18. You are capable of solving most problems if given the right information.
19. Politicians are mostly in politics for power, money or other personal gains.
20. Truth is usually as plain as day and night.
21. I am entitled to my own opinion.
22. Your personality is mostly formed by the age of 7.
23. How to worship is about individual choice.
24. The world around us reveals the answer to us.
25. Reality is what you believe it is.
26. For most situations in life there is a right choice and a wrong choice.
27. I prefer to use more than just reason to make decisions.
28. Usually, what you give is what you get in return.
29. True for me is always the same as true for you.
30. Your identity is determined by your perception of the world.

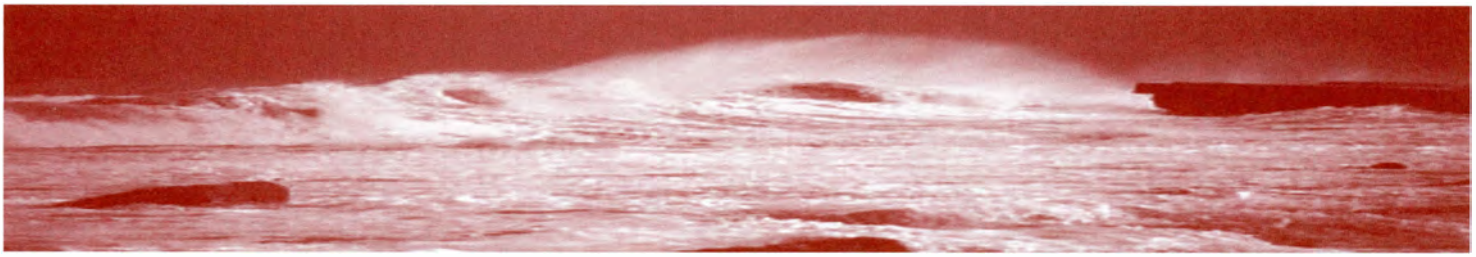
Scoring Guide: For every odd statement that you put positive, give yourself one mark. For every even statement that you put negative, give yourself one mark. The higher you scored, the more you are influenced by the ideas of postmodernism. The lower you scored, the more you are influenced by the ideas of modernism.

in front of television or computer screens. It is essential that Christian educators critique the digital culture that is influencing the institutions of our culture, including the church and school. Paradoxically, while today's youth crave authentic relationships and interaction, the video screen encourages inauthentic and superficial communication.

Christian schools, especially in late elementary and middle school years, should include curriculum that critiques different aspects of the digital culture, including topics such as the effects of television, movie watching, and computer usage on how we think, communicate, and worship. Furthermore, our pedagogy must not simply conform to the modernist technicism that clings to our culture but rather we must ask serious questions about whether our teaching techniques encourage students to be servants and disciples. Have PowerPoint presentations, Internet research, and digital presentations replaced teaching that encourages linear processing, critical thinking, and careful analysis? Staff can encourage authentic communication through modeling and careful instruction as well as by dis-couraging or banning, during school hours, some behaviors like listening to headphones and computer game usage, activities that make genuine interaction difficult or impossible.

Inescapable challenge

The continuing shift from the modern to the postmodern mind is a land filled with opportunities and dangers. Maneuvering through today's cultural minefield is a complex task and is only accomplished with Spirit-guided thought, study, and, most importantly, prayer. For the Christian school, ignoring this cultural shift is not an option. Our students constantly face a world with a myriad of subtle temptations and an increasingly blatant disregard for many truths that



Christians hold dear. Conversely, acquiescing to these cultural trends is also not a viable option. But without constantly and prayerfully critiquing our culture, we are bound to follow this path. Our task as Christian educators is, therefore, to walk together with our students through this minefield of competing philosophies and ideas and to encourage them to live a life centered on God.

Endnotes

[1] Veith, Gene, *Postmodern Times: A Christian Guide to Contemporary Thought and Culture* (Wheaton,: Crossway Books, 1994), p.19

[2] Taken from lecture notes from Michael Goheen's course given in Smithers in August 2003.

[2] Jewel, "Intuition". From the album *0304.*

[3] System of a Down, "Science." From the album *Toxicity.*

[4] *The NIV Study Bible*, (Michigan: Zondervan, 2000) Psalm 24:1

[5] Ibid, Proverbs 4:7

[6] Ulstein, Stefan, "G Rated Education in a Leave It To Beaver World". Source unknown.

[7] Grenz, Stanley, *A Primer on Postmodernism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdman's Publishing, 1996).

[8] Goheen, Mike, "Educating Between the Times: Postmodernity and Educational Leadership." *Journal of Education and Christian Belief* May 2001: p.29.

[9] Aguilera, Christina, "Reflections." From the album *Christian Aquilera.*

[10] *NIV Study Bible*, Genesis 2

[11] Ibid, 2 Corinthians 5:17

[12] Veith, p. 67

[13] Veith, p. 64

[14] As cited on www.nodice.ca/election2004/0620.html, June 30, 2004

Other Resources:

Carrell, Brian, *Moving Between Times: Modernity and Postmodernist: A Christian View* (Auckland, The DeepSight Trust, 2003).

Middleton, Richard and Walsh, Brian, *Truth is Stranger Than It Used To Be: Biblical Faith in a Postmodern Age* (Downer's Grove, InterVarsity, 1995).

The Postmodernist,
Deconstructed Self-Referential Column

Jan Kaarsvlam is a "construct." We can say that he "exists" only to the extent that he, as a "signifier" represents (though inadequately, of course) the actual authors of this column. But of course, if we were to deconstruct the Jan Kaarsvlam-ness of Jan Kaarsvlam and discover the "true" names of the authors, it is not as if we would be discovering any actual "truth" about them, since their names are also "social constructs." And, in fact, if we could somehow "meet" them (whatever that would/could mean), we really would "know" no more about them than we do about Jan, since their entire existences, in a very "real" sense, are also "socially constructed."

The news bounced around the school like a pinball, careening from one Bedlam faculty member to another. The word was that Rex Kane, Bedlam's philosopher of Phys. Ed., beatnik of the basketball court, and guru of the gymnasium, had, after twenty years without any form of professional development, signed up for a graduate class. When the bell for break rang, Bedlam's faculty flooded the staff room, rushing with much the same anticipation they might bring to opening night of an absurdist play starring Jerry Lewis, Federal Reserve Chairman Alan Greenspan, and the offensive line of the New York Jets.

As the faculty entered the room, they saw Rex holding forth in the corner. Shop teacher Gord Winkle and counselor Maxwell Prentiss-Hall appeared to be hanging on his every word. Rex had books piled high on the table in front of him and was, strangely, wearing a barbecue apron and a Greek fisherman's cap. One of the books was titled *The Fall of Modernism*, a two-volume set that included *Deconstructing Physical Education* and *Coaching: Is There a Difference?*, and the final, a heavy, leather bound tome, bore the title *Postmodernism in a Post-postmodern World: "Resignifying" the "Signifier" in a "Signless" "Soup"*. Rex had not yet opened this last book, but he had been excited when purchasing it; this would be his first philosophy of education class that included a cookbook.

Principal Bentley VanderHaar stepped between Rex's adoring disciples to reach at the donut box resting just beyond Rex's books. He said, "Looks like some heavy reading you've got there, Rex."

"Oh, it's some heady stuff to be sure," Rex replied. "It says here…" he paused to reach into his apron pocket for a monocle which he fitted to his right eye. He squinted at the open page before him and continued. "It says here that modernism, a key construct that guided human thinking for the better part of the last century, was nothing but a pack of vicious lies. That's right, lies! Apparently all of life isn't reducible to several scientific theorems or math formulas."

VanderHaar stared at him with the ineffectual, slightly befuddled gaze of a sleep-deprived basset hound, a look which he displayed with increasing frequency around the halls of Bedlam. Christina Lopez piped up from across the table.

"Give me a break. Am I the only person here who is willing to confront this madness?" She looked around the room. She was met by blinking eyes, blank stares, and one or two shrugs. Only Bible teacher Cal VanderMeer appeared to be listening. She put her hand to her forehead.

"Oy, sometimes I feel like this whole school is some kind of fictional humor column or something and I am always cast as the voice of reason." She turned back to Rex. "Okay, bright boy, let's get a couple of things straight. First of all, this is a Christian school. That means that, although it is a great thing to be up on what is going on in the rest of the intellectual world, we know that there is an absolute truth, we know that God reveals himself through all of nature, including math, and science and everything else, and, while we can see moments of God's truth in everything including both modernism and postmodernism, we recognize that neither one is a substitute for the truth. So you can talk about the lack of validity in objectivist understandings, and you can cite Derrida, Foucault, and the rest of that bunch, but let's remember that, compared to the Bible, it's all a pack of lies." Her diatribe completed, she slumped back into her chair with a weary sigh.

Maxwell Prentiss-Hall, Bedlam's counselor, timidly rose from his seat. "Um, I don't know about that, Christina. I mean, I think postmodernism has been kind of helpful sometimes." She glared at him. He swallowed and continued. "No, really. Like postmodernism did help shake academia down from its ivory tower a bit. For several hundred years, scholars, Christians among them, have worked under the assumption that reason and science would yield up ultimate truth. The postmodernists have blown that myth apart. Science has its limitations, and perhaps the sum of knowledge and truth is greater than what we can measure and observe. Postmodern thinkers insist that we can't know it all. That sort of humility in scholarship I find refreshing. And I'll even go one better; I find it quite Christian."

Lopez looked as if someone were squeezing her spleen in a pair of vise-grips. "How can you say that?" she demanded. "Postmodern philosophers and critics have done their utmost to gut the written and spoken word, to insist that true communication is impossible. How can you be a believer of the Word, the one who was with God and who was God, and claim to value postmodernism?"

The sunlight glinted off Rex's monocle as he turned toward Maxwell. "Now, now, Max-a-reno. Actually I think she has a point."

For a moment, Christina was taken in and thought that she had gotten through to him. Then Rex continued talking. "I mean, a rose by any other name smells just as sweet. I mean, am I right or am I right?"

Lopez turned to him angrily. "So you are suggesting that the signifier bears no connection to the signified?"

"No," Rex replied calmly as he closed his book. He took the monocle from his eye, wiped it clean with a hankie, and then dropped it in an apron pocket. "I am saying that Shakespeare suggested there is no connection. And he did it about four centuries before Derrida was even a gleam in his daddy's eye. As the good book says, Christina, there is nothing new under the sun."

Silence filled the room. Rex liked to read it as a silence of assent. Christina, on the other hand, read it as the silence of shock that Rex had said something sensible and even borderline provocative. Cal VanderMeer, however, who had watched all of this from afar, feared that it was the silence of boredom and ignorance. Most of his colleagues, even Winkle and Prentiss-Hall, seemed far more concerned with the previous day's baseball scores than they were with philosophical systems waging for control of their students' worldviews. Everyone but Cal had ignored Rex and Christina's brief conversation.

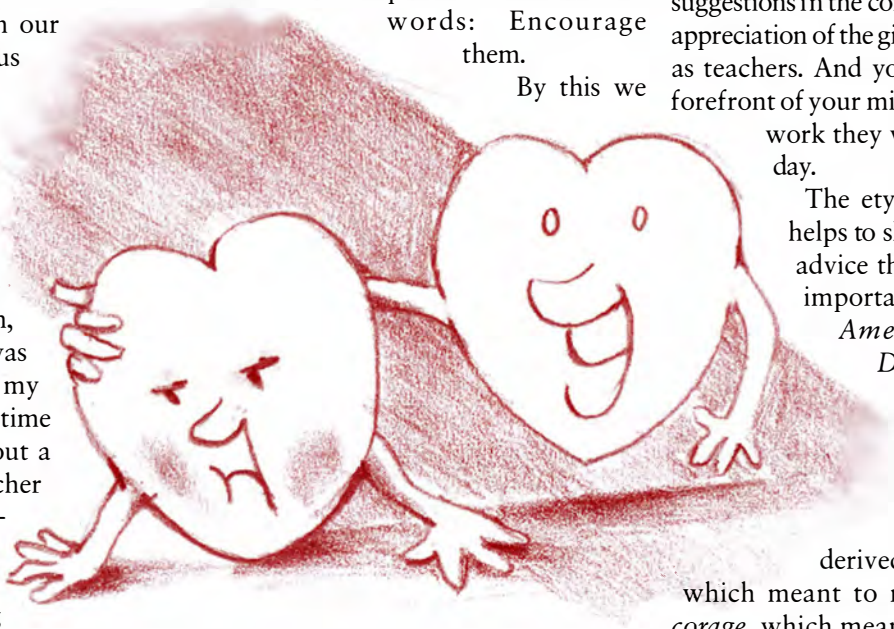
But perhaps he was wrong. The silence, in a postmodern world, is verifiable only as silence. Any interpretation of it is purely subjective, and any attempt to cast its meaning in objectivity is smoke and mirrors, a grand illusion. That act would be as pointless as trying to find wisdom in the humor column of a journal for educators.

Supervising Beginning Teachers: The Most Important Objective

by William J. Vande Kopple and Jonathan M. Vande Kopple

William J. Vande Kopple teaches courses in linguistics and English education at Calvin College, Grand Rapids, Michigan. Jonathan M. Vande Kopple teaches language arts and social studies at The Potter's House Christian Middle School in Wyoming, Michigan.

The question came from our friend Bob as the three of us chatted outside church after the morning service: "I don't think I ever told you guys that I start supervising a student teacher next week. I really didn't want one, but the college coordinator wore me down, and finally I said yes. I was reluctant because one of my colleagues had a miserable time with a student teacher about a year ago. That student teacher just didn't show any drive — it seemed as if all he wanted to do was sit in the lounge and flip through teaching units. So now I've got a question, and the two of you should be able to come up with a good answer. You, Bill, have worked with, what, hundreds of student teachers? And, Jon, you did your own student teaching not too long ago and are good friends with lots of beginning teachers. So what do you think is the single most important objective I should keep in mind as I supervise? Think about it, talk it over for a day or two, and then e-mail me an answer. Fair enough?"



A quick response

"Sure," I responded, "we'll try to come up with something."

"O. K., see you." He turned and hustled across the street toward his car.

We had two blocks to walk, and in the few minutes it took us to come up to the second block, we had already agreed on a general response, a response that we think applies to the supervision not only of student teachers but also of all teachers at early stages of their careers (and perhaps of all teachers at all stages of their careers).

Our response comes in two words: Encourage them.

By this we mean that if you supervise beginning teachers, you should at least assure them that certain challenges are common in the lives of all inexperienced teachers. If you do not do this, they will begin to suspect that they are the only ones facing particular challenges (we call this the "Lone Ranger" syndrome), and they will wonder what flaw within them causes that. Beyond this, we suggest that you tell them often what clear gifts for teaching that you see in them, praise them for skillful pedagogical tactics that they have tried, let them know how you have seen those tactics actually affecting students, and help them think about how the tactics they have used can lead to additional effective practices.

See the potential

With this advice, we do not mean to imply that you must never point out areas of weakness, or aspects of their performance that they could develop further. But we believe that, when you do offer suggestions for improvement, you should make your comments with a clear nurturing tone. You should pass on suggestions in the context of awareness and appreciation of the gifts God has given them as teachers. And you should keep in the forefront of your mind how skilled at their work they will probably be some day.

The etymology of *encourage* helps to show why we think the advice that we settled on is so important. According to *The American Heritage Dictionary*, the word "*encourage*" comes from the old French word *encoragier*. *Encoragier* was derived from two forms: *en-*, which meant to make or put in, and *corage*, which meant courage and which was derived from the Latin word for heart (*cor*). In other words, one who encourages other people puts courage into them and fortifies their heart.

Lack of confidence

We agreed on our response to Bob's question against the backdrop of extensive memories of how several beginning teachers that we knew projected themselves as they stood in front of a class.

Not many of them exuded anything close to steady and assertive confidence. If you discussed pedagogy with a group of them, many of those who added a proposal to the discussion did so only after apologizing for their ideas. Many beginning teachers

see a classroom visitation as a time of terror, not as an excellent opportunity to display their pedagogical skills and to learn ways to refine those skills even more. And it has been our experience that in conferences following classroom visitations, the supervisor has to work quite hard to get many beginning teachers to believe that they are as talented as they actually are. In short, many student teachers as well as teachers early in their careers seem somewhat fragile and vulnerable.

Why might that be? There are probably many parts to the complete answer to this question. Their fragility and vulnerability are likely associated in significant measure with their youth and inexperience. But we wonder whether other factors might not also be involved. Most of the beginning teachers that we know have had a strong religious background. Because of that, we wonder whether they have heard so many sermons over the years warning against pride and self-centeredness that their ability to exercise their gifts and draw on their accomplishments to build a healthy self-image has been stunted.

Similarly, we wonder whether they have heard and imagined so much about depravity over the years that they have a difficult time being open to the gift of God's grace. If they struggle to accept God's grace, that struggle might lead them to develop a pervasive sense of works righteousness, of always having to earn God's love and favor. And such a sense might help to explain why many of the beginning teachers that we know are almost compulsive in their perfectionism, ever striving but always inevitably failing to meet their own expectations.

Crippling self-doubt

So how do the beginning teachers that we have known react when they are not encouraged by their supervisors, either because they hear little or nothing from those supervisors or because they receive only negative comments? Their first response usually is to lose much of the confidence with which they began their teaching careers. They begin to doubt themselves and to question their own judgments about pedagogical moves. This self-doubt can become so severe that they can have trouble making a definite decision about methods for particular lessons.

It is usually not that they cannot think of teaching ideas; they just do not have the confidence to act on any of them. Thus, they dither and debate. This often turns what could have been a one-hour planning session into a two- or three-hour planning session, and their awareness of how much time it is taking to finish planning one lesson drains much mental and emotional energy and makes them feel increasingly tired and desperate. Fatigue and desperation do little to enliven the atmosphere of classrooms. Moreover, if fatigue and desperation persist for several days, they can lead to a feeling of being overwhelmed. And once beginning teachers experience that, they are not far from being frozen in inactivity.

"One who encourages other people ... fortifies their heart."

The critical approach

These negative effects were exemplified for us most memorably in a young woman who did her student teaching a few years ago. Her supervisor, we are certain, was not trying to be mean or cruel to her. But this supervisor operated with a philosophy different from the one underlying this essay. She repeated to her student teacher that the first year of teaching was invariably rough and that the best way to prepare a student teacher for that year was to be critical of that person every time he or she did something questionable or wrong. This supervisor's policy was coherent, but we find little to recommend its substance (and we believe that her policy actually represents an almost total forgetting of what it's like to begin to teach). We know for certain that this policy did not help the student teacher grow and flourish, for, after a few weeks of frequent criticism, she ended up leaving school every day in a rush and sat at home before a blank computer screen for hours, weeping.

Towards initiative

On the other hand, when the beginning teachers that we have known are encouraged by their supervisors, they react in ways that are wonderful to observe. For one thing, their confidence grows, seemingly day by day; often their growing confidence is noticeable even in the way they stand and carry themselves within the classroom. Usually, too, as their confidence grows, they begin to take more and more initiative in the lives of their schools. Early in this process, they start proposing adjustments to such things as all-school management policies, coming to meetings with the names of possible speakers for classes and chapels, and suggesting effective ways to introduce teaching units. Later in this process, they usually participate in making proposals for books that the entire school community can read over the summer, for new exploratory and elective courses, and for new extracurricular organizations. For example, one young teacher we know proposed an ecology club that developed into one of the more active

and productive clubs in her school.

In part, they take more and more initiative because they become increasingly comfortable letting their creativity show, and, since they do not question every idea they ever come up with, they learn to be comfortable sharing their ideas with others and growing from others' responses to those ideas. Finally, they begin to show real joy in their work. They are full of energy, speak of their subject matter with unfeigned enthusiasm, and display well- developed, albeit sometimes startlingly wry, senses of humor. They are alert to ways of being supportive of students and actually look for ways in which they can encourage those who have encouraged them.

Dancing together

One must always be tentative and modest when suggesting how human beings might in fact display the image of God or work to display the image of God more clearly. We suggest that when colleagues notice, value, and encourage one another they begin to enact aspects of the nature of the Trinity. In *Engaging God's World*, Cornelius Plantinga, Jr., at one point refers to the term *perichoresis* as one that theologians have used to explore aspects of the Trinity. It helps to think of the etymology of this word. On his website, the Reverend Duane R. Bidwell unpacks the word as follows: *peri* is used as in *perimeter*, meaning "around," and *choresis* is used as in *choreography*, meaning "dancing." He writes that this word is fitting in descriptions of the Trinity because we can imagine the Trinity "as a circle of equals, holding hands and dancing." To this Plantinga adds the following: "The persons within God exalt each other, commune with each other, defer to one another" (20). "In a constant movement of overture and acceptance, each person envelops and encircles the other" (21).

Over the centuries since the early Greek Christians used the word *perichoresis* in reference to the Trinity, people have appealed to the vision behind the word to suggest models for various kinds of human organizations (in this connection, see Alister E. McGrath, *Christian Theology, An Introduction*, 2nd edition, 298-299). We suggest that a teaching and learning community in which people interact with one another honestly, encourage and lift up one another, exalt one another's gifts, and make room for others to develop their gifts would be a community so wonderful that in our imagining of it we might well catch glimpses of what Heaven will be like.

In proposing that the concepts conveyed by *perichoresis* be extended to the communal lives of school staffs, we certainly do not mean to suggest that on a staff there cannot be somewhat different roles and even somewhat different kinds and levels of authority. Most Christians, we believe, would say that the persons within the Trinity have somewhat different roles and carry somewhat different kinds of authority. But still the members of the Trinity, to use Plantinga's words once more, "exalt each other, commune with each other, defer to one another" (20).

Such emphases give us the courage to ask a direct question of all of you who have some role in supervising beginning teachers as part of your work on a school staff: "When was the last time that you encouraged any one of the people whom you supervise?"

ROOM 219

Nancy Knol
Column Editor
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Think on These Things

Nancy Knol teaches English and Religion at Grand Rapids Christian High School in Grand Rapids, Michigan. She is co-author of the book Reaching and Teaching Young Adolescents. *Most days you can find her in Room 219.*

This year one of the subjects that we are addressing in our school in-services is the increasingly prevalent problem of cheating. This has become a bigger issue, of course, because the Internet has now supplied students with easy ways to access material and even buy a paper if they are willing to dig into their pockets to obtain a good grade. Several months ago, a young woman wrote an essay in the Newsweek *column "My Turn" to express her regret at taking a well-paying job as a research paper writer for the spoiled, slothful children of wealthy parents. These children needed to get good grades in order to graduate from expensive colleges where they learned virtually nothing.*

Many in the small group I participated in at the in-service felt that the very *definition* of cheating had changed in recent years. Where previously it denoted "breaking the rules in order to gain an unmerited advantage," it has now come closer to a simple "getting caught." The regret that comes after getting caught, then, is just that — regret. One does not hear "I am so sorry that I stooped to this" as much as "I am so sorry that I might not pass now." Teachers spoke of students responding with "Do you have to tell my parents?" or "Can I do it over?" as their first concerns. Some students initially protested, "Everybody else does it too!" as if that somehow justified their actions.

Apparently, this trend is pervasive in the culture at large. Recently David Callahan, a writer for the *New York Times*, as well as other notable publications, wrote a book with the daunting title *The Cheating Culture: Why More Americans Are Doing Wrong to Get Ahead*. Callahan's basic premise is that our society is dividing itself into two classes — the "Winning Class" and the "Anxious Class." The "Winning Class" has developed its own moral code, a code which allows cheaters to get ahead without facing negative consequences. The "Anxious Class" still holds on to some degree of conscience, but increasingly feels the pressure to cheat in order to succeed. Even Ivy League schools like Yale are subject to numerous incidents of cheating.

According to Callahan, Yale is in a state of denial, never having enforced an honor code. He quotes one Yale senior, who accounts for this shortcoming this way: "The reason they don't have such a firm policy at Yale, they say, is that they don't need it. They say if they made something like that, it would imply that they need it, so it would reflect badly on them. It's kind of ridiculous because they do need it. There is a lot of cheating here… Most professors say they don't really look for it. That it doesn't happen much. But if you look the other way, of course you're not going to find it."

What has happened to our society that has brought about this change? What has happened to *us*? It is easy to blame the Internet, but that is only the tool that is used, so to speak, to break into the safe. What has evolved or disintegrated in the human heart? In his remarkable and wise book, *Not the Way It's Supposed to Be*, Neal Plantinga writes about the "spiritual hygiene" which is so necessary to not only personal wholeness, but also to shaping our society towards real progress, not just the appearance of progress. He writes, "Good spiritual hygiene includes a practiced ability to assess goods (goods seldom come with their weights written on them) plus the power of will to pursue them with appropriate degrees of interest and to enjoy them with a fitting level of pleasure. Unhappily, involuntary longings lead us around a good deal, and ignorance and self-deception often skew our judgments about what is worth longing for in the first place."

Long ago, the apostle Paul wrote to the Philippians: "Finally brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable — if anything is excellent or praiseworthy — think about such things." The word that stands out for me in that verse is the now almost archaic word "noble." It is hard to come up with a good synonym for it — perhaps "honorable," which is its substitute in some versions of the Bible, probably comes closest. Or "virtuous," a word I used on an assignment recently and ironically had to define for my students. Antonyms are easier: "cheap," "contemptible," "disgraceful." When I think of nobility, my mind turns to Sydney Carton, the hero of Dickens' novel *A Tale of Two Cities*. Because of his resemblance to another man he is able to step in for him at the guillotine in the bloody days of the French Revolution. His dramatic speech "It is a far, far better thing that I do, than I have ever done; it is a far, far better rest that I go to, than I have ever known…" brought tears to my eyes as I read it for the first time in 9th grade.

What we as educators must grapple with is how we can teach our students to understand what such a word *means* and what impact it has on our culture. As teachers, especially as Christian teachers, it is our responsibility to distinguish between choices that "see the noble" versus ones that "see the green." Are we unconsciously promoting the kind of "Winning Class" that Callahan decries? Must there be a dichotomy between nobility and success? How can we equip our students to maintain their integrity in a society that is losing its moral compass, willing to do almost anything for financial gain? Perhaps teaching has never been more difficult. If we are to be true to our calling, we must "think on these things."

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Studying Creation as God's Word

Clarence Joldersma (cjolders@calvin.edu) professor of education at Calvin College, Grand Rapids, Mich., asked the Dot Edu panel to answer a question posed by Tony Kamphuis this month. Tony asks: "Traditionally, CSI schools belong to a theological tradition which recognizes that God's word comes to us in three ways: Scripture, Christ, and Creation. Traditionally, many North American evangelical Christians do a good job of emphasizing the first two ("study your Bible!" and "foster your relationship with Jesus!") but not so much the third one. Should a Christian school's emphasis perhaps be on the third revelation, the Creation? Should this be the distinguishing characteristic of Christian schools? Would this not help us avoid reducing God's work to a small sector of reality (i.e., personal piety, personal salvation, and personal morals)? Would this not correct mistaking too large a realm of reality as neutral with respect to Christianity? And would this not give schools a naturally different purpose than churches?

November 7, 2005

Lois Brink

Hey, Tony. I'd say, yes, yes, yes, and yes. Is this the same as faith seeking understanding? You raise several issues. How do Christian schools intersect with the programs offered by our local churches: Christian education, youth programs and service projects? We have been talking about this for a while, but is there clarity about who does what and why? Is spiritual formation a goal of schools? Are you suggesting that Christian schools focus on the *knowing and understanding* pieces? This allows for breadth of school experiences, so that participation in Christian community can be one of the *knowing and understanding* of God's Creation pieces. This also demands a strong learning-for-knowing component for school, even a religion curriculum. F inally, this calls for wide-view, careful decision- making about spheres and creation order as it plays out in school curriculum and programs. Can we articulate how our school learning, program and activities intersect with church, family and community responsibilities?

If a Creation-focus becomes the distinguishing feature of Christian schools, what about the rest of our worldview? Since the fall and discernment are so critical to our condition, how can we not emphasize this understanding? And since grace and restoration is so clearly a part of our faith and call, how can we not include response to them in our curriculum and school programs? Maybe I need to hear more about the Creation emphasis as it plays out in school settings.

Lois

November 9, 2005

Tony Kamphuis

Hi, Lois. I guess I wasn't suggesting a focus on "creation" that ignored the other stages of creation history (Fall, Redemption, Consummation). I see those as explaining what has happened to the creation over time. In that sense, teaching about the effects of the Fall and the need for discernment, is actually still teaching about "the creation" and the state in which it finds itself.

I was thinking of "creation" as part of a different triad: the three ways many reformed thinkers have suggested the Word of God comes to us. That understanding has enabled us to avoid truncating our view of Christianity and its areas of interest — after all, we are keen to see God revealed in every area of his marvelous creation, and not just to "hear God speak" through his written word! If we did not value God's speaking and self-revelation through his creation, we would all just end up reading the Bible for our "religious" activities, and failing to dig into the marvels of his creation (including the cultural developments of humans) expecting to see God there as well.

In our area we have an "alternative Christian program" offered through the public school board. That means it is free of charge, and the school involved has uniforms, teachers that understand the unique nature of the school (many of them are Christian), teach Bible survey courses (before school hours) and hold assemblies (before school hours). These often point their students to a personal relationship with Christ. In the face of it, our local Christian High Schools have been forced to ask anew: what are we doing that is different than this "free" alternative? Is our distinctive approach valuable? Why? To my mind the fact that this public school cannot shape its curriculum in ways that acknowledge God and his effect on the areas we teach, means


Clarence Joldersma

that they cannot be an effective Christian school. After all every school (public or Christian) is primarily focused on studying and understanding the world. Being unable to do this in a distinctively and explicitly Christian manner is a significant drawback to any other approach!

Tony

November 12, 2005


Agnes Fisher

Tony and Lois, if creation itself groans until redemption is fulfilled then it certainly is a part of the total domain under the Lordship of Christ and must be addressed studied and understood as such if we are to be true Christian educators.

An interesting note to this is that our physics and chemistry teacher mentioned one morning in devotions that in the questioning of "why" after the tsunami there may be an adequate practical answer to apply. That is, earthquakes, volcanoes and such "disasters" actually keep the planet alive by providing new soils, new nutrients, new islands and such. W ithout this activity the earth would soon die and many more people than some thousands would go with it. He says the earth is a "living" thing and the laws were set by God to keep it going, to replenish it, if you will. This does not help those in grief, but it certainly addresses the issue of needing to know and understand God's Creation. The bigger question remains as to how the Fall and sin enter into all of this, but that's another issue.

Agnes

November 15, 2005


Pam Adams

Hi, everyone. I agree what makes us distinctive within the Christian community of saints is our emphasis on creation and its care. Too often Christians of various stripes act as if the creation is not very important. We can be a beacon in this regard. Seeing our Creator in the creation should affect how we live our everyday lives. It should affect what vehicle we drive, what we eat, and how we recreate. Yes, emphasizing creation care can be our gift to the Christian community, and, hopefully, to peoples of other faiths as well. However, if we only read the creation without the Word, we can become unbalanced, and this can skew our perspective. Non-Christian environmentalists have a lot to say to us and we can learn much from them. However, if you see the land as perfect and not affected by the fall, then you will want to preserve as much of it as possible in its pristine state. Being fruitful and subduing the earth must never mean blatant disregard for the earth, plants, and animals. But does this mean we can't use the land for farming, schools, hospitals, and homes? The cultural mandate, given to us in the Bible, changes how we see the earth. Should it only be preserved, or should it be developed? Man as the crown of creation should use this wonderful creation to glorify God by serving our fellow man. This can include using the various resources God has provided.

So, yes, we should emphasize creation but we should never lose sight of the Word which gives us direction about how we live, which includes developing the creation.

Pam

November 16, 2005


Johanna Campbell

Hi, Tony. Your question is a large one indeed! From my vantage point, I think our Christian schools do a good job of bringing out the beauty of God's creation, ways in which Christians can be stewards of this creation, and how we can discover the laws God has placed in his creation, laws that apply to every subject and area of life. I think we need a balanced approach: students need to read and study the Word, practice the disciplines and foster their relationship with the Lord of all. However, there are three other emphases that we need to bring to the classroom when we teach Bible. The first is an ability to focus on the subject itself: students and teacher stand in awe of "The Thing" as Parker Palmer calls it; in this case "The Thing" is nothing other than the W ord of the living God. To be studying the decrees, laws, statutes, precepts, commands, words and promises of our great God is a privilege that should bring great joy to the heart. The second aspect that would enhance this teaching and focusing on God's Word is the power that comes when Scriptures are studied in community. Students and teacher alike humble themselves under the words of God and together discover the great truths for their lives, the wisdom that is from above, the comfort that only God can give. Finally, this can only be done in reliance upon the Spirit of God, who makes all things new and opens the eyes of the blind. It is in God's light that we see the light. When these three channels are opened, an amazing power is unleashed. The Word becomes flesh before our very eyes.

Johanna

When does Christian Education Begin?

Steve J. VanderWeele

Steve Van Der Weele is professor emeritus of English at Calvin College, Grand Rapids, Michigan.

The introduction to the Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Education states that the goal of Christian education is "...to bring people to a saving relationship with Jesus Christ (justification), to see that they grow in their newfound faith (sanctification), and to ultimately present them spiritually mature at the throne of God (glorification).... The Holy Spirit empowers (Christians) to present his Word to a lost and fallen world so that the lost will repent from their sin and undertake a relationship with the true and living God." And, when I was present at a Christian school anniversary, one of our prominent clergymen said this: "Christian education begins at the foot of the cross."

Well, now. What if the Fall had not occurred? Would children not have needed nurturing? Would they not have needed to learn mathematics, or language (and languages), or botany, or the rules of logic, or the many properties of light and matter that Einstein and his successors have disclosed to us, to our utter astonishment, delight, and awe? Would we not have needed dictionaries, or stories to tell, or history, or anthropology? Granted that we might not have needed doctors or psychologists to heal our physical and mental diseases, would we not have been prompted to learn about our bodies and minds out of appropriate curiosity?

To place the starting point of education with our fall from grace places us in an awkward position. Think of all the human achievements, the cultural legacy of mankind, of all that has been accomplished in response to the cultural mandate of Genesis. Did all this occur because of the Fall? In spite of it? Or did it become possible because Christ has, in principle, redeemed the whole creation, restored it to some semblance of its original intent, put it back on track, and, though that creation still groans for its complete redemption, gave us the enlightenment into the program for mankind that he envisioned for his world in the first place? In his *Paradise Lost*

Milton has Raphael reveal the workings of the cosmos to a curious Adam, then informs him that all the world lies before him for the exercising of his proper stewardship. He has Adam and Eve take up their assignments, learning about horticulture day by day, composing poetry (as Handel has it, anyway), learning the art of conversation — and, indeed, the art of disagreement. And all this before the Fall.

The Fall, of course, brought about profound changes. To cite Milton again, "The earth felt the wound." The serpent slinks away, and now disease, toil, alienation, the seven deadly sins, and a skewed sense of our relationships — to nature, to our fellows, to God himself — manifest themselves. Falsity and Error enter the world, placing Truth on the defensive. The Belgic Confession informs us, rightly, that we see God through the spectacles of Nature; it is also true that we see evil through the spectacles of Nature.

All this devastation needs to be undone. But we do not start from scratch. The Lord did not forsake the work of his hands. He set out to reclaim it. He preserved much — the cosmic laws for the physical and life sciences, works of art to serve as memorials and inspiration, the good stories, as C. S. Lewis reminds us, available for enjoyment and profit. The world would be an odd place if the achievements of Christians were our only legacy. Much of rationality and imagination have been preserved, so that we can live beyond the level of mere survival and achieve the level of human dignity as we reflect the image of God. Mathematics, languages, remedies for diseases, mobility, political and legal structures which permit people to live together — if not always amicably, at least accepting limits and restraints — all these make life possible and must surely in abundant ways please our Maker.

But people need to be changed for the full realization of God's program. New components have been added to the curriculum. The Wisdom of Scriptures must be brought to bear on the reality of the created world. Students must learn their desperate need of a savior. They must be taught to love God above all and their neighbor as themselves. They must be taught to practice the virtues. They must learn to respond to appropriate opportunities for vocations. They must learn to bring every thought and imagination into captivity to the obedience of Christ.

And they must bring all this Christian wisdom to bear on the "stuff" of creation. The Church is the spearhead of what we must seek first — the Kingdom of God, in all its potential and fullness. Their baptism, and their forgiving and being forgiven, will shape their Kingdom view of the world. As I read biblical wisdom on these matters, I see an essential continuity between the world we now inhabit and life in the new Jerusalem. And I have to think that we will still be students, and that we may still have to exert some effort to learn our lessons. We shall wish to learn for the sheer joy of learning. And our Master Teacher will lead us into all truth.

Since, as the Apostle John reminds us, Christ participated in the work of creation, Christian education began already at creation. The students we graduate should be saints-in-the making, but learned saints; they must be wise, but saintly sages. And they must be ready to participate in the life of the new order, building the redeemed community the way it was intended to be.

Fearfully and Wonderfully Made:

Body Image in an Unforgiving World

by Julie Walton

Julie Walton is assistant professor of exercise science, department of health, physical education, recreation, dance and sport at Calvin College in Grand Rapids, Michigan.

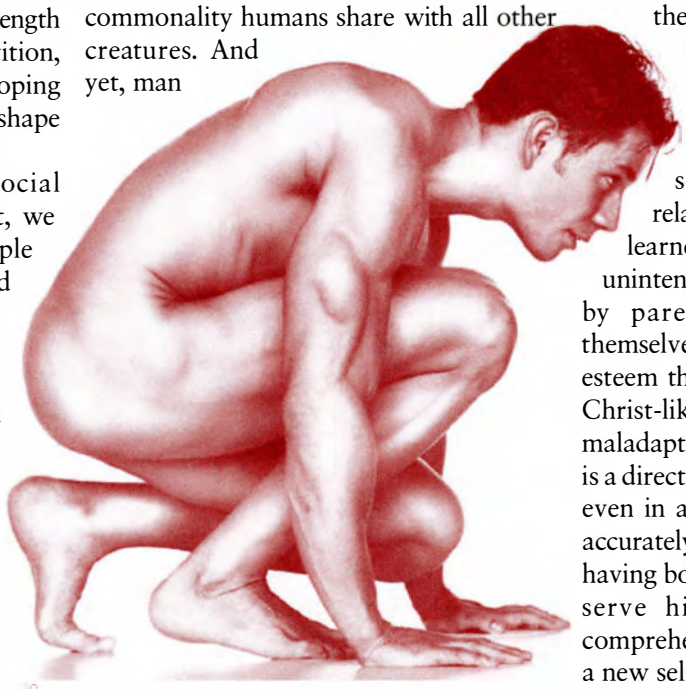
As an exercise scientist, I deal with the raw physicality of the human body every day. Students and I are immersed in issues of physiology, health, wellness, and physical fitness through training for strength and endurance, preparing for competition, making healthy food choices, and coping with pervasive cultural attitudes that shape our notions of body image.

As Christians, we decry the social mandate to be lean and strong. Yet, we are so desensitized to the lie that people of worth must be thin, muscular and beautiful that we live out skewed notions of body image on a daily basis. We are pushed and pulled by this tension of living inside a physical body that is judged by superficial standards, while we know that God calls us to live by and through his Holy Spirit in a way that is not worldly.

Historically, some have preferred a Greek dualism that compartmentalizes the things that truly make us human. This preference results in a dichotomy in which the more evil part is that which we see and sense, and through which we move. They view their physical body, consisting of flesh and bones, fat and sinew, as a deterrent to the life of the mind and spirit — a life that exists on a higher plane, an order less sullied by physical laws and desires. Why are we not just souls without a body? The Platonic notion that the body is the soul's prison is a far cry from God's design, one which mysteriously integrates a mind, spirit and body into one temporal, mortal— yet in God's plan immortal — being which he created with joyful purpose.

A mysterious unity

God is clear about the importance and necessity of a physical body in which we are to move, and breathe, and have our being. Out of the dust of a very new earth, God himself molded man's physical body before giving it breath or being. This physicality came by God's design. It is a commonality humans share with all other creatures. And yet, man



is unique among all creatures, for he alone bears God's image. Philip Yancey, in *I Was Just Wondering* (1998), writes that "[I]n all of earth there are no exact parallels of spirit and immortality housed in matter. The discomfiture we feel may be our most accurate human sensation, reminding us we are not quite 'at home' here." We have a body, mind and spirit that are three in one, distinct but inseparable, mortal yet striving to be immortal. Is it any wonder that we struggle with our identity and image?

Young people, especially, are confused by the complexity of our image. In day-to-day interactions with college students, I see an alarming array of actions that run the gamut of attitudes about the human body. Some students train obsessively in the weight room, molding muscles in an attempt to create a certain look, not unlike the way a sculptor works and fashions clay to create particular contours. Others go for nights on end without adequate sleep. Still others starve themselves because they think they are fat. There are whole subsets of students suffering from a skewed body image, and it colors nearly everything they do in terms of exercise, nutrition, self-care, academics, and relationships. These attitudes, mostly learned in early adolescence and often unintentionally intensified and validated by parents and teachers, manifest themselves in behaviors and issues of self-esteem that, far from revealing a humble, Christ-like approach to life, are instead maladapted and defeated. This condition is a direct result of failing to come to terms, even in a fallen world (or, perhaps more accurately, because of a fallen world), with having bodies intended to image God and serve him. It leads to a bankrupt comprehension of the command to put on a new self, to accept that we have a life to live that is worthy of God's calling and work — a destiny to be accomplished through a physical body.

Unbiblical self-image

Some people regard their bodies with shame, guilt, self-hatred, humiliation, despair, and feelings of unworthiness. Others treat their bodies with a pride-driven, narcissistic compulsive self-idolization masked as stewardship. Yet others could not care less about their bodies, an attitude that is self-indulgent and lazy. None of this is biblical or part of an

abundant, victorious life. Scripture informs us that we are not our own, but were bought at a price, and that we are to take care of ourselves even while heeding the call to deny ourselves and serve Christ alone.

The culture dictates physical perfection, yet antithetically rejects the one perfect human that ever lived. A plethora of new reality television shows dealing with whole body makeovers turn classically plain people into surgically-rendered svelte, symmetrical swans of perfection. It is alarming when a woman who is unhappy with the shape of her nose greedily picks from a surgeon's dessert menu of brow lifts, chin implants, teeth veneers, breast enhancements and belly liposuction to go with the new nose.

In 2004, an American medical clinic sought FDA approval for the world's first face transplant. Genetic manipulation has soared beyond a mere ability to pre-select the gender of a baby, forging ahead with plans for choosing everything else about a pre-conceived child from hair and eye color, to intelligence, to athletic predisposition, nose shape, and height.

We have returned full circle to the garden scene in which the serpent seduced Eve with words that promised she could be like God. With our new science and surgery, we can now actually circumvent physical laws in the pursuit of physical perfection. It's not that we want to be *like* God anymore. We just want to *be* God, and are plopped squarely in the middle of a culture that is bent on self-redemption. This perverse and all-too-common attitude makes meaningless Jesus' renunciation of his heavenly citizenship when he took on a physical human form.

The culture prescribes perfection. Christ's perfect love illumines us as the sinners we are, falling short of God's glory. The culture promotes outward appearance

as a means to fulfillment and power. Christ urges us to develop strength in our inner character and the loveliness of a humble spirit. The culture lures us to love only ourselves and to idolize a standard that is not normal or healthy.

Christ admonishes us to love the LORD our God and each other dearly. The culture markets the value of self-ownership in everything from personal rights to self-help books. Christ reminds us that we cannot own ourselves because of the great price he paid to redeem us, and that our true identity rests solely in him.

Misleading questions

We get two questions about identity backwards, and, as a result, our children suffer from horribly perverted ideas about their bodies and their worth as humans. In early and middle adolescence, it is normal for kids to seek an answer to the question, "Who am I?" But for our children to truly develop a healthy personhood, identity, and self-image, the question must instead be, "Who is Jesus?" One of the reasons we struggle so deeply with our body image is the lack of our understanding of who it is we image. Consequently, we get caught up in trying hard to look the part, instead of playing our part as witnesses to and reflectors of the light.

We all want a life that has meaning. We need to belong and to be valued. We crave love and attention. We loathe admitting a weakness, because we live in a world that equates worth with self-sufficiency. In the formative years of late adolescence, as Christian teens begin to realize a wider world that centers on Christ instead of them, they migrate toward the second most asked (yet also backwards) question, "What kind of mission is God calling me to?" When it comes to a strong and healthy self-identity, we must encourage students to ask instead, "What kind of 'me' will I bring to a mission?"

It is through the Christian communities of church, school, and family that we can and should convey these principles to our children in ways that proactively help them develop confidence in who they are in Christ, and how they will use their physical bodies to carry out his commission. These are the ways that our children can have hope for a life that is both accountable and meaningful.

But we must act early and consistently to keep our children from becoming marginalized by feelings of physical inadequacy. A child's body image and identity develop early. By upper elementary school, children already report issues with body size, fatness, teasing, and self-loathing. These issues have nothing to do with health but instead preoccupy a child's thinking as a "right-wrong" issue. It is "wrong" to be ugly (or fat, or short, or dumb). It is "right" to be tall, and pretty (handsome), smart, or thin. Research is clear in stating that parental attitudes at this stage are critically influential (and often

prejudicial) in helping shape or cripple a child's self-esteem and body image.

Lingering disorders

Early middle school years bring the added burden of physical changes related to puberty and gender that amplify body image issues. Identity formation becomes increasingly influenced by peers and media and is easily misguided by rampant misinformation and wildly artificial norms for appearance. Children begin to take on adult physicality without the benefit of adult coping skills. Negative feelings about oneself at this age often surface, in girls especially, as negative self-talk that is universal and socially acceptable. Peer-encouraged body dissatisfaction at this age is rarely benign, poised to grow like a malignancy that can eventually ruin both one's physical and mental health. Body dissatisfaction often causes characteristics of discontent with other aspects of life such as relationships and academics, and all are closely connected to self-esteem. One thing is sure: once established, body-image disorders are very difficult to undo.

"The culture dictates physical perfection, yet antithetically rejects the one perfect human being that ever lived."

There are several key ways a teacher or parent or youth leader can proactively help shape a child's body image in the shark-infested waters of a body-conscious society. Knowledge is critically important in helping children and teens understand issues like healthy weight, genetic influences on body shape and size, and media manipulation of our expectations. However, the more important issue, particularly in the early teens, is to help students develop a sense of mission and of having the set of skills necessary to carry out that mission. At this age, children often focus on the things they can't do well, and, because they tend to be extremists, they exhibit a proclivity to exaggerate their inabilities. The best possible prevention of body image disorders occurs when adults carefully mentor and steer students in ways that help them develop personal competence.

Banish inactivity

Personal competence can be particularly developed through physical activity, which is why students must be taught the skills that will enable them to feel comfortable moving in their own bodies for a lifetime. They need to be able, and fit enough, to run, and skate, and bike, and physically play all their lives. It is good for kids to experience the joy of movement. Unfortunately, as much as we'd like to blame television and computers, academics are the single biggest cause of childhood physical inactivity. The human body was created to move. Pinning kids to a desk throughout a school day creates a twofold disaster: it prevents opportunities for learning physical skills that positively shape body image, and it creates a sedentary mindset that can be very difficult to reorient in later years.

In addition to regular and vigorous physical activity and play, students need adults to intentionally model healthy body image. Teachers and parents should not expect kids to have healthy eating attitudes if they themselves habitually eat poorly or are chronically dieting. Adults must take care to refrain from self-denigrating talk about their own bodies, and must not tolerate negative body talk from a child, either about himself or others. Children need to hear and see adults who put off the old self and put on a new self created to be like God in true righteousness (Eph. 4).

As the culture becomes increasingly phobic about physical appearance, we must work more fervently to teach our children the basics of stewardship and caretaking. More importantly, we must daily work to introduce them to the Owner of their bodies, that they may praise him because they are so "fearfully and wonderfully made."

??? Where Have All the

by Donald Oppewal
Donald Oppewal (oppewaldon@msn.com) is emeritus professor of education at Calvin College, Michigan.

Readers of this journal are familiar with the schools that together form Christian Schools International (CSI). They may know that these CSI institutions together make up 410 schools, 115 of which are in Canada. They may even know that 9,500 educators in these schools teach 102,600 students. What they probably do not know is that CSI schools are part of a world-wide movement of schools with similar traditions but with their own cultural identities.

The story of about 25 of these was told at the Reformed Ecumenical Council gathering in Utrecht, the Netherlands, in early July, 2005. While the REC usually deals only with ecclesiastical matters in a week-long assembly, this year a special Pre-Assembly took two and a half days to focus on the state of the Reformed Christian day school.

This effort was the brainchild of Rev. James Lont, Secretary for Youth and Christian Nurture of the REC. He had discovered that 25 of the 39 member denominations had made both tentative and aggressive efforts at fostering Christian day schools. He spent many months identifying those denominations and the representatives who could speak for their denomination, and then invited them to send a story teller to the special Pre-Assembly. I was chosen as the one to represent the movement in the US and Canada.

As both participant and observer, I learned much about both the commonalities and the differences in these 25 different settings. Some presentations were tales of success and hope for the future; some were tales of frustration with unstable governments and with extreme poverty among its supporters, with many expressing a desperate need for more and better trained teachers.

The role of the Dutch

A key to understanding how Reformed Christian day schools spread so far and so wide lies in knowing about developments in the Netherlands in the 19th century. Readers of this journal perhaps know the

influence of the Dutch theologian, journalist, politician and prolific writer Abraham Kuyper. Rising above the schisms and quarrels of denominations, he focused his energies on Christian education.

As both pastor and Prime Minister, Kuyper carried the day for the cause of schools that would be free of government control as well as church control. Supported by the doctrine of sphere sovereignty, he achieved in the Netherlands a policy of multiple school systems that received equal funding.

I include this brief and totally inadequate description of what happened in the Netherlands to help us identify why Reformed schools spread worldwide. Since the Netherlands was both a colonial power and a source of great missionary efforts, the Reformed worldview spread not only to the Dutch East Indies but also to South Africa, Sri Lanka, as well as eventually the US and Canada. The Dutch in South Africa, in turn, engaged in extensive missionary efforts to many countries to their north, reaching briefly even as far north as Nigeria. These missionaries and, sometimes educators carried with them the challenge of Christian day schooling for the converts.

Some generalizations

While cultural and geographical factors made for many differences in the stories told, it appears that typically Reformed missionaries came to a country, gained converts, established hospitals and also schools. Many converts eagerly accepted the challenge of setting up their own schools, as for many of them the governments were corrupt or unable to provide schools. Thus, Reformed churches often filled a vacuum in their society.

When the missionaries left, however, the national churches were unable to maintain and operate the schools. Some were, and are to this day, funded by government, and are thus able to sustain themselves, even attracting non-Christian families. Just about all of these national churches saw their schools as a key factor in their mission efforts. Their schools were seen as parochial schools and were operated with a zeal for mission outreach.

Some striking exceptions

The following countries, for various reasons, adopted the parentally owned and operated Christian school concept: Australia, the Philippines, the Dominican Republic, and, of course, the United States and Canada. These seemed to be the places where the movement flourished more than in other settings. Whereas the Dutch shaped the parent-controlled school in America, it was the Americans who, in turn, helped

establish the same in Australia, the Philippines, and in the Dominican Republic. In the latter case, financial assistance is still provided, but the other two have become self-sustaining.

Two surprising trends

In the Netherlands, the birthplace of the Reformed concept of parentally controlled school, dramatic social change has seriously weakened the work and witness of those adhering to the Reformed principles for education. It is well known that the Netherlands has a deliberate policy of being an "open" society, with rapidly changing mores about the acceptability of drugs, prostitution, and, most recently, same sex marriage.

Faith-based school systems, once seen as making a contribution to a stable society and given full government funding because of a battle that was won a century ago, are now looked down upon and seen as in conflict with an "open" and permissive society. While pockets of resistance to government control of all schools still exist, the reporters from the Reformed tradition now turn their major efforts to pressuring these government schools to acknowledge religion in the curriculum in some small way. This parallels what some Reformed denominations in the US now see as their contribution to the educational scene.

A second surprise came from the story tellers from South Africa. In earlier days, the educators in the Reformed denominations of South Africa fostered Christian day schools as they carried with them, from the motherland, the Kuyperian dream. With the dissolution of apartheid, these same schools are now discouraged by governmental strictures. Sometimes this happened because many of them had a policy of segregating on the basis of race. While some "separate" schools still exist in South Africa, the trend toward one school system under government control is clear. The South African story tellers were also, like the Netherlands contingent, at great pains to tell us of their efforts to have an influence in these government schools, sometimes to the point of writing a curriculum for religious courses. To this observer it sounded like the efforts made in the US to have an objective study of religion, but with little hope of a faith-based curriculum.

Postscript

Since this year's Pre-Assembly was not intended to reach consensus on any educational question, much less to debate the merits of any system, each story teller, unaware of what others would describe, gave their constituency's history and hopes for the future. No one seemed surprised to discover the differences between the parochial school and the parental school as each developed so differently in their unique situations. Few took note of the radical change in both the Netherlands and the South African versions of Reformed witness in education. This gathering was not a conference but a communal sharing of various histories and struggles in making a school system that arose out of their faith and interaction with their culture.

One last observation. It is only in the United States that the Reformed day school as a parentally owned and operated school system has a stable and even growing presence. The US version has done this with minimal government support or control. The Canadian system has more aggressively pursued government cooperation and assistance, and has apparently done so with equal success and continuing vitality.

Query

Who Decides Fun Day and Discipline?

Tena Siebenga-Valstar is a principal at Fort McMurray Christian School, Alberta. We encourage 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 e-mail her at tvalstar@telus.net.

Unilateral decision

Question#1:

I am a part-time teacher who received a note from the secretary indicating that I did not have to teach on my scheduled day because the time was going to be used for a chapel. The principal indicated our school was going to have a fun day on which all students and teachers were asked to dress up like any favorite TV or movie character. It was requested that "there would be no costumes that would prevent the education of the student or other students in the room." Part of the chapel time (45 minutes) would be used to guess all the TV or movie characters. How do I handle this?

Response:

It appears that you are having difficulty with a decision that was made. Because it affects you in a number of ways, I suggest that you request a meeting with the principal about the matter. You do not indicate how much you teach, but are part-time teachers in your school not included in staff meetings? If you are given a choice as to whether or not to attend meetings and have chosen not to attend, then you probably have to live with the decisions that are made at the staff meetings. If staff meetings are held on an ad hoc basis and you are not informed of them, you should indicate that you would like to be informed as to when they are held because you would like to be involved in the decision-making process. Regularly scheduled staff meetings serve to build staff unity and facilitate activities that are in keeping with the school's vision.

Your question indicates that the principal made this a unilateral decision. Since this is something that involves the whole staff and the education that is to continue while this event is going on, I would have thought that this would be discussed by the whole staff. It is helpful if the whole staff decides on the kind of activities which are to occur throughout the school year, whether they are fun activities which utilize the students' creativity, service projects, chapels, educational challenges or fundraising activities. If the staff as a whole brainstorms to decide which activities will be part of the school program, and which staff member will take responsibility for each activity, you will likely have greater cooperation and involvement. This also decreases the responsibility of the principal to be the instigator. Maybe, in your case, the principal saw a need to increase school spirit and thought this activity might do so.

You indicate that the chapel time would be used to guess the names of the characters. My understanding of chapel is that it is a time of worship in service to God. I wonder what the focus of the whole activity was. We always have to ask ourselves, "Why are we doing what we are doing? What educational purpose is being served? Is God being glorified through this?" The activity in question appears to be of a non-devotional nature; therefore, I wonder how it was going to be used in order to give glory to God. As Christians, we are called to live as a community of believers and to build up one another (1 Corinthians 14:26), to share the gifts with which we have been blessed (Romans 12), and to do everything for the glory of God (I Corinthians 10:31).

Parental interference

Question 2

A B.Ed. student in a senior practicum described how she had been trying to model her mentor teacher's disciplinary method of writing student names on the blackboard after several warnings and disciplinary infractions. She finally felt comfortable with the approach and found it to be effective. However, a parent complained that writing her child's name on the board constituted a public exposure of misdeeds, a strategy which humiliates children, diminishes their self-esteem and causes grief and harm. Consequently, an order went throughout the school that children's names were no longer to be publicly displayed as a result of classroom misconduct. What do you think of this school's reaction to the parental complaint? The student teacher was upset because after learning a system that seemed to work, she had to abandon it for a potentially less effective means of class control.

Response:

I am surprised that a school would operate as you indicate. If the school changes practice or policy each time a parent objects to a practice, teachers are in a difficult position.

Many of our Christian schools are operated by a school society. The society members elect a board, which is given the mandate to govern the school. The board approves members who serve on committees such as the education committee. This committee is mandated to approve the education program of the school or recommend changes in the event that changes are needed. This

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committee also recommends the hiring of teachers and administrators who are responsible for implementing the education program. The principal is chosen because the board has confidence in that person to give educational direction to the school, direction which is consistent with the school's vision. As a colleague once said, "The parents may operate the school, but the administration runs the school on a daily basis."

It appears that in the situation you described, some structure is needed so that the teachers have a consistent basis from which to operate. I trust that the parent had discussed the concern with the teacher prior to approaching the principal. Given the complaint, a principal would have been wise to seek the input of the educational staff. A discussion of the procedure would have led to an evaluation of the practice and whether it is consistent with a Christian approach to classroom management and respect for students. Through dialogue educators may offer alternatives to the procedure, alternatives which work for students in their classroom. They may agree that this practice was valid in some specific instances. Following this type of discussion, educators could recommend acceptable responses to classroom misconduct. Such responses would honor the child, the teacher and the learning community of the whole class. The principal could make the education committee aware of the concern and of the action taken regarding the concern. This would allow the education committee to do their job of evaluating the education practices of the school. A structure such as this enables teachers to practice their craft, evaluate their pedagogy in a safe environment, and seek to do the best for all students involved.

Christian Schools International Appoints New President

GRAND RAPIDS, MICHIGAN — Christian Schools International (CSI) has a new president and CEO in Dave Koetje, who has been a leader in Christian education for 33 years. Koetje comes to CSI from the position of chief strategist of the Grand Rapids Christian Schools (Grand Rapids, MI). In that role he was responsible for forming the vision of the 2,500-student school system and implementing new initiatives, including Christian High Online, a Web-based high school.

According to Koetje, CSI's role is to provide support and vision to Christian schools. "God has used CSI in remarkable ways over the years. I am excited to explore how CSI can better serve our schools and families, building on the solid education foundation that has been established by people of commitment and vision."

Koetje began his career in education and administration in 1972 at Des Plaines Christian Junior High in Des Plaines, IL. From 1976–1983 he served as executive director of the Calvinist Cadet Corps, a Christian boys club. In 1983 he became the principal of Calvin Christian School in Grandville, MI. In 1986 he became principal of Oakdale Christian School in Grand Rapids. In 1993 Koetje took on the post of superintendent of Grand Rapids Christian Schools, a position he held until becoming the chief strategist in 2004.

When asked what some of the more exiting developments in education have been over the past 20 years, Koetje said, "We have learned so much about the complexities of child development, and how the brain functions. It's been a joy watching schools create new learning systems to respond to enlightening research. In addition there has been a rethinking of what student skills ought to be developed." Koetje believes that some of the key challenges facing Christian schools today are: "financial sustainability, articulation of what is excellent teaching from a Christian perspective, and skilled leadership that is equipped to not only improve what is, but also to create what isn't, for example, skills that enable us to understand and respond to the emergent realities of the marketplace."

CSI's programs include promoting Christian education, publishing textbooks and other instructional materials, providing health insurance and pension plans, and offering leadership training and school accreditation. CSI also publishes magazines and newsletters, including *Christian Home & School* and *Christian School Teacher*.

CSI has had six previous executive directors: Mark Fakkema (1925–1947), John Van Bruggen (1947–1953), John A. Vander Ark (1953–1977), Michael T. Ruiter (1977–1988), Sheri Haan (1988–1996), and Daniel Vander Ark (1996-2005).

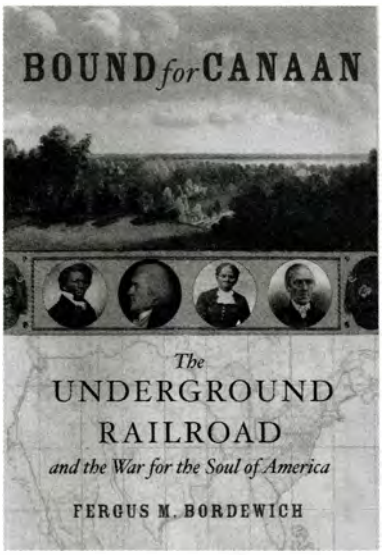
Dan VanderArk, the departing president, leaves on a high note after having been influential in shaping a report on Christian education presented by a Committee to Study Christian Day School Education for the Christian Reformed Synods of 2003 and 2005. In that report, churches are urged to promote Christian Day School Education and to make it possible for parents to send their children to Christian schools.

Book Reviews

Fergus M. Bordewich, *Bound for Canaan: The Underground Railroad and the War for the Soul of America*. New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 2005. 439 pages plus 101 pages of notes and index.
Reviewed by Steve J. Van Der Weele, Calvin College (Retired)

Ibsen's play The Doll House ends with Nora slamming the door after her as she leaves her husband. Such events were not supposed to happen in nineteenth-century Europe, and the noise of the slammed door reverberated throughout Europe. In similar dramatic fashion, the day came when a fugitive slave, Josiah Henson, finally arrived in Canada, and, although the hovel which was given him was no more than a converted hog shed, he could now slam a door in a white man's face.

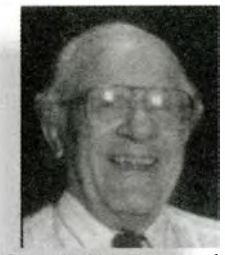
Although the author makes no claim for his book as an encyclopedia of the massive movement to liberate slaves — that is, down to the last name and statistic — he gives us all the details we need to persuade us, if we had not known it before, that the institution of slavery is not merely a digression in an American history book, a chapter tucked away with reports of the colonial uprising, presidential contests, westward expansion, and the Gold Rush. Slavery needs a section all by itself, for it is central to our history. The nation, as Bordewich states, made a Faustian bargain with slavery, refusing to understand that such moral compromises come with a price, and that the mills of the gods do indeed grind slowly but exceedingly fine. An earlier book, by Ira Berlin, Generations of Captivity: A History of African-American Slaves, relates the gradual process by which human beings from Africa came to be enslaved by American plantation owners, with each slave regarded as three-fifths of a human being. Bordewich's book chronicles the enormous energy and planning which went into helping slaves escape from their masters. As he does so, he informs us as well about the brutality exercised on many plantations by landowners who firmly believed that black is the color of slavery and that black people were intended to serve white masters. The Virginia House of Delegates declared, in 1832, "We have, as far as possible, closed every avenue by which light can enter ...[their] minds. If we could extinguish the capacity to see the light, our work would be completed; they would then be on a level with the beasts of the field, and we should be safe (106)."



Savor the title of the book for a moment. Canaan was the promised land — and by an interesting and significant coincidence, it comes close to spelling the destination where up to one-third of the fugitives found their freedom. Many were told that there was no safe haven south of Canada, and that as soon as they arrived on British soil, they would be free. Canada, after all, had abolished slavery already in the 1830s, a generation earlier than Great Britain. Moreover, in its adversarial relationship with the United States, it could sympathize with the freedom-seeking fugitives. The Underground Railroad? Yes, a metaphor. Few actually used the rapidly growing railroad system for their flight to freedom. Through another coincidence, however, the development of the railroad and the growing abolition movement occurred concurrently. The whole new vocabulary of stations, conductors, passengers, baggage, and routes was made to order for the network of roads and trails, homes and shops, departures and arrivals from one destination to the next as the fleeing slaves entrusted themselves to unknown participants in the enterprise of civil disobedience called the Abolition Movement. (The Underground Railroad and the Abolition movement were not synonymous, of course, but maintained a symbiotic relationship.) And, yes, it became obvious that the issue of slavery would define the nation, would shape its very soul. In due time, every American became involved in the issue of slavery.

The movement began very modestly, in Philadelphia, among some Quakers, whose consciences compelled them to challenge the reigning orthodoxy about slavery, an institution acknowledged in various ways in the Constitution itself. It gradually spread to other religious fellowships as well — Baptists, Methodists, Congregationalists, Presbyterians. Moreover, the soul-sculpturing process was carried on, not, first of all, by Enlightenment thinkers, or our political documents. Though these people and statements did posit a transcendent idealism, they proved insufficient to carry on the crusade against what Gerrit Smith called "the hell-concocted system of American slavery (165)." Revealed religion carried the day. The secular thinkers contributed through their forensic achievement, but the religious folk realized that activism was called for — risky, courageous, aggressive, resourceful activism.

They read their Bibles hard — Psalm 115:16, for example, and Exodus 21:16, which calls for the death penalty on anyone who steals and sells another person. The movement developed from apathy to cautious questioning, to modest assistance, into a full-fledged movement involving hundreds of people executing secret plans as well as the solid corps of workers even less visible who saw to the feeding, housing, and equipping the runaway slaves. Once the critical mass of citizens felt uncomfortable with



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people owning other people, the movement accelerated rapidly — aided by resistance to the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850, Harriet Beecher Stowe's novel Uncle Tom's Cabin, and instances of egregious retaliation against slaves captured and returned to their plantations.

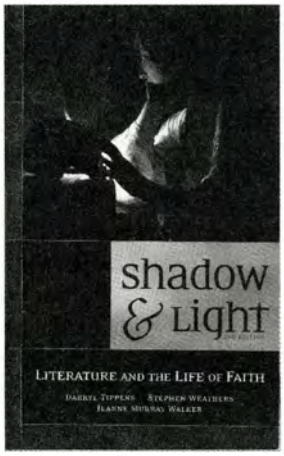
Bordewich's book makes for lively reading. His pages are replete with one tale after another about how ordinary people, imbued with a sense of their cause, performed incredible deeds as they challenged an institution which dehumanized not only the slave, but the plantation owner and the slave trafficker as well. Moreover, in due time, the white citizens, as they became obliged, by law, to assist in the capture of fugitive slaves, became enmeshed in the barbarism of Southern slavery. But these ordinary people were blessed with exceptional leaders, both white and black, leaders with passion and charisma, leaders who themselves took enormous risks and sometimes paid with their lives. Harriet Tubman is almost in a class by herself, but the Hall of Fame includes others, such as Thomas Garrett, Jermain Loguen, Gerrit Smith, Levi Coffin, Josiah Henson, Rev. John Rankin, Kewis Hayden, Mary Ann Shadd Cary, and, of course, Frederick Douglass — most of whom survived the Civil War and remained active in the cause of freedom. Of course, secretly conveying runaway slaves over land and by sea, through primeval forests and by river navigation, by cart and by foot, made only a dent in the abolition of slavery. It required a John Brown and a raid on Harper's Ferry, a crisis in Kansas, the Battle of Bull Run, a War between the States, an Emancipation Proclamation, a Fifteenth and related amendments, and a Civil Rights movement in our century to complete the work of the abolitionists.

The work of these people is too recent to relegate them to the dustbin of history. We need to know more about what Bordewich informs us so vividly: the secret rendezvous — often in cemeteries; night flights; unsuccessful attempts to flee by boat; the seven years an early Anne Frank hid in an attic to elude her pursuers; the pursuits, the rescues, the heart-rending recaptures, the disguises, the codes, secret signals, the use of boxes as means of escape.

We need to know more about the enormous energy put out not only by the abolitionists but also their pursuers, who, after all, had the law on their side. We need to follow the movement decade by decade, beginning with the 1830s, and state by state. We need to experience the exhilaration at learning about slave catchers who were outwitted by their intended victims, and at long-delayed reunions of family members. And we need to know all this in order to understand the residual racism which besets us still. Bordewich is not a detached observer about what he has been chronicling. He concludes with an admonition: "...temporizing and unprincipled compromise on civil rights can be risked only at the peril of damaging the nation's soul (439)."

Daryll Tippens, Stephen Weathers, Jeanne Murray Walker, editors, *Shadow and Light: Literature and the Life of Faith*, 2nd edition. Abilene, Texas: ACU Press, 2005. 728 pages plus 15 pages of "Selected Themes" index and permissions. Reviewed by Steve J. Van Der Weele, Calvin College (retired).

Shadow and Light is capitalizing on the new, if not yet universal, recognition that the spiritual nature of human beings is a reality that needs to be acknowledged in textbooks, curricula, and pedagogy. The editors' selections reflect this new phase of higher education. The organization by literary types remains conventional, but their index of themes indicates into what seas they cast their nets: Family and Human Love; Otherness and Ethics; Environment, Nature, and Sacramentalism; Discovery, and Identity; Obedience and the Disciplined Life; Sacrifice, Justice and Community; The Mystery of God and Worship. The potential problems are obvious. Is significant literature, though



requiring pedagogical correction, passed over for mediocre selections where the questions and answers, from a religious perspective, are predictable?

In my opinion, the editors have chosen well and wisely. To be sure, the selections represent a robust harvesting of works of the Christian tradition — in other words, all our favorite authors, from Donne to Newman to Bunyan to O'Connor to Buechner to Henri Nouwen and the rest. One can organize a course from this anthology in which the students read only these Christian classics. But one can also cast his net in other waters and encounter such provocative authors as A. N.

Wilson (I would have voted against him), Bernard Malamud, Eudora Welty, Willa Cather, and others which will provide ethical exercise in another mode than the Christian writers provide.

In my experience with general anthologies, the secular writers have dominated, and one needed to furnish the religious selections to supplement the text. I prefer the proportion which this anthology offers — a critical mass of literary works written under the aegis of the Christian faith, with enough other selections to keep one from letting the course become a class in exclusively Christian readings.

One might, of course, prefer some selections to others — as is true with any anthology. But there are many legitimate ways to supplement even this collection. I would be pleased to use this text in, say, a course in Understanding Literature. And I hope it would not be lost on the student that a substantial part of the world's best literature reflects religious and, often, Christian faith. It is good that they should know that. The publishers, in fact, offer a series of student letters in appreciation of this text. It has the approval as well of such luminaries as Eugene H. Peterson, Antony Low, and Leland Ryken.

Additional Outstanding Title

David McCullough. 1776. New York: Simon and Schuster. 2005. 294 pages plus 92 pages of source notes and index.

McCullough realized while writing his biography of John Adams that much of the early history of America remained untold. His latest book, 1776, relates the events of that year, with some spilling over on each end. McCullough is a masterful storyteller. He writes with great artistry about the three major battles of that year: the battle for Boston, for New York, and for the Christmas Eve battle at Trenton. The first and the last of these could have gone badly, and the loss of New York could have been even worse had not 9000 soldiers been able to escape, almost miraculously.

The Declaration of Independence came perilously close to being just that — a declaration, and nothing more. McCullough helpfully includes two speeches of King George III about the developing tensions between the two countries. The king offered generous terms of amnesty to his wayward children, but swift and severe punishment for traitors to the crown. McCullough gives us a good sense of space. In describing the battles, he takes us through streets, over rivers, down lanes, up heights, over frozen fields, into swamps. He lets us feel the heat of the bonfires, smell the gunpowder, and feel what it is like to march without proper clothing and all but barefoot on frozen ground. But the book focusses on General George Washington. He was truly the man of the hour. He made mistakes, but he learned from them. He had a passion for his men, who gave him, in due time, a loyalty to the point of death. He gave them a vision of how the fate of the continent rested upon their efforts. The book gives us a lively sense of gratitude for the gifts of Washington's leadership and the commitment of his troops, the gifts which won our freedom.