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# *Christian Educators* Journal

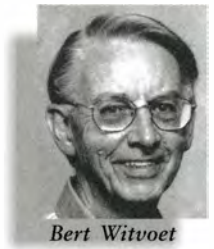
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## Respecting Appropriate Boundaries



## The Minefield of Sexual Abuse



Bert Witvoet

According to two high school principals I talked to, their schools have to deal with at least one or two sexual abuse cases each year. Much of the time the alleged abuse has to do with a domestic situation. Rarely are teachers or other staff members involved. Not that Christian schools are immune to this horrible practice. Many of us know of someone who has taught or been a principal or caretaker in a Christian school who, later on, it turns out, exploited a position of trust and power and risked long-time spiritual and psychological damage to the victim. Today we are more aware of the effect sexual abuse has on young persons. In the past, if an incident of abuse came to light, the usual approach would be to deny that it took place, to minimize the problem or to cover it up because such revelations would give the school a bad image. Today, we understand not only the evil of such a cover-up; we know also know that we have an obligation to the whole community to expose the reality of abuse so that others will not fall victim.

### Determining guilt

It is, no doubt, a very difficult matter to right away believe that abuse may have taken place in your school or in a home, especially when the accused is someone you respect, someone you have befriended, or someone who is related to you. What if the accusation is wrong? There are many examples floating around of false accusations leveled against a person in authority. The victims may demand that you believe them. If you don't, you may be accused of being part of the cover-up. But shouldn't any person be considered innocent until proven guilty? The best thing to do in these cases is to go only with what you know, and hope that the legal process will prove guilt or innocence. Quite often, that means you cannot take a position on the matter. By rights, you have to be a fence sitter.

But the accusation does have to be investigated by the police. The laws of our land have declared sexual abuse a crime, and for good reasons. Harm has been done when abuse takes place, and harm may be done again if the perpetrator is not stopped. Abuse may even involve consent of the abused, but if that abused person is a minor, consent is of no significance in the eyes of the law. The person with the greater "power" is responsible. Immature people can be manipulated and, often, they do not have the emotional and spiritual maturity to fully understand what is happening to them.

Woe to those in the school community who blame the victim because of certain patterns of behavior. The person who has been entrusted with the responsibility to protect students and seek their welfare is always to blame, even if the student is a flirt. Being a flirt or acting provocatively is sometimes an indication that the student has been abused before either at home or elsewhere. In that case, the student has not learned that there

are appropriate boundaries to sexuality. It may be reasoned that the perpetrator also may have a history of being abused. That certainly helps to explain his inappropriate behavior, and it may even make us more sympathetic to him. But it does not justify him. (I use the male pronoun even though female teachers have also been convicted of sexual abuse. However, their percentage is much lower.)

It is in this area of distinguishing between sin and crime that the Christian community has failed the most in the past. When two adult members of the staff engage in immoral behavior, that is sinful but it is not illegal. When a teacher or principal abuses a child, that is both sinful and illegal. Because of the illegality, the actions have to be reported to the authorities.

### The question of forgiveness

Another element of confusion in Christian circles is the matter of forgiveness. Somehow we think that, if a person is sorry, we have to extend forgiveness to him. But what right do we have to forgive someone for what was done to someone else?

This question reminds me of how Simon Wiesenthal, a Jew who spent time in a German concentration camp, struggled with the question of forgiveness. While in a concentration camp, he was summoned to the bedside of a dying German officer. The young officer had asked for one of the Jewish prisoners so he could confess to what he had done as a Nazi and ask forgiveness. Wiesenthal listened to the dying man's confession but walked away without forgiving him. He did not think he had the right to forgive someone on behalf of others.

Later on, the dying man's request burdened him, and he put the question of what he should have done to numerous spiritual and cultural leaders for their input. The result was a fascinating book called *The Sunflower*. Now, it's true, Wiesenthal, who died this year, did not as a Jew have the same understanding of forgiveness that we as Christians have. When I read *The Sunflower*, I automatically placed myself in Wiesenthal's position and asked myself what I would have said. I might have pointed the young German officer to Christ and suggested to him, that, although I could not speak for other Jews, God was willing to forgive him. (I say "might" because I must not assume too much graciousness on my part here, if, in fact, I would have been in a concentration camp myself and had seen my own people treated worse than animals.)

God is the only one who has the right to forgive someone on behalf of others because he is the ultimate person we hurt whenever we sin. Another Jewish writer, Elie Wiesel, thinks that even God does not have the right to efface the sins one commits toward others (See his memoirs *All Rivers Run to the Sea*). That's an interesting point to discuss. Certainly, we can't use God as a detour around seeking forgiveness from the victims.

But I agree with Wiesenthal that we fellow human beings do not have the right to extend forgiveness on behalf of someone else. The most we can do is forgive a colleague for the harm he has done to us as teachers and members of the school community.

But even if the victim extends forgiveness, that does not mean the criminal activity should not be reported or followed up on. Unlike some other Christians, I do not believe that repentance should lessen the sentence. If that were so, all criminals should quickly repent and hope for mercy. Christ forgave the murderer on the cross, but he did not make any attempt to free him. *Paradise* awaits those who repent, *not* freedom from the consequences of their sin or crime.

### Severe judgment

I personally know of several instances of sexual abuse in the Christian schools. Three involve principals, two involve teachers, and one, a caretaker. One of the principals has gone to his eternal destination. I hope for his sake that it's Paradise, but I have my doubts. Somehow I think that Jesus was thinking of sexual abuse when he said to his followers: "Things that cause people to sin are bound to come, but woe to that person through whom they come. It would be better for him to be thrown into the sea with a millstone tied around his neck than for him to cause one of these little ones to sin" (Luke 17:2).

I know that one of his victims no longer attends church or believes in God. She may well not end up in Paradise because of that principal, never mind the suffering she is undergoing today in her relationships. We know how devastating sexual abuse can be on its victims. According to Finkelhor and Browne (1986) the effects of sexual abuse "may be delayed into adulthood. Long-term effects that are frequently reported and associated with sexual abuse include depression, self-destructive behavior, anxiety, feelings of isolation and stigma, poor self-esteem,

difficulty in trusting others, tendency toward revictimization, substance abuse, and sexual maladjustment. (*Sexual Counseling Digest*, Sept. 1996)

### After the fact

Having said all that, I wonder if we as Christian schools have done enough in the area of preventing the sin and crime of abuse? It's not a matter we like to dwell on much. It's not inspiring to anticipate abusive situations. It may even come across as creating distrust at a time in our society when authority is already operating under a blanket of suspicion and doubt. When we asked in several previous issues of CEJ for "sensitive and carefully written stories about known abuse in [our] school, without revealing names and other tell-tale indicators," nobody in our readership took up the challenge. Why not? Don't we know about certain instances? Or would we rather not talk about them? On the one hand, it is commendable that we prefer not to talk about instances of abuse. We're not eager to gossip, but is it helpful to avoid talking about it altogether?

The other side of the coin is that, when parents see how aware we are as a Christian school community and how careful we are about hiring and training teachers and staff, that will create greater trust again. Unless there are abuse policies around in our Christian schools that surpass the ones I have seen, I must conclude that most of what is in those policies focuses on what to do about abuse after the fact. A fair bit of it seems to be concerned with making sure we are not liable in the eyes of the courts. Certainly, Beth Swagman's comments on the useful policy produced by the Toronto District Christian High School (p. 12) are apropos: we need to do more in the area of screening, training, education and prevention of abuse in the schools.

An ounce of prevention is better than a ton of millstones.

Bert Witvoet

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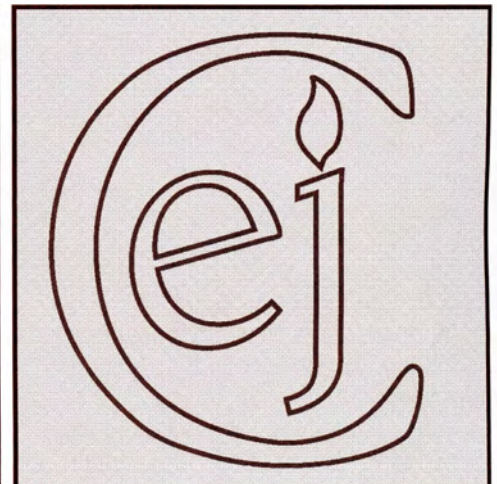
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# Respecting Appropriate Boundaries Between Coaches and Athletes

**Kimerly Gall**

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Sexual abuse does not take place in Christian institutions, right? Wrong! We would probably be surprised by the number of inappropriate sexual contacts and behaviors which occur in Christian settings (schools, colleges, churches). Some cases are reported. But, make no mistake, there are plenty of other cases which go unreported. One setting where inappropriate behaviors may occur is the physical education and sport setting. In the sport setting there are indeed alleged cases as well as actual cases, which have resulted in the resignation of coaches.

In one incident I know of, a coach had inappropriate sexual contact with an athlete. It happened over 10 years ago. He was a male coach of women athletes at a Christian college. The story was kept out of the newspapers, but he was forced to resign. He moved out of town, not to another coaching position, but to another job.

A second incident was with a male coach of women athletes at another Christian college. A player filed a sexual harassment complaint, stemming from an incident while she and the coach were on a trip. In a written statement, the university said the coach submitted his resignation following "an investigation of allegations of misconduct."

Why do inappropriate incidents occur? The number one reason is that we are sinners. We are imperfect human beings who encounter various temptations and sometimes make poor decisions. Factors in the sport setting which seem to encourage abuse include the enormous amount of time spent together in the course

of a season as well as the range of emotions one might experience during the season (joy, anger, frustration, satisfaction, appreciation).

Why do some occurrences of abuse go unreported? I'd say, in many situations, it is fear — fear of confronting the "adult," fear of not being believed, fear of being put down by other athletes, and fear of repercussions. In a rare case, what might



typically be considered sexual harassment is not sexual harassment because the alleged victim "wants attention of a sexual nature." In some cases, the victim doesn't know what to do, or she is afraid to talk about the incident.

## Undesirable attention

Within the realm of coaching, most inappropriate incidents occur between male coaches and female athletes. There are relatively few male sports teams coached by females. From my observations, and from years spent coaching and having discussions with other coaches, here are some of the reasons for inappropriate physical contact: the coach needed to fulfill

his ego; he couldn't restrain himself in the use of power; and, finally, because many female athletes, especially in Christian settings, "need" male affirmation, the coach falls into the trap of overstepping appropriate boundaries. None are excuses for inappropriate behavior. As teachers, professors and coaches, we have a legal and moral responsibility to keep safe the environment in which we work.

As described in the Calvin College 2005/06 Student Handbook, sexual harassment can be defined as "unwanted attention of a sexual nature. Remarks may not be intended to harm, but if they have that effect, they constitute harassment. Sexual harassment may involve abuse of power or privilege. It [sexual harassment] can be verbal, non-verbal or physical" (p. 51). The Handbook provides specific examples, such as: (1) "inappropriate or unwelcome touching, patting, pinching, or brushing against a person's body or clothing; and, (2) unwelcome inquiries or comments about a person's sex life, clothing, or body" (p. 51). Upon first reading of this handbook, a coach could become a bit paranoid. How many times have you not seen a coach put his hand on the back or shoulder of an athlete? How many times does a coach touch an athlete in helping with technique? According to Steir (2005), "educators and coaches, when acting as agents or employees of a school, will need to consider what a reasonable person views as acceptable or unacceptable behavior, and act accordingly" (p. 13).

Sometimes it only takes an "accusation" or one incident to ruin a person's reputation. It is, therefore, important to develop an understanding and knowledge of what sexual harassment is, and to avoid situations which could place one in danger of being falsely accused. So what precautions might athletic departments and coaches take?

### Pro-active rules

#### Precautions for coaches include:

- Do not travel alone with an athlete of the opposite gender;
- Do not meet alone with an athlete in a room without a window (and where there are windows to the room — keep them unblocked);
- Have at least one adult of the same gender as the team members along on trips, especially overnight trips.

#### As an athletic department:

- Develop a handbook which defines behavior expectations and which defines sexual harassment.
- Related to behavior expectations, discussions and the development of


policies on appropriate practice and game attire could be beneficial.

— Conduct a meeting with all coaches to discuss specific examples of sexual harassment that pertain to the sport environment. Too often we “assume” every coach is an adult and knows all about sexual harassment and will act appropriately. But discussions on the topic could be beneficial in defining specifics related to inappropriate actions, especially for coaches new to the environment.

— Provide information on steps for a coach to take to protect himself when an athlete projects inappropriate behaviors towards the coach.

There are millions of sport practices and games taking place within any given year. The vast majority of those are conducted every day of the season without any incidents related to sexual harassment. Coaches, parents, and athletes should not become paranoid about this topic. But common sense precautions should be discussed and followed because even one inappropriate incident of a sexual nature is one too many.

### References:

- Stier, W.F. (2005). *An Overview of Sexual Harassment. Strategies*, 13-15. Calvin College Student Handbook (2005/06) 

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# SEXUAL ABUSE:

## A DECISION-MAKING MODEL

by Wayne Joosse

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Cases of alleged sexual abuse are usually complicated and very emotionalized. We want justice; we want to support the victim and punish the perpetrator for such terrible exploitation. However, we also know that some persons allege abuse when it did not happen, sometimes because of confused memories and sometimes by deliberate choice. The lives of falsely accused persons are usually irreparably damaged. There is often considerable confusion over what is

Figure 1 - Will I need an umbrella?

Decision: Will I need an umbrella?			
		Yes	No
Does it rain?	Yes	Truth 1	Error 1
	No	Error 2	Truth 2

the truth. Given such ambiguity, we might prefer not to decide whether abuse did or did not occur, but no response is also a choice with perhaps serious consequences.

This article will present a basic decision-making model which I often find helpful. In particular, for this issue of the *Christian Educators Journal*, I hope it will offer a useful framework for thinking about the issues, choices, and consequences of cases of alleged sexual abuse.

I'll introduce the model with an innocuous example. You are preparing to leave home for the day, and the weather forecast says there is a chance of rain. Should you take an umbrella? As Figure 1 shows, there are two ways you can be right but also two ways to be wrong. The winning combinations are taking the umbrella and it rains or leaving it home and it doesn't rain. But you err if you take the umbrella and it doesn't rain, especially

if, periodically and annoyingly, you forget the umbrella and have to go back to retrieve it. You also err if you decide not to take the umbrella and it does rain, causing you to look like you've just been swimming with your clothes on.

We have some control over the size of the cells, i.e., the likelihood of the various outcomes. We can modify the vertical, decision-making line. We might do so because of the predicted probability of rain or because of how we assess the seriousness of the two errors. To use extreme examples, if a person found the hassle of carrying an umbrella far greater than the consequences of getting rained on, such a person might never take an umbrella.

(This moves the vertical line all the way to the left, eliminating even the possibility of error 2.) Conversely, one could totally avoid error 1 (getting rained on) by never leaving home without an umbrella. Most of us would not go to such extremes, but it is important to see that the two errors are inversely related; whatever *reduces* one error *increases* the other. That inevitable trade-off, as we will see, is what complicates our response to alleged abuse, because each error has significant consequences.

A more serious use of our decision-making model — judging whether someone is innocent or guilty of a crime — moves us closer to our primary objective. Judges and juries need to make such a call. Again there are two ways of being correct (truths 1 and 2) and two ways to be wrong (errors 1 and 2).

We don't like to have guilty people go

free, but, in most judicial systems, we see the opposite error, punishing an innocent person, as more serious. Consequently, we essentially move the vertical line all the way to the left and consider a person innocent unless proven guilty. In our commitment to avoid error 2, we knowingly accept that our inclination regrettably increases the number of guilty people who go free — error 1. It is important to see that there is no way to reduce both errors.

With this model in mind, let us turn to a brief overview of how we have dealt with sexual abuse.

### Historic tendency

There are sound reasons to believe that most forms of abuse (e.g. child, sexual, spouse) have occurred throughout human history. Given a very different mind-set — e.g., a man's wife is his property, parents can treat their children as they see fit — abuse was probably even more prevalent in the past. Yet to most of us, abuse seemed unthinkable. We could not imagine ministers, coaches or fathers doing such things to children they were supposed to nurture. That is why, historically, most

Figure 2 - Did this person commit this crime?

Decision			
		Guilty	Innocent
Reality	Guilty	Truth 1	Error 1
	Innocent	Error 2	Truth 2

victims suffered in silence. Who will believe me? Who will take my word over that of a respected adult? We were naïve, and abuse was grossly under-reported. Victims suffered immensely in silence, and most perpetrators went undetected and unpunished.

In recent decades we have become far more aware of how widespread abuse is

and how horrible the consequences usually are. Therapists came to realize that abuse was not infrequently behind the presenting problem. Sometimes the client was assessing the counselor to see if it were safe to bring up the real issue. Other times, memories of the abuse were buried deep beneath layers of secrecy and shame and

clients often develop great faith in their therapists, they came to believe that the abuse must have happened. Some clients knew abuse had not happened but saw it as the perfect excuse for not functioning more effectively in life. "Given the horrific nature of abuse, it is remarkable I'm even doing as well as I am." Even worse, some vindictive individuals, consciously and deliberately, saw claims of abuse as a devastating way to hurt someone in authority.

often need the affirming encouragement of a significant other. But others are now more skeptical and inhibited.

In summary, in times past abuse happened, but it was often unknown and rarely discussed. Error 1 was common; true victims suffered in awful silence. Error 2 was rare (innocent persons accused) because few people were accused.

**Figure 3 - Did abuse occur?**  
Our belief

The reality		Yes	No
	Yes	Truth 1	Error 1
	No	Error 2	Truth 2

needed nudging of the patient by the therapist to be drawn out. Laws were passed which required teachers, health professionals, and others to report cases of suspected abuse. Only then did we learn how widespread abuse was.

### Excesses

Roughly in the 1990s, things seemed to go too far. Some therapists, especially those with an anti-male bias, were looking for abuse and started using more aggressive memory-enhancing techniques — guided imagery (e.g. reliving past experiences), hypnosis, or even so-called truth serum (e.g. sodium amytal). A book, *The Courage to Heal*, immensely popular with both mental health professionals and their clients, recklessly suggested that sexual abuse was often behind anxiety, insomnia, depression, and relationship issues — behaviors obviously also caused by many other variables. Furthermore, the book claimed that if you think you were abused, you probably were. That kind of thinking opened the door to all sorts of problems.

In particular, therapeutic techniques for uncovering repressed memories imperceptibly slid into ways of implanting false memories. In some cases, because

In recent years the North American public has become increasingly skeptical about allegations of abuse. Research has demonstrated that people, especially children, can rather easily be led to believe something happened, when in actuality it had not. Claims can be fraudulent for a variety of reasons. The False Memory Syndrome Foundation now offers resources for those falsely accused which enable them to fight back. Many alleged abusers have been vindicated and some have successfully sued therapists for implanting false memories. Some accusers have recanted their claims and implicated their therapists. Some therapists have lost their careers. However — and this further adds to the complexity — accusers retract their allegations for many reasons; it does not necessarily mean that the abuse did not happen.

### Current dilemma

Therapists, and, in a sense, most professionals, are in a dilemma. Therapists are afraid to probe for or initiate discussion of abuse for fear of being accused of implanting false memories. However, memories of the abuse can lie dormant under years of secrecy and shame. Victims

### 1970s and 1980s

In the 1980s and 1990s, we became far more aware and responsive to the reality of sexual abuse. Victims "came out of the closet" and usually were believed and supported. We increasingly got it right — truth 1 — though with such inclinations, error 2 also inevitably increased.

But those trends went too far. Sexual abuse, once a taboo topic, was now out in the open — maybe too much so. On television talk shows it seemed almost trendy, both for celebrities and ordinary folks, to claim abuse and to be a survivor. Innocent people were harmed and families torn apart. Such cases of false memories and fraudulent allegations were highly publicized. Consequently, we've become more skeptical, and persons who allege abuse are less likely to be believed. Legitimate victims, unfortunately, pay a price for this change in climate. Ironically, in some respects we are back to where we were, with victims now less likely to get the hearing and support they deserve.

Each inclination — towards belief or skepticism — has both benefits and costs. Our culture seems to oscillate between the two tendencies. Claims of abuse are usually complicated, the truth unclear, and the stakes high. Yet a response is usually necessary. I hope this article and this model are helpful for clarifying the options, possible consequences and inevitable trade-offs. ☺



## The Right Touch?

by Lois De Vries

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Stories about the physical abuse of children sicken us. How could anyone do such a thing to a child? we wonder. Yet I have seen a teacher slam a student against a bank of lockers, another break a yard stick over a student's head, and an out-of-control science teacher literally throw a student over a lab table. A tough inner city school? No — the small-town Christian elementary school I attended in the 1950s and 60s. Such stories make us shake our heads, relieved those bad old days are gone. In today's climate such violence seems impossible.

No teacher would ever dare to hit a student today, thank goodness. Today physical violence in the classroom is not our biggest fear. In a society barraged by stories about pop stars and priests who molest children, it's easy to understand the warning of a master teacher to his student teacher, "Don't ever do that!" as they spotted another teacher hugging a student in the hall. It's easy to understand the concern of an older teacher about finding a young male colleague alone in his darkened room with

a female student. Even though the teacher and student were yards apart as they innocently conversed after a class video presentation, the older teacher felt compelled to urge her colleague to be more careful in the future.

### Alarming numbers

There is more than paranoia at work here. Statistics indicate that in the U.S., one in four girls and one in ten boys are sexually abused before age eighteen, and figures from an April 2005 report claim that six to ten percent of public school children have been sexually abused or harassed by school employees and teachers.

It may be tempting for us in the Christian school community to step away from such numbers. Certainly those numbers are not true in our schools. Our teachers would never do such a thing; our parents and students trust us — right? We're trustworthy — right? Yet, I can remember one Christian high school teacher about whom the rumors flew even back in my days as a student in the 1960s. Was it on purpose or coincidental that the girls with the shortest skirts were placed in the front rows? Was the principal notorious for rubbing his hand down the backs of young female teachers being paternal, or

perverted?

While I could locate no statistics about sexual abuse in CSI schools, the 2005 Abuse Questionnaire sent out to Christian Reformed churches shows clearly that sexual abuse is no stranger to that denomination. According to the survey, 13 percent of respondents, all members of the CRC, indicated they had been sexually abused.

### No touch?

So are they right — those teachers uttering solemn advice? Should we as teachers be concerned about touching our students, about being alone with them? Yes. The danger is real. The fear of parents and teachers alike is real. We need to avoid even the hint of impropriety and to avoid misleading or harming in any way the students with whom we work.

However, I wonder sometimes if we have let our legitimate fears overtake us so that we are afraid of any physical contact with our students.

When he was a little boy, my nephew Brent announced to our family that he had heard that everyone needs nine hugs a day. I don't know where Brent got his information, but the concept strikes me as good.

My father was not a very "touchy" person, but I remember that when I was sick, he would come in to see me and just grab my toe, saying "How ya doin', kiddo?" The right touch. Many years later, when, as an adult, I was being prepped for major surgery, the surgeon came in, grabbed my toe, saying "All set?" Just the right touch. In contrast, I remember another doctor who tried to comfort me by placing his hand on my knee in the examining room. I know he did not mean to be offensive, but that was not the right touch.

In my church, we form a circle in the

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front of the sanctuary for communion. As the pastor hands the bread and wine to one member of the group on each side of the circle, he often touches that person on the shoulder. In the communion circle a council member blesses children who do not yet take communion with touch and words. There's something comforting about receiving such physical contact. During difficult times in my life, I have wished I could receive that touch of blessing, too. I don't think I am the only one. The right touch emphasizes the concept of community — we are one in the Spirit.

Touch in itself is a gift — another way of

communicating and connecting. There is a growing body of evidence indicating that physical touch can enhance physical healing. Recent studies indicate that the effects of touch also can be extremely powerful in an educational context. Nicholas Gueguen, in "Nonverbal Encouragement of Participation in a Course: The Effect of Touching," notes that evidence suggests students who were touched gently by a teacher in class became less disruptive and more cooperative. The evidence also indicates that this "tactile contact" will eventually improve student participation, no matter the grade level. In the same article, David Gershaw, Ph. D., states that

"brief, gentle touches to the hands, arms or shoulders tend to lead to positive reactions from those who are touched."

I was that teacher who cautioned a young colleague; yet only a few days later I stood alone in my classroom with a six-foot 17-year-old male student, overwhelmed with the injustices of his life, weeping on my shoulder. A mixed message? I don't think so. I have seen the healing effects of a touch on the shoulder, a handshake, even a little hug between teacher and student. We connect with students in many ways; all of these — including touch — have the power both to hurt and to heal. ☺

## In Praise of Non-Invasive Touching

by Bert Witvoet

We know instinctively that touch is very important to human health. We know how important it is from having been cuddled by our parents when we were young. We know it from having been comforted when we were grieving. We know it from having fallen in love with someone. Of course, all these experiences involve intimate relationships. But touch is also important in situations that are not intimate.

When you google the subject "healing touch," you come across all kinds of websites that promote the importance of appropriate touching. A certain kind of therapy is referred to as "Healing Touch." This therapy is described as gentle, non-invasive touch that seeks to "restore harmony, energy and balance within the human energy system." Maybe you think this sounds too much like New Age stuff and that Christians do well to avoid it. But that would be a mistake. We all hurt sometimes. We all benefit from a good hug. Some of us may need holistic therapy.

As I get older and less inhibited, I appreciate the importance of touch more

and more. Today, we have become much freer that way. At church, we often hug good friends. We have come close to what the early Christians used to call greeting each other with a holy kiss.

Jesus was not afraid to touch people, especially not as he reached out to heal them. He took in his arms little children and blessed them. The parents of these children had brought these children to Jesus so he could touch them. Jesus healed a blind man by touching his eyelids, putting mud on them. But the most dramatic story of Jesus's desire to touch people can be found in Mark 1: 40-45. We read here of a leper who came to Jesus and begged him on his knees, "If you are willing, you can make me clean." The leper did something rather unusual. He did not warn Jesus not to touch him, as he was supposed to do by calling out: "Unclean." The man boldly came to Jesus and knelt in front of him. And then, Jesus did something very unusual. Overwhelmed with compassion, Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man. "I am willing," he said. "Be clean." Jesus touched the leper!

Some of you may want to remind me here that when Jesus touches the leper, it's not just a social sign of affection. Jesus touches the leper to heal him. First of all, there is no danger of exposure for him. And secondly, this touching has nothing to do with experiencing intimacy. But I would dispute that. Yes, when Jesus touched the leper it was a "healing touch" in the truest sense of the word. He performed a miracle. Our touching cannot accomplish that. But I strongly believe that Jesus not only healed the man's leprosy, he also restored his sense of dignity. He treated him as a brother, a child of God. He brought him back into the circle of humanity.

All of this makes me realize how important touch is. At the same time (and here I introduce an element that almost destroys the sanctity of holy touch), you and I know that, although as teachers we stand *in loco parentis*, we must be careful in how we touch our students. The ugly reality of abuse has spoiled this beautiful part of human life for many of us. We end up playing it safe by not touching anyone. Or do we? ☺

# Protecting Teen Welfare

by Bert Witvoet, with a document from Toronto District Christian High School

*Physical, emotional, sexual abuse is almost a given in any school community, Christian or otherwise. According to two high school principals I talked to, most of it occurs in the home. But at times, the abuse has to do with what happens at the school. Most of us know of at least one incident having to do with the sexual abuse of a student by a teacher, principal or custodian. Sometimes the matter ends up in court and, consequently, in the news, especially of late. In the past, abuse was usually covered up. We don't like to talk about it very much because we're always torn between the demands of justice and love. Fortunately we are getting more clarity today about the need to report and to protect the abused.*

*I asked around for a good abuse policy developed by a Christian school. I was directed to the Toronto District Christian High School in Woodbridge, Ontario. I was told that their policy is being favorably considered by other Christian schools in the province. What I will do in this article is highlight the content of this policy, which covers 31 pages and is divided into 12 sections and three appendices. I have selected the main points in each section to give the reader an insight into the contents. After you have read the abbreviated sections and also read Beth Swagman's evaluation (See box item "An Ounce of Prevention ..."), please use this material to discuss abuse policy and prevention in your own school. We would love to hear from you on this important topic. Here are the contents of TDCH's abuse policy:*

Reporting Teen Abuse

## Towards Healthy Relationships: Protecting Teen Welfare, Reporting Teen Abuse (Approved by the Board of Toronto District Christian High School, June 4, 2003)

### Article A: Biblical and Theological Perspectives

*For they will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain...." Isaiah 11:9*

...The Christian school is responsible for becoming a safe community that confronts sin, particularly the sin of abuse. The school seeks to bring healing to its victims and help to its perpetrators; and it consciously works for the prevention of all abuse.

TDCH should strive to help our community to publicly acknowledge that the sin of abuse exists among us; to support efforts that such abuse be addressed promptly so that abused and abusers may

experience the healing power of God's grace; and to take positive steps to make our school safe for all persons.

### Article B: Underlying General Principles

1. The primary responsibility for ensuring the safety and well-being of the teen lies with the parents or guardians.

2. The school has a custodial role in caring for the teen. This is delegated to it by the parents or guardians and is a prime duty of the school.

3. The protection of the teen is paramount. If there is any doubt in the reporting or management of teen abuse, the person should err on the side of

protecting the teen.

4. The state has the authority from God to use the means at its disposal to protect the teen from abuse where necessary.

5. TDCH has a legal duty to cooperate with the state authorities. Furthermore, collaboration, cooperation, and good communication among all the involved professionals is essential for the protection of teens.

6. TDCH must be sensitive to the particular needs of the teen in the reporting and management of teen abuse.

### Article C: Summary of Legal Principles

Every person who performs professional



or official duties with respect to a teen and who has reasonable grounds to suspect physical, sexual, emotional abuse, or neglect to a teen is required by the Child and Family Services Act to report this belief and the information on which it is based as quickly as possible to the Family and Children Service Agencies. Failure to report is contrary to the Act and may result in legal and professional consequences....

#### **Article D: The Purpose of a Teen Abuse Protocol**

1. A *protocol* clarifies and codifies preferred practices. Once adopted by a school, it becomes a school policy. The school's teen abuse protocol specifies the procedures that are to be followed in cases where teen abuse has occurred, is occurring, or is likely to occur, or when suspicions or allegations of such teen abuse arise.

2. The protocol provides general information for the implementation of the Child and Family Services Act or its Regulations, but is not intended to be a substitute for them....

#### **Article E: Protocol for Reporting Suspected Teen Abuse**

...When a teacher or staff member suspects that a teen is a victim of abuse, that staff member shall inform the principal regarding the suspicion and the circumstances, even if the information on which the suspicion is based is considered privileged or confidential. When the suspected abuser is the principal, the staff member may consult with a senior trusted colleague or trusted board member. In this case, take a copy of this protocol along since the person consulted may not be familiar with it....

#### **Article F: Protocol When Complaints Involve Teachers**

1. When students have complaints or charges against teachers, these should be taken seriously by the principal.

a. For allegations involving normal



disciplinary actions by a teacher, the principal shall first consult with the teacher about whether existing discipline policies have been followed.

b. For allegations involving possible sexual or physical abuse by a teacher, the principal shall use discretion in consulting others.

2. When there are reasonable grounds to suspect that a school employee is the alleged abuser, the principal or person suspecting the abuse shall follow the protocol in Article E above and report the suspected abuse.

3. Neither the principal nor the school board is judge or investigator in serious allegations of physical or sexual abuse and must — the administrator being satisfied about the strength of the grounds — leave it to professionals through appropriate

reporting (Children's Aid Society or police)....

#### **Article G: Protocols When Complaints Involve the Principal**

1. When students have complaints or charges of abuse against the principal, these should be taken seriously by the teacher or other person to whom the complaint is made.

2. When there are reasonable grounds to suspect that abuse by the principal has taken place, the teacher or person suspecting the abuse shall follow the protocol in Article E above and report the suspected abuse....

#### **Article H: Records and Confidentiality**

When a teacher identifies or recognizes a situation of concern with respect to a student (a matter for special attention, such as performance or dress), the teacher should make a note in his or her own records and may consult with other staff members; after discussing the matter, the teacher may follow up as warranted....

#### **Article I: What Are Reasonable Grounds?**

"You do not need to be sure that a teen is in need of protection to make a report to a CAS. 'Reasonable grounds' are what an average person, given his or her training, background and experience, exercising normal and honest judgement, would suspect" (Brochure *Reporting Child Abuse and Neglect*, Ontario Ministry of Community and Social Services)....

#### **Article J: Recommendations for Discretionary Areas**

The principal is responsible for the welfare of the teen enrolled in the school during school hours and during school events. This is a custodial power enabling

the principal to take actions to protect the teen's safety and ensure that the school environment remains friendly and supportive for that teen....

#### Article K: Follow-up for the Teen

After the assessment of the abuse allegations has been completed by the authorities, the parents may wish to work with a Christian counselling organization. The treatment may involve:

a. Working on a one-to-one basis with the student or family counselling as well as group involvement;

b. Working with the parents to help them deal with their own feelings related to the abuse as well as learning some ways of

dealing with their child's reactions, feelings, etc., related to the abuse....

#### Article L: Creating a Safe School Environment

TDCH is responsible for being a safe school environment for all teens and adults within its walls. The school can become more safe in several ways: it can lessen the likelihood of abuse happening at school; it can help teens to be more aware of what abuse is and the importance of reporting it; and it can be more sensitive to teens who may be the victims of abuse.

##### 1. Expectations of Staff and Volunteers

a. TDCH has a policy that all teachers of the school must undergo a security check prior to hiring.

b. All bus drivers, school staff, and volunteers that work directly with students are required to have a security check prior to beginning their employment or volunteer service.

c. All staff members must adhere to the Lifestyle and Conduct Policy (See Staff Handbook p.3).

##### 2. Working Conditions

a. All classroom doors have windows that give an unobstructed view into the room or are left open.

b. One-on-one contacts between staff and students should be held in public view.

c. Displays of affection between staff and students can be a natural way of conveying support and encouragement but should be limited to brief and appropriate contact. Any person's sensitivity to such contact or right to refuse such contact must be respected.

##### 3. Training

All teachers and others who work with students will review this document.

##### 4. Curriculum

All Grade 9 students are part of our sexual harassment prevention program which focuses on defining abuse and harassment and provides direction to students if they are victims or witnesses in the school or elsewhere. They are made aware of our school's harassment policy.

### An ounce of prevention ...

by Beth A. Swagman

*I submitted the abuse document entitled "Towards Healthy Relationships," which I had received from the Toronto District Christian High School, to Beth Swagman (swagmanb@crcna.org), director of the Abuse Prevention office in the Christian Reformed Church of North America. I wanted to solicit her comments as to the usefulness of this document. Here is what she wrote. (Editor)*

The committee that put this policy together went through a lot of work, and the school board should feel comfortable that the legal issues of reporting are very thoroughly addressed. But I hope our school and church communities will do more in the future to *prevent* abuse from occurring and not just to address the immediate concern of protecting ourselves legally when it does.

There are 13 pages in the policy section of the document — 12 of the 13 are devoted to reporting requirements. On page 13, four additional areas of concern are crammed onto one page: one point on staff expectations, one point on screening (security check), one point on training, and one point on curriculum for the youth. If your question is whether this policy advances the issues of prevention more than others I have seen, the answer would be no.

In my work with churches, I emphasize more steps of screening and more emphasis on the expectations and boundaries between staff and students. This good document places too little emphasis on training, education and prevention, which could underscore the importance of knowing the dynamics of misconduct that can occur in the school setting.

*The above excerpt of a 31-page report does not, of course, do justice to the material that was produced by staff at the Toronto District Christian High School. Principal Ren Siebenga explained that staff members made use of material produced by the Christian Reformed Church. A full electronic copy of the report can be obtained by emailing Joanne Booy at TDCH: (booy@tdchristian.ca). ☺*



## The Powerpoint and the Glory or Keep your Hams to Yourself

by Jan Kaarsvlam

*Jan Kaarsvlam's first novel, Oh, the Green Fields of Scranton, though never published, has recently been optioned to be a motion picture. Jan has taken a leave of absence from his most recent teaching assignment — fourth grade at the Miami Christian School in Hobart, Delaware — to do some thinking about how to cast the movie. A recent attempt to interest Shelley Duval in the part of Aunt Queegquay was misinterpreted by the star. Jan is happy to report, however, that the casts should be off by May.*

Few things in Bedlam Christian High School looked as out of place as ever-winsome phys. ed. teacher Rex Kane, baton in hand, mounting the dais in the front of the choir room. Before him, his colleagues sat in tiered rows. Behind him stood a screen. To his left rested a projector connected by a knotted umbilical cord to a laptop computer, both on a pull cart.

Resplendent in a lime green running suit and yellow tee shirt, Rex also sported a silk maroon tie dotted with small yellow paisleys around his collarless neck. Half-eye reading glasses perched on the end of his nose. He tapped the baton on the music stand to quiet the assembly.

"You may be wondering about the tie," he said. "Fact is, whenever I address an august bunch like this, I feel insecure. The tie, though merely a piece of fabric, is empowering to my psyche."

Gord Winkle, the shop teacher, sat in the front row. He had a small paper plate mounded with powdery cookies. Frankly, he was a little sad that the eating portion of the meeting was already over, and he was having trouble focusing. He had indeed been wondering about Rex's tie, but mostly he'd been frustrated that it managed to obscure the words printed on Rex's tee shirt. He could swear that the first word was HAM, but he couldn't make out the rest.

Rex continued his presentation. "As you know via Mr. Vanderhaar's memo, I am leading an in-service today partly for your benefit and partly for mine. I need to make such a presentation for my master's program at Kuyper College. After the success of my sectional at the Christian Educators Conference last year, "Coaching: Is there a Difference?", I think Mr. Vanderhaar realized that I was the logical choice. And so I forthwith present some thoughtful talk about physical contact between teachers and students. As a faculty, we have struggled with the issue since Wally Friedman was dismissed last year for sexual abuse."

Chairs creaked as Rex's colleagues shifted uncomfortably in their seats. Some of Wally's friends sat in the back row, their arms folded belligerently across their chests. Though Wally had admitted his culpability last year, they still somehow felt that he

had been treated unjustly when he was dismissed. Cal VanderMeer, whose daughter had been the victim of Friedman's abuse, felt overwhelming sadness at another reminder of his daughter's pain. Others felt confused. And Gord, well, Gord still felt frustrated. Rex's tee shirt, as far as he could make out, said "HAM — Your mother pink cheat." That made no sense even for Rex.

"I will be using power point to help with my presentation," Rex said, "but understand that, like you, I can't abide speakers who stand with their back to the audience. Unlike such poor public speakers, I will keep my face pointed toward you at all times. Take this as a lesson for the next time you have to make a presentation. Still, I like using power point because it gives you a good visual reinforcement of what I'm discussing. So, without further ado...." Here Rex dramatically waved a remote above his head and pushed a button. "I present, *Student-Teacher Relationships: A Full Contact Sport?*"

On the screen behind Rex was a picture of numerous Bedlam students in their p.e. uniforms in the gym. Red rubber balls were sailing through the air. The headline text said, "Unit One: Dodge Ball."

Rex dramatically cleared his throat and the next power point slide bounced onto the screen. It pictured a long-haired professional wrestler in a singlet, snarling at the audience while brandishing a fold-up chair high above his head. The bottom of the slide was emblazoned with these words: "Dodge ball—a game of strength...." Rex began his talk: "The first thing we need to recognize is that in the student-teacher relationship, all the power lies on one side — that of the teacher. This means that teachers need to think carefully about their actions...."

Rex clicked the remote, and the professional wrestler dissolved in a swarm of little boxes, to be replaced by a picture of Rex, capped with a German World War I helmet, hunched over a Stratego board. The text read "... and a game of strategy."

"...and how those actions might utilize their latent power in unhealthy and unwelcome ways." The Stratego picture slid off to the left to be replaced by a picture sliding in from the right which showed Bedlam senior Nelson Schmarm spiking a red rubber ball into the greasy scalp of freshman math team captain David Grose. Underneath this violent image was the caption, "Dodge Ball improves cardio-vascular health."

Schmarm and Grose faded out, replaced by a close-up of Schmarm, who looked surprisingly porcine with the camera so tight. He clutched four balls in his arms, and his face looked panicked. Words at the bottom of the screen read: "Step #1 to success: Manage your balls carefully." Rex leaned forward, encouraged by the stunned yet enrapt looks from his audience. "But, ironically, the teachers who hold all the power often act

defensively, worrying more about themselves than the needs of their students. What does this mean for physical touch in the classroom? Frankly, I think that's obvious, but to make sure you see it for yourself, I'll need a couple of volunteers." Rex pulled a piece of paper that he had taped to the top of the projector down over the lens so that the screen went dark.

Collectively, Bedlam's faculty squirmed, struggling to make clear to Rex that they were not interested in volunteering. Rex smiled invitingly. No hands went up. A minute went by. Still no hands.

"All right then, I'll just pick a couple of people to help me. Gord, would you mind?" Gord Winkle slowly rose from his seat, terrified at the notion of what Rex might make him do, but excited about the prospect of finally figuring out from a close vantage point what it was Rex's tee shirt spelled out. His current best hypothesis was, "HAM — then brother, you stink heat!" Meanwhile, Rex's eyes scanned the collected faculty until they finally stopped. "Red Carpenter and Jane VanderAsch, come on down!" The desperate faculty's applause drowned out Jane's and Red's protests, and soon they found themselves standing next to Bedlam's beefy shop teacher and facing the prospect of having to follow Rex's lead.

"All right," said Rex. "Let's demonstrate proper and improper forms of physical touch. To start with, I've heard a lot of teachers argue that sometimes a student just needs a hug. The hug is innocent. It is meant to show simple maternal or paternal love. Gord and Jane, I'd like you to demonstrate for all of us the kind of affectionate hug that a great uncle might give his favorite niece."

Jane's face looked as though she had just swallowed a bug. In contrast, Gordon grinned, remembering his Great Aunt Irma and how much she smelled like apple fritters. He threw his arms around Jane and held her tight. Jane's arms remained ramrod straight, her face reddened and her lips pursed as Winkle squeezed her. The collected faculty stared in amazement at the awkward display. Winkle, disappointed that Jane simply smelled like talc, let her go. She crossed her arms, turned away from him, and looked ready to scream or cry out of embarrassment. Principal Vanderhaar thought about stepping in to right his ship. Rex, however, seemed oblivious to everyone's discomfort and simply forged ahead.

"Next," he said, "I'll need Gord and Red to help model another common physical touch at schools." Red Carpenter looked



pleadingly at his colleagues, blew a heavy sigh, and stepped forward. The only person smiling in the whole room was Gord, and that was because he had finally caught a clean peek of Rex's shirt. It read: "HAM — the other pink meat!" Gord's stomach rumbled as he quickly scanned his dietary data to discover the first pink meat. His thoughts were cut short by Rex's impossible request.

"Okay, Gord, a lot of times if you go to different sporting events, you'll see the coach pat his player on the butt while he's rounding a base or leaving a huddle. Would you, with the help of Red, please demonstrate the proper way for a coach to pat his player's butt?"

"Nope," Red said, waving his arms. Without looking at Rex, Gord, or anyone else he began his way across to room toward the door. "There's no way anyone's touching my butt. You're crazy, Rex. You know that? Crazy!"

"Maybe," said Rex, "maybe I am. But I think we've demonstrated exactly what I wanted to get across to you." He stepped forward, taking the reading glasses off his nose and pulling the tie from his neck. And for the first time in anyone's recollection, Rex both looked and sounded completely sane and completely sincere.

"Look, Jane, Gord, and Red are all upset. And over what? A little hug? A little pat on the butt? Except those touches aren't little. In this room, I've had the power, and I used it to force physical contact that was not really welcome. Folks, we are in that position everyday. And that hug or backrub or swat on the fanny that you think is affirming may really be hurting someone. You all know that I'm single. But if I were a parent, I don't think I'd be sending my kids to school hoping that teachers feel there's a need or desire for them to be always touching my children. The student-teacher relationship ought to be distinguished by mutual respect and an appropriate distance."

Rex flipped up the piece of paper that covered the lens and clicked the remote one last time. A final picture grew out of a starburst. It was a picture of a ball caroming off Nelson Schmarm's face. The caption underneath it read, "Dodgeball isn't a game. It hurts. There are plenty of non-contact sports that are just as fun. Like ping-pong."

As the faculty stood to leave, Cal VanderMeer chuckled to himself. Rex was either the best example of how God really can speak through anyone at any time, or the smartest teacher Cal had ever known. ©



# Christian Schools as Communities of Gratitude

by Quentin J. Schultze

*Dr. Schultze is the Arthur H. DeKruyter Chair in Faith and Communication at Calvin College and author of the recent book Here I Am: Now What on Earth Should I Be Doing? (Baker), from which the themes of this essay are borrowed. He delivered an early version of this essay at the Christian Schools International leadership convention in Ottawa, Ontario, in July 2005, and would like to thank the attendees for their warm hospitality.*

A few years ago the Calvin College faculty redesigned the “core” curriculum, which serves as our foundation for Christian liberal arts education. One of the most important changes was requiring that core courses cultivate virtues such as patience, wisdom, and courage. Not long after we had approved the new core, a faculty member noticed that we had forgotten one critically important virtue: gratefulness. This was particularly ironic because one of the college’s confessional documents, the Heidelberg Catechism, highlights gratitude to God as the prime motive for Christian service. A Christians’ hard work is not meant to be an end in itself, but a joyful response to the message of salvation.

“Rejoice in the Lord always,” says the Apostle Paul (Phil. 4:4). He adds that believers should even offer supplications with thanksgiving. Augustine said that a Christian should be an alleluia from head to toe — a living expression of gratitude.

## Being thankful educators

Every person involved in education — all teachers, administrators, students, parents, and other staff — live somewhere along a scale between thankfulness and thanklessness. On one end of the scale is a grateful life marked by joy and delight even in the face of trials. On the other end are

signs of ingratitude, such as grumbling, impatience, and pride.

Gratitude is central to the Gospel, and, therefore, to Christian education. The Gospel is a gift, offered to us in grace. Our right response, thankfulness, is perhaps the principal virtue for Christian educational community. When we say that “all of life is worship,” we mean partly that all of life is a grateful response to God, who has initiated and upholds our salvation both as individuals and as members of covenant communities.

Moreover, gratitude is a way of life that captures others’ hearts — it is inherently

*“Although I believe in total depravity, I was still surprised to read all of the nasty grumbling, criticism and sarcasm.”*

evangelistic. We all are attracted to grateful people. We humans want to know why others are thankful. We desire to be around grateful persons. At school, we prefer to work with grateful colleagues, to teach appreciative students, to be served by grateful administrators, and to interact with thankful parents. Why? Probably because we implicitly see in them a reflection of God’s grace.

Ungrateful persons in our schools are “downers.” They look downward to the parched earth rather than up to the living waters of heaven for their attitudinal bearings in life. Their sick hearts lead them to be critical of others as a way of making

themselves feel better. Whereas thankful teachers build up colleagues and students, ungrateful ones tend to blame others for their downcast spirits. The section of Scripture before Paul’s command to be grateful even suggests that ungrateful people are likely to be gossipers.

## Schools imitate society

Unfortunately, many of us educators are losing this spirit of gratitude. We are becoming thankless, just like the wider communities we inhabit and the conflict-riddled media we consume. Talk shows on radio and TV are sliding into verbal slugfests devoid of mutual respect, let alone hope and joy. Letters-to-the-editor sections of papers display ample criticism but hardly express any gratitude. To turn a well-worn phrase, being critical rather than appreciative has become politically correct.

Public exchanges of goods and services rarely elicit the traditional expression, “My pleasure.” Instead, people now reply, “No problem.” Do people no longer find pleasure in serving others? Are they not grateful for the opportunity to do so? Or are all market exchanges — even tuition payments — becoming purely economic transactions?

At the urging of a colleague who sought my opinion, I visited some of the Web sites that allow students to post anonymous comments about their teachers. Although I believe in total depravity, I was still surprised to read all of the nasty grumbling, criticism, and sarcasm. The few positive postings usually had to do with a teacher’s good looks, not his or her pedagogical competence or virtuous demeanor.

## Hidden opportunities

Of course there are all kinds of situations and especially relationships that can wear us down and rob us of gratefulness. I spent more than half of my life being angry about

the way my parents “mis-raised” me. I, too, had my share of teachers and administrators who lacked skill and compassion; some of them hurt me deeply during elementary school.

But how should we respond to unruly students, overly demanding parents, unsupportive churches, and unmotivated colleagues? Should we allow ourselves to become bitter, cynical people? Should we join the chorus of nay-sayers? We know that trying times are vehicles that God uses to forge character, including faithfulness. A school’s troubles are hidden opportunities for building a community of gratitude in which people turn gratefully to God and one another.

In his book *On Free Choice of the Will*, Augustine chides those who are quick to make judgments and slow to give thanks. We “students” of God’s world should be “like explorers who rejoice in what [we] have discovered, not like inspectors who have to put things right,” he warns (II, 12).

As strange as it sounds, schools that are coasting along successfully have to watch out for emerging indifference; they can either maintain a spirit of gratitude or take their achievements for granted — as if they earned it on their own. Troubled schools, on the other hand, can either erode through internal conflict or come together in a grateful spirit of hope. When schools embrace God’s promises instead of their own efforts, they defy society’s attitude of “no problem.” They discover pleasure in God’s grace.

### Remembering our saints

When I speak at a Christian school, I am invariably reminded of all of the people who sacrificed on behalf of that educational community. I imagine the many people who banded together voluntarily to make the school a living, serving institution. I even think about parents and teachers and

pastors who were more committed to Christian education than to their own social mobility. Recently, I spoke at a school convocation where four generations of families were present. How many social institutions in society could claim such cross-generational fidelity? What a reason to rejoice!

Every one of our schools has its own legacy of selfless service. The deceased saints who maintained this legacy were

*“I sometimes get a bit irritated with Paul’s upbeat attitude. I wonder if he was Pollyannaish.”*

themselves sometimes frustrated, fearful, and even ungrateful. But they persevered in faith, recognizing what God could do through them, rather than letting themselves be torn apart or torn down by what they were not able to accomplish. Every Christian school is a story about how God has transformed human weakness into communal strength. Each time a problem was solved, unity restored, and the community served, the school’s many constituencies had ample reasons to be filled with gratitude.

Recalling such blessed times keeps a school’s feet humbly on the ground and its gaze toward heaven. Our schools need to recall repeatedly what they are most thankful for — both the everyday mercies and God’s eternal promises. And we need to retell these stories to each generation, giving God the glory while thanking those who have gone before us.

I would like to encourage you personally, and your school collectively, to remember the many things for which you should be grateful. Periodically make a list, file it with other historical reminders, and use these materials to tell your own stories of how God has blessed you in your weakness as well as your strength. Remember these stories during annual and special dedications, and when you perform convocations and commencements. This could be one of the most important “to do” lists that your school ever makes, since it reflects God’s own “done that” list!

### Live each day thankfully

Moreover, we need to monitor the state of our own souls. When we arise, before the day sweeps us into busyness, we ought first to thank God for another opportunity to serve. If you need to, turn off the clock radio. Be still for a moment. Breathe in and out slowly a few times. Remind yourself that God has given you another day of life! You are a living miracle, a divine gift.

Then, during the day, thank God silently, with a smile, for every good thing that comes your way. For safety in the car trip to work or back home. For a job. For a cup of coffee or tea, or a glass of fresh, cool water. For chocolate — in moderation, of course! For kind words from others. For every interested and motivated student. For problem students in whom God’s grace can be manifested! For an administrator who serves, for the secretarial and janitorial staff, and so much more. For parents who pray for you and your school. For all of those who volunteer.

This might seem to be overdoing gratitude. But think about Paul, who somehow thanked God for all things and in all places. I sometimes get a bit irritated with Paul’s upbeat attitude. I wonder if he was Pollyannaish. I would like to see more



of the questioning Job in Paul. But Paul was not being falsely or artificially grateful. He was simply (not simplistically) captivated by God's mercy in his own life. Looking up to heaven, he realized that God did what he could not do for himself. Paul was seduced by God's love in Christ Jesus. So when Paul became the church's first teacher-theologian, he preached grace — which is another way of saying that he taught the reason for gratefulness. More than that, he modeled gratitude. Even in his most

critical letters to unfaithful churches, he thanked God for such broken brothers and sisters, and he called them back to gratitude as well.

### Interruptions of grace

A Christian school is many things, but among them is a community of appreciation. Our primary spirit should be gratitude, leading us to give thanks to others in return for what God has done, is doing, and has promised to accomplish through

his Son and Spirit. Living in the light of the Gospel, and exemplifying the Fruits of the Spirit, a Christian school educates *with*, *in*, and *for* gratitude.

Even daily interruptions thereby become opportunities for putting the Gospel into heartfelt action. After all, God interrupted humankind with the gift of Jesus Christ. God interrupts all of us, calling us out of our spiritual sleep and into loving engagement with his world. He reminds us, via every gift of each good thing, that once we were dead, but now we are alive.

Grace is uncontrollably bursting forth all around us and within us. And even daily, annual, and lifelong problems are fertile ground for such grace. Which of us can predict the next low-achiever that will rise to the challenges? Which of us dares to claim that we can teach or learn apart from God's grace? Who among us believes that we can "save" Christian education from the problems that plague some of our schools and churches? These difficulties are mere interruptions, calling us to remember and believe who God is, who we are, and why we Christian educators should rejoice always.

In a world where so many people and institutions are filled with ungratefulness, at a time when cynicism sinks our hearts and clouds our minds, during an age when so many people demand more and give less, we Christian educators have a special opportunity to fill our hearts and schools with a very different message of hope.

So let's thank one another, and those who have gone before us in Christian education, and especially our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, who is the very foundation of our educational enterprise. Let's be walking, talking, remembering, rejoicing followers of the God of grace. If we heed this call, we shall become spiritually, as well as educationally, healthier communities that stand out as bright beacons of shalom in a broken world. ☪

## Atheism Was Taught in Schools

by Paul Theule

*Paul Theule is principal of Rochester Christian School in Rochester, New York.*

After our work in Lithuania this summer, Laurie and I traveled by bus to Riga, the capital of Latvia. Because this Baltic nation shares much history with Lithuania (and Estonia), including the occupation by the Soviet Union in 1940, then Nazi Germany, and then the Soviets again, we visited the Museum of the Occupation of Latvia. The two- to three-hour study provided a unique experience.

In the section of the museum entitled "Atheism and Repression of Religion," one particular line in the exhibit stood out: "Atheism was taught in schools." How awful! How repressive! My response came from my cultural and religious training, especially coming out of the Cold War. The official doctrine and policy of the Soviet Union was to teach atheistic Communism, and the schools taught it well.

I quickly remembered that just two days earlier my students at Lithuania Christian College had, at the end of our intensive course, smothered me with warm accolades, thanking me for teaching them and consistently commenting, "This is the best class we've ever had. We've never been taught like this."

Now, I like warm fuzzies as much as anyone else, but this museum exhibit helped me put their comments in context. The worldview presented and explored in our study of *Hamlet* and the human dilemma stood in stark and refreshing contrast to the teaching the students have encountered all their lives. Even today that teaching flourishes as most of the current teachers are just carry-overs from the Communist days, and these veterans have taught new teachers. All the instruction experienced by my students had been presented from an atheistic perspective. Critical thinking was not allowed. All they got was the straight Party line.

While we North Americans may consider the wrong of teaching from an atheistic perspective, we must be honest here at home. Which worldview is mandated by law in American public schools? Isn't it atheistic materialism holding hands with relativism? "Atheism was taught in schools" will be the legacy of America as well.



Nancy Knol  
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## Portrait of a Righteous Man

It has been a hard year so far. There are several reasons for that, but the biggest centers around a great loss in our school community. Our principal, Jim Stapert, was called home very suddenly on September 26, 2005. It was his plan to retire at the semester break, and his death seemed premature, even unfair in that light. After working for so many years as teacher and principal in our school system, he — and all of us who loved him — was hoping for a well-earned rest, for time without phone calls and meetings and obligations.

One of our teachers, Jim Krosschell, spoke about Jim Stapert at the 25th anniversary of his appointment as principal, and at a recent memorial chapel he revisited those words by sharing them with the student body. It was an eloquent, truthful tribute, and with his permission, I share it now with you:

*I said two things to Mr. Stapert. The first was on behalf of all of us. Mr. Stapert was our boss. In today's world, it is common for the boss to be fodder for comments around the coffee cup or lunch table. It is not unusual for any and all complaints about an employee's work environment to be laid at the feet of the boss. At Grand Rapids Christian High School, that was not the case. It may be difficult to imagine this in today's world, but everyone who had Mr. Stapert as their boss is respectful, appreciative, and complimentary of him, and around our coffee cups and lunch tables, we said that. Given a choice, we would choose Mr. Stapert as our boss. It would be an easy decision.*

*My second comment was a personal one. It is clear to me that being in the position of principal of Grand Rapids Christian High School could bring you a degree of notoriety and status. It has become clear to me that Mr. Stapert was uncomfortable with that aspect of his position, and he did not enjoy the moments when the spotlight was on him. He viewed his position here as a place to serve others. He functioned in his position as a servant to teachers and staff, doing what he could to make our work easier and better. He worked tirelessly to create what he described as a platform or environment where you, the students, could achieve and excel. He wanted you to be more knowledgeable, learned, and wise. His choice was to have you understand more, and have a better Christian perspective. He tried to find ways to*

*create a setting, our school, where you could develop a deeper and wider relationship with God. His delight was when the spotlight was on you. When you struggled he may have been at his best. He wanted you to feel forgiven and to retain a sense of belonging. He measured his success through your success. You were why he did what he did.*

*I thank God for the time I could spend in this school benefiting from teaching in the environment he worked so hard to create. I will always remember it, and consider it to be one of my life's significant blessings. I thank God for the life of Jim Stapert.*



Jim had a column in the *Home Bulletin* called "Just in the Family." It was a place where his skill as a writer and his wisdom as a leader and his faith as a Christian all came shining through. In one of those columns he wrote about how important fresh starts are. He concluded by saying, "Remember that right in the middle of human history — in a stable manger, on a cross, and by an empty tomb — God Almighty started over with us. Starting over can be a godly thing

to do."

And now, we as a school community are compelled to make such a fresh start, and our new principal has already shown us that he takes the responsibility and challenge of this position very seriously. We move on because we must. But Jim has left his mark. His legacy is the testimony of a man who was, like Atticus Finch from the beloved novel *To Kill a Mockingbird*, "the same in his house as he is on the public streets." A humble, righteous man, who lived to serve God's people and point us all in God's direction. What greater praise could any of us hope for? ☺



## Hands, Hands and College Education

*Clarence Joldersma (cjolders@calvin.edu) professor of education at Calvin College, Grand Rapids, MI., asked the Dot Edu panel to respond to the question that panelist Agnes Fisher came up with in the following letter:*

January 9, 2006

Hi All:

"I spoke with a grandmother of one of our former students this week. She was excited to inform me that her grandson, who "hated" school and did not do well in academics, is now enrolled in a technical college, where he learns how to repair cars. He's getting a 4.0 average. He is excited about his schooling and thrilled to be getting such wonderful grades. All this to illustrate a point we already know; that is, we do not all have the same gifts. To teach only for the college-bound student on the Christian high school level might be something to look at and correct. Our local secular college teaches remedial classes on the freshman level. One of my friends who teaches there is ready to quit because he finds he must lower his standards more and more to accommodate the students who really, in his learned estimation, should not be there." An important question that arises out of this is: Do all students have the right to go to college or university for a bachelor's degree? Should Christian elementary and secondary schools be set up in such a way that all students have a chance to be prepared for post-secondary university-level education?



Agnes Fisher

Agnes

January 10, 2006

Agnes:

You are raising several issues, aren't you? What paths to a Christianity-infused vocation, besides the Christian-college path, should we as a Christian community be developing and supporting? Should we as a Christian community be supporting our families for both Christian K-12 "day school" and Christian college education? Is college education becoming what high school education once was, and should we be thinking K-16 education as the usual educational path for our children? If so, what implications does this have for the focus of our school curriculum, our programs? What criteria should we be using to advise our children about their post high school plans? Should



Lois Brink

most adolescents be directed towards college or towards vocational training with the option of college later? If college education is viewed primarily as the path to good jobs, does parent responsibility include financing this path? How does financing a college education involve caving into our economic-based culture without discernment?

What help can we get in sorting out the above? I suggest we might want to begin with the 2004 Synod study report of my denomination (the Christian Reformed Church) on Christian day schools to clarify our Christian school's educational goals and responsibilities: Examine the mission and vision statements for your school and your church to see where they intersect; Look at the context as well as content of Scripture for discernment on economic issues and community responsibilities; Talk among ourselves about educational assumptions which we make and concerns that we share; Re-examine our personal family and Christian community commitments and expectations about financing Christian education.

Have I muddled the water by asking all these questions?

Lois

January 11, 2006

Lois and Agnes:

Yes, there are a few questions here. One is whether the Christian high schools should be doing a better job of preparing students who want to go directly into the workforce, and the other main question is whether colleges are really for everyone.

I will address the second one in part. I do think we need to get away from the notion that college is only for professionals. I do believe that Christian colleges should create two year programs to meet the needs of students who don't want to be teachers, social workers, or other professionals.

I believe the core foundational courses at a Christian college are important for all young Christian people setting out on their life's journey. Could we create programs that build on these foundational courses with practical courses that teach specific skills with a decidedly Christian perspective?

We may even want to collaborate with local technical colleges



Pam Adams



Clarence Joldersma

to prepare Christian licensed practical nurses, computer technicians, and daycare providers. Will this water down the college curriculum? Well, does it water down the elementary or secondary curriculum to have varied learners in these setting? I don't think so. It adds richness and complexity to the experience. While the teaching might be more challenging, I would say the students are worth it.

Pam

## January 15, 2006

Hi all:

My actual intent initially was to address the issue of the many and varied gifts we all have and that we do not always do justice to that fact in our schools. I would suggest that Christian schools ought to provide Christian education to prepare students for jobs that do not require a college degree, such as skills as mechanics, plumbers, landscape designers and other hands-on jobs. Perhaps we need a special track of classes based on technical (skills) training.

Agnes

## January 16, 2006

Agnes:

I agree with you that we should acknowledge the gifts, multiple intelligences, creativity and talents of each of our students and prepare them for any vocation that fits them. My focus would be on how well we prepare our students to actually go out into the workplace and bloom where they are planted. How can they, as ambassadors of Christ, bless their workplace? How can they build God-honoring relationships with their colleagues? How are they using their God-given gifts in any work situation? How can their work become their worship? How can they stand up for the cause of Christ in a godless and secular society? If they learn to walk with God in all areas and situations of life during their time in our Christian schools, they will be ready to tackle any workplace, whether that be a college, university, trade school or a job at MacDonald's.



Johanna Campbell

Johanna

## January 17, 2006

Hi all:

I think the reason why these two points become entangled has to do with the fact that our society has not traditionally valued those who work with their hands in the same way as those who work with their "heads." There is some old dualist hangover happening here (and I am certainly not suggesting that those working with their hands don't use their heads!). So the questions Pam is asking really are two sides of the same coin: "Isn't everyone entitled to knowing that they are "valued" (which in our society often requires a diploma or degree)?" "Don't we Christians value everyone regardless of the type of gifting God has extended to them?" I suspect the answer is "Yes!" but we're just now figuring out what that means for our schools...

Tony



Tony Kamphuis

## The panel consists of:

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

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

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

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



# Leading From the Inside

by Bruce Hekman

Dr. Bruce Hekman ([brucehekman@sbcglobal.net](mailto:brucehekman@sbcglobal.net)) retired as the Superintendent of the Kalamazoo Christian Schools three years ago. Since then he has been an adjunct professor of education at both Covenant and Calvin Colleges.

The rumors had been circulating for weeks: some students were smoking pot during school hours. Persistent sleuthing finally produced results: five students spotted in a stake-out, calmly smoking pot at lunchtime near one of the back doors of the building. Time to confront, search the lockers, empty pockets. Denials all around, but evidence to confirm that it wasn't cigarettes — a marijuana pipe, a small bag of marijuana supports the direct observations with binoculars from a cold shed at the back of the property.

Calls to parents follow, with lots of denial and anger. A meeting with the parents produces more of the same: lies from kids, anger from parents who are defending their children. It's time to exercise judgment. We favor expulsion and call the board together. In the face of the undeniable evidence and the unwavering lies from the five students the board's decision is swift: immediate expulsion.

The above account shows school administration in crisis mode as they deal with needy kids and dysfunctional families. The stress is enormous and sleep is scarce. It's heartbreaking to expel any student, to say nothing of expelling five of them in April. It's a small consolation that a month later, one of the students confesses to his parents and they arrange for drug counseling. The others eventually admit their guilt too, but none come to ask forgiveness for their lies, and no parent returns to ask forgiveness for the abuse heaped upon us when they were defending their child's innocence. Nothing we ever

learned in school prepared us to play the roles of detective, prosecuting attorney, judge, social worker and family counselor.

## Spiritual strength

How can those called to leadership be faithful to their calling in the face of the difficulties of the position? How can leaders become strong persons?

In Jeremiah 17: 7-8 we find this advice: "Blessed are those who trust in the Lord, whose confidence is in him. They will be like a tree planted by the water that sends out its roots by the stream. It does not fear when heat comes; its leaves are always green. It has no worries in a year of drought and never fails to bear fruit."

In this passage, we find the first and most fundamental requirement for leadership:

*"Obedience is the key virtue of the Christian life, just as pride is the principal vice."*

spiritual strength. It's leadership from the inside. The list of leaders in the Bible bears out this observation: Moses, Abraham, David, Daniel, Nehemiah, Paul and other unnamed saints listed in Hebrews 11 all faced enormous challenges with the grace and confidence gained by a very active and close relationship with their Lord and their God. Wesley Granberg-Michaelson, in his book *Leadership From Inside Out* declares, "Leaders who can be trusted to guide the evolution of institutions into the future will be those who lead well-examined lives, who have recovered spiritual practices that liberate them from the power of

compulsions and free their energy for outward service." (p. 17)

## Training rules

In this article I add my voice to others who encourage leaders to know themselves through the practice of spiritual disciplines (Richard Foster, John Ortberg, and Stephen Covey, among others.) One definition of leadership describes a leader as a person who influences people to accomplish a purpose. Leaders who have a deep personal faith and commitment to growing in that faith will experience the riches of God's blessing and grace, even in the face of the most daunting circumstances.

The first discipline is obedience, in which we surrender ourselves to God as perhaps reluctant but willing servants. By our obedience to the ways of God we come to know the heart of God. God came to Abram and said, "Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you." (Gen. 12:1) Abram's obedience led to God's rich blessing, even though Abram had to wait for years to begin to see the fulfillment of God's promises to him. Moses, the reluctant shepherd, was called by God to leave the desert to bring God's people out of bondage in Egypt. Nehemiah remembers God's promise, "If you are unfaithful, I will scatter you among the nations, but if you return to me and obey my commands, then even if your exiled people are at the furthest horizon, I will gather them from there and bring them to the place I have chosen as a dwelling for my name." (Neh. 1: 8-9)

Obedience is the key virtue of the Christian life, just as pride is the principal vice. Nehemiah's first response to the news about the sad condition of Jerusalem is to turn to God in a prayer of confession and obedience. Throughout the story of David, that great leader of Israel, we read the

refrains, "... and David sought the face of the Lord," and "In my distress I called to the Lord." In these and many other examples in scripture and history, great leaders seek the kingdom of God first, through their faithful obedience to the will of God.

### No baggage

The second discipline is to learn to travel light, the need to lead an uncluttered life. In Mark 6:7-11 Jesus sends out his disciples. With "no bread, no bag, no money in your belts," they were traveling much lighter than most of us would ever consider. But the principle found here and in Hebrews 12: 1, 2 is an important discipline for leaders today. "...let us throw off everything that entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us." Nehemiah traveled from Babylon to Jerusalem with fully loaded U-Haul camels, but his vision for restoring the dignity of God's name by rebuilding the wall around the city of Jerusalem is a model of persistence and perseverance in the face of all kinds of threats and distractions from enemies outside and inside the community of exiles.

The grace to keep the vision focused and uncluttered can be given only by our submission to God. Richard Foster, in his book *Celebration of Discipline: the Path to Spiritual Growth*, observes, "The obsession to demand that things go the way we want them to go is one of the greatest bondages in human society today. People will spend weeks, months, and even years in a perpetual stew because some little thing did not go as they wished. They will fuss and fume. They will get mad about it. They will act as if their very life hangs on the issue. In the

discipline of submission we are released to drop the matter, to forget it. Frankly, most things in life are not nearly so important as we think they are." (p.97)

### Spiritual retreat

Howard Hendricks has argued that every leader needs to spend 10 to 15 percent of his or her time alone, thinking, reading,

praying, in order to sort their priorities, to learn the ways of prayer, and to be filled with a close walk with God. As a new teacher I was reminded by my mentor that "you can't pour anything out of an empty pot." Servant leaders who pour themselves out to others day after day need to be refilled. It's the discipline of abounding and abiding: finding a balance between isolation and involvement. No one can lead with an empty spirit. Wise leaders schedule time away, time alone, time with a spiritual mentor. How else can leaders be kind, wise, joyful, fair, patient, just, encouraging, visionary, creative?

Nehemiah spent four months preparing himself in mind and spirit to accept the role to which he was called.

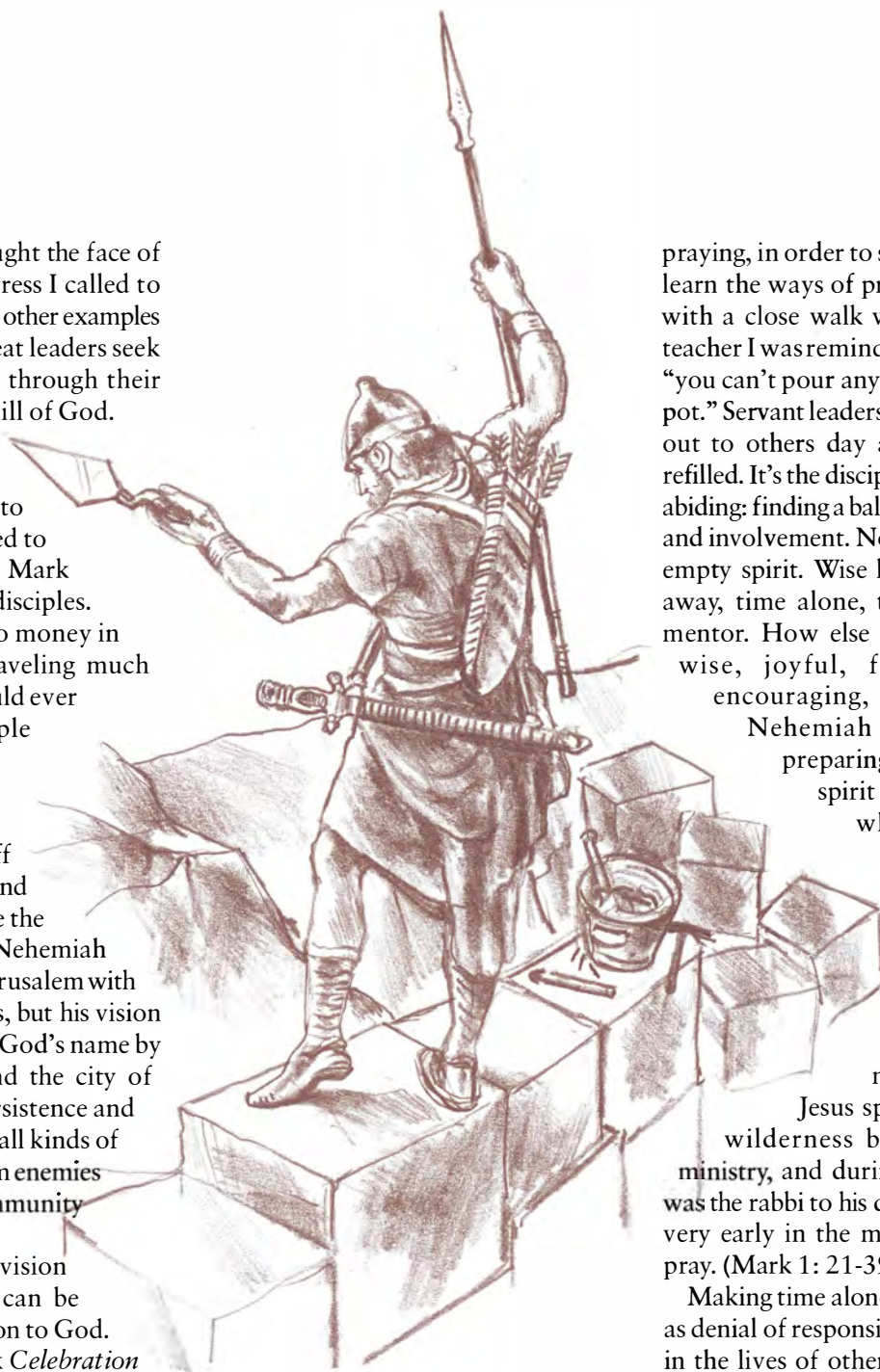
Moses spent forty years in the desert, practicing his leadership skills on sheep and meeting with God.

Jesus spent forty days in the wilderness before he began his ministry, and during the three years he was the rabbi to his disciples regularly rose very early in the morning to go off and pray. (Mark 1: 21-39)

Making time alone should never be seen as denial of responsibility for involvement in the lives of others. Time alone equips leaders spiritually and intellectually to be effective, to think clearly, to put things into perspective, to be spiritually restored.

### Lowly spirit

No one can grow, however, without the fourth discipline of humility and teachable spirit. When we stand before our God we remember who we are. Isaiah met God and responded, "Woe is me! I am ruined! For I





am a man of unclean lips and live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the Lord Almighty.” (Is. 6:5) Job encountered the power of God and reflected, “Surely I spoke of things I did not understand, things too wonderful for me to know.... My ears had heard of you but now my eyes have seen you. Therefore I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes.” (Job 42, 3, 5-6)

We need to remember that, as servants of God, we don’t own anything. We take our instructions from the Master, who uses his servants as managers and stewards of what he has placed in our care. We need to be reminded that “we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us.” (II Corinthians 4:7) Occasionally, we need to have our eyes opened to see God, just as Elisha’s servant did in II Kings 6:8-17. When we see God in our circumstances we share Elisha’s assurance, “don’t be afraid.... Those who are with us are more than those who are with them.”

One of the practical consequences of a life of humility and teachability is the willingness of people to become leaders. How did Nehemiah know that he should become a leader? He heard God’s call and obeyed. How did he prepare himself? We know that he took some time to get ready and to think through what needed to be done. I’d like to think he found models and mentors in God’s Word and in the government he served in Babylon. Unlike so many of today’s high profile CEOs, biblically humble leaders forego privileges to take responsibility. Nehemiah models this behavior and refuses to play the power and privilege games the world’s leaders play (See Nehemiah 5:14-19).

### God’s plan

Humility and teachability are the keys to the fifth discipline: vision. For the

Christian, vision for the way to be lived may be defined as the ability to articulate a broad, deep understanding of the self in relationship to God, the ministry to which we have been called and the currents of culture in which we live. Our vision for life is based on a set of biblical values to which we are deeply committed. Vision means knowing the destination of our lives. Vision is the expression of our faith in action, including a broad perspective of God’s plan and purpose and more focused

*“No one can lead with  
an empty spirit.”*

application to a current situation. Vision is a way of seeing events and issues in the context of God’s plan for his people.

Nehemiah articulates his vision in the first chapter. In his prayer to God, no mention is made of rebuilding a wall. The wall is only one goal that is part of a larger, broader vision and purpose that Nehemiah understood because he was a servant of God, who learned the ways of God through his obedience. Leadership requires the ability to articulate both a broad Christian world view and more specific applications of that view, so that the community is of one mind and heart in working together to see the vision realized. Nehemiah was able to harness the unskilled, discouraged remnant in Jerusalem by articulating and by modeling a consistent vision of the way life is to be lived.

Vision can come only to those who have a close, humble walk with God. Proverbs reminds us that wisdom is a gift from God, that it comes to those who “cry aloud for understanding,” and “search for it as for hidden treasure.” (Proverbs 2: 3, 4)

### Inevitable criticisms

With the responsibility of leadership comes suffering, a discipline every aspiring leader would do well to remember. Christian leaders who walk in the dust of their rabbi, Jesus, learn endurance and the ability to handle criticism and stress in difficult circumstances. The apostle Paul describes the life of a leader under pressure in II Corinthians 4:8. “We were hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed.”

Criticism is the inevitable consequence of leadership. The discouragement that can result can become leukemia of the spirit for the individual and for the community — a deadly disease if it takes hold. Peter offers good advice for all victims of criticism. Loosely paraphrased, Peter says, “Don’t complain if you’ve done something wrong and are criticized for it, because you deserve it. If your conscience is clear, and you can stand before God as innocent of wrongdoing in any way, then there will be stars in your crown for suffering in the cause of what is good and right.”

We have much to learn from our critics, and our ability as leaders will be enhanced by our willingness to listen and learn when we make mistakes. Nehemiah had his share of critics right from the beginning of the wall-building project. Some of the criticism came from local leaders whose power was threatened by this newcomer. These enemies began with mockery and escalated their attacks as Nehemiah showed his resolve under threats of death, so that workers on the wall were forced to carry weapons in one hand while doing their wall building with the other. Nehemiah faced much more subtle criticism from the very people he was trying to lead, and sometimes had to stop to settle the problems that threatened to derail the project.

Every leader would be well served by mounting these words where they can be seen every day: "Do not pray for an easy life. Pray to be a strong person."

### Always celebrate

One of the mysteries of God's relationship with the people he created is that he chose ordinary human beings to be his ambassadors. All leaders are "clay pots" as the apostle Paul calls himself in II Corinthians 4:7. He begins this chapter by saying, "Since through God's mercy we have this ministry, we do not lose heart." We know from the testimony of Peter and Paul in Acts 4:12 that ordinary people can have extraordinary courage when they walk closely with Jesus. With the great commission Christ gave his church came his promise, "and surely I will be with you always, to the very end of the age" (Matthew 28:20b). The end of the story of Joseph in Genesis 50 testifies to God's ability to use the evil intentions of Joseph's brothers for good.

John Ortberg, in his book *The Life You've Always Wanted*, calls this "the practice of celebration." Nehemiah said to his grieving congregation, "This day is holy to the Lord your God; do not mourn or weep.... Go your way, eat the fat and drink sweet wine and send portions of them to those for whom nothing is prepared, for this day is holy to the Lord; and do not be grieved, for the joy of the Lord is your strength." Ortberg writes that joyfulness is a learned skill, a spiritual discipline of celebration.

### Defiant joy

When we celebrate we exercise our ability to see and feel goodness in the simplest gifts of God and our capacity for joy increases. Ortberg reminds us that "One test of authentic joy is its compatibility with pain. Joy in this world is always joy 'in spite of' something. Joy is, as Karl Barth

put it, 'a defiant nevertheless' set at a full stop against bitterness and resentment." (p. 73)

"This is the day the Lord has made [not yesterday, not tomorrow]. Let us rejoice and be glad in it." (Psalm 118: 24)

When the mantle of leadership was passed from Moses to Joshua, God encouraged his fragile community with these words, "Be strong and courageous, because you will lead these people to inherit the land I swore to their forefathers to give them." (Joshua 1:9) When we lead in God's strength, working out his vision for life, we lead and follow in hope. With a strong spiritual foundation leaders have nothing to fear and can expect a front row seat as God works in the community. For Nehemiah, the completion of the wall was a significant leadership achievement. But the real blessing came to that community when the prophet Ezra began to read the long-dormant scriptures and a deep spiritual revival took hold among the remnant of God's people.

The call to leadership can be a daunting challenge, but an amazing blessing as well when we look inside and practice the spiritual disciplines that can make us strong persons. God's advice to Joshua is good advice today. "Be strong and very courageous. Be careful to obey all the law my servant Moses gave you; do not turn from it to the right or to the left, that you may be successful wherever you go. Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful. Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be terrified; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go." (Joshua 1: 5-9) ☞

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### FACULTY OPENINGS

Calvin College, one of the largest Christian colleges in North America, is internationally recognized as a center of faith-anchored liberal arts teaching and scholarship. The college is seeking applications for openings beginning September 2006 in the following departments:

Art History	Mathematics and
Organic Chemistry	Statistics (2)
Communication Arts	Music
and Sciences (4)	Nursing (2)
Economics and	Physics and
Business (2)	Astronomy
Education (2)	Political Science
Engineering	Student Academic
English	Services
Geology	• Basic English
Germanic Languages	• Basic Mathematics
HPERDS	

Calvin College seeks faculty members who affirm the Christian faith as expressed by the Reformed confessions and who have academic and personal qualifications for teaching and scholarship. Applications from ethnic minorities are strongly encouraged. Interested persons or persons who wish to make nominations should correspond with the Provost's Office or the respective department chair. Further specifics are posted on the college website:

[http://www.calvin.edu/  
admin/provost/open/index.htm](http://www.calvin.edu/admin/provost/open/index.htm)

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# LEAP OF FAITH

by Shereen D. Vande Werken

*Shereen Vande Werken(sdv2@calvin.edu) is in her senior year as an Elementary Education major at Calvin College in Grand Rapids, Michigan. In this story, she recounts her experience as a tutor swimming with 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> graders. Shereen hails from Highland, Indiana.*

Children tumble out of the school bus and swarm the steps of the PE building. I huddle near the others from the Education 326 class, peering at the wiggling throng of fourth- and fifth-graders. We usually don't see the children like this. We see them at their school, where we tutor them weekly in reading and writing. Today is a special treat for them: we're going swimming.

Swimming with their college tutors is one of the highlights of the children's school year, Professor Post told us; it brings them great joy. At that declaration, silence smothered our classroom. Each of us looked around, wondering who would be brave enough to give up a morning of their reading recess and appear in a bathing suit before hoards of fourth- and fifth-grade students.

Here I am. I turn my eyes to the children. Is this really worth it? I hope so. I say a quick prayer: "Lord, help this to make a difference to them."

A whistle shrills above the roar of the excited children, and their chatter subsides. "We're going to take you downstairs to the locker rooms to change now," Professor Post announces. "Girls, line up over here and follow these ladies; you boys follow the boy tutors."

The crowd parts miraculously, and the children rush to follow their designated leaders. Through the metal doors they flow, and down the steps. I timidly follow in the wake of a flood of girls.

A row of lockers stands guard just inside

the door of the locker room. Before the lockers, arms and legs in every imaginable shade of brown tug bathing suits, t-shirts,



and towels from Meijer bags and smuggle them into bathroom stalls. Each stall strains to accommodate flocks of three or even five little girls, all determined to protect their privacy by changing together behind closed doors. Lockers clang, stall doors slam, barrettes click. Giggles and screeches echo off the stark white tile of the walls.

Amidst the bustle, I find a bare patch of

floor near the door and gently drop my towel and bag. Timidly, I pull my shirt over my head. The black of my bathing suit stands out in stark contrast to my pale skin. My shoes squeak off, and my pants descend with a whisper of cotton. My white legs gleam for all the world to see.

I signed up for this, I remind myself — undressing in front of others, jumping into cold water, rubbing skin against skin with children that I hardly know. Can any good come of this awkward scene? I quickly wrap my towel around my waist, enjoying a small respite from the exposure.

"If you're done changing, follow me out to the pool!" a teacherly voice hollers above the din. Clothes flop to the floor as little girls rush to follow the speaker. Thirty-three pairs of bare feet slap against the tile, pattering off toward the pool.

I aim my feet toward the pool, too. A wriggling mass of spandex-covered bodies awaits me, squirming on the benches and jostling on the tiled deck. Over the brown heads I spot the pool, a concrete-walled pit of sparkling blue water, stretching farther than I wish to see.

Chlorinated geysers erupt all along the pool edges as children fling themselves in. As the warm bodies slap against the cool water, a chorus of screams rises. The whole herd of children, only moments ago rushing to get into the water, just as swiftly reverses momentum. Glistening, goose-bumped arms scramble to heave shivering students out of the pool, and the water is rimmed with chocolate brown bodies. One by one, though, brave youngsters slip off the lip of the pool and once again pepper the water.

Taking a deep breath, I follow, giving myself over to complete shivery wetness. Despite the voice in my head that suggests that my encouraging, towel-clad presence on a poolside bench might be equally inspiring, I begin coaxing children into the

water. I soon regret it. One of the students takes my challenge.

"Tutor, catch me — I'm gonna jump in!"

I stand where I am instructed to wait, two feet from the pool's edge. I stretch out my arms. She bites her lip and shivers.

"I'm gonna do it," she says.

I nod expectantly. Suddenly, she flings herself at me. Her body slams into my chest, and I struggle to keep us both above the water. Wondering how she feels about this new feat, I lift her back onto the side of the pool.

"I'm gonna do it again!" she says, beaming. "Step back away."

I take a small step back. She waves me further out. I step back once more.

Soon, I am five feet away from the pool's edge, my arms stretching toward her as she flies toward the water and toward me. After each jump, she sparkles with delight.

Her delight lasts. It lasts a full 45 minutes. She grows bold. She jumps backwards, she twists, she jumps high, she jumps long. She even puts her face under the water. I hold her up, I catch her, I urge her on, I carry her around the pool. And I ache. My shoulders shake from the exertion of lifting and catching; my legs throb from wandering to and fro in the water. My eyes sting, filled with chlorine from her splashing and jumping. What good could this possibly be doing? My arms and back will ache for days — will she even remember this adventure for that long? I watch as she positions herself on the edge of the pool, waves at a friend on the bench, poses in preparation for another grand performance. And I keep holding my arms out, trying to memorize her smiles for later on when the pain in my shoulders will stifle mine. The smiles give me hope.

All the same, the whistle is a relief. When the last child is out of the pool, I trudge toward the locker room. All around the shower area, little brown bodies in bright bathing suits twirl beneath

the spray of the shower heads, squealing at the fingers of water tickling their bare legs. They scamper from one stream of water to the next, staying only a few seconds under each, rinsing one elbow, one shin. I gingerly join four little girls in a huddle around one of the spitting spigots and attempt to splash a bit of the clean water over my chlorine-soaked body.

As if at some mysterious signal, all of the little girls desert the shower room and scurry back to the lockers. It's even louder than before, though I didn't think it possible. Underwear sticking to damp legs transforms dressing into an acrobatic feat. Shirts and shoes hastily discarded a mere hour ago are now searched-for treasures. I pick my way across the locker room and wonder how I can get into dry clothes. Huddling in a corner, I dress myself as hastily as possible. My head begins to throb.

"If you're all dressed, hurry upstairs — the bus is waiting!" someone yells.

A few girls shuffle toward the door.

"Come on, girls! You have to get back to school!"

Two more girls collect their swimsuits and leave the room. I join with the other college students, peering into the shower room and checking the bathroom stalls for stragglers. The final few girls wave

goodbye and trudge out the door of the locker room.

"Somebody forgot their clothes!" Behind me, one of my peers holds up a set of clothing for all to see. We dash up the stairs, clutching the clothes and a stray towel, and run out to the bus to return the lost items.

The children and their gear are all packed up; the bus begins to lumber away from the curb, growling as it picks up speed. It's too bright outside for me to see any of the faces of the children on the dim bus. I stare after it.

They're gone. I'm left with only an aching body and dripping hair.

"That was wonderful!" says Professor Post.

I look again at the spot that the school bus has just deserted. And then I trudge wearily toward my apartment, framing a captured smile in my mind's eye. ☺



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# Fair Rewards for Faithful Service

*Tena Siebenga-Valstar serves as Education Administrator 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.*

## Fair and adequate remuneration

### Question # 1

What should be our attitude as Christian schoolteachers in regard to compensation for our work? What about the responsibility of Christian agencies to give workers what they are worth? How do you view this?

### Response:

Colossians 3: 23 and 24 states, "Whatever your task, put yourself into it, as done for the Lord and not for your masters since you know that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward; you serve the Lord Christ."

I know that in my career I would very often reflect on the wonderful job I had as a teacher and then say, "and I even get paid for doing something I enjoy so much." Whether we started teaching last year, ten years ago, or earlier than that, the reality of life demands that we need financial compensation for that which we enjoy doing. A beginning teacher, in addition to the cost of housing, often has education loans to pay back. Marriage and a family are often in the plans of young teachers, and a teacher must earn an adequate wage to support a family. Compensation for teachers should be sufficiently high so that it is not necessary for both parents to work full-time outside of the home in order to provide for the family. Fair and adequate compensation is essential.

Christian schools expect teachers to be exemplary models for the students they teach. As a school community, we must also be willing to pay for their quality and expertise. Our compensation must be such that Christian schools attract teachers of high caliber. Christian schools want teachers to be continually improving in their teaching practice. The Christian community must be willing to compensate for that professional development. Christian schoolteachers have a high calling, but they should not be singled out by the Christian school community for special financial sacrifice for the cause of Christian education (CSI 2006-2007 *Compensation Report*, pg. 6).

The latest compensation report raises another issue. We live in a broken world where broken families are more prevalent than they used to be. Children coming from broken families often

need an exemplary male model; yet, many of our teachers are female. Compensation for our Christian teachers must be such that it attracts and retains men as well as women in the teaching profession. The salary and benefit package "must be sufficient for the primary wage earner to support his or her family" (CSI, pg. 7). I believe that Christian School teachers, together with other members serving on a school's compensation committee, should research salaries and benefits of other teachers and professionals with similar education and experience to make realistic comparisons. Teachers serving under other school boards in your local community are doing similar jobs and dealing with the same "cost of living" and therefore are a fair compensation comparison. Christians in areas of work other than education do not anticipate providing their services to fellow Christians for less than the going rate. For that reason, Christian teachers must be justly compensated for the service they provide. When Jesus was sending out the seventy to go ahead of him into the towns where he intended to go, he said, "for the laborer deserves to be paid" (Luke 10:7).

When I was a teacher I did not like to serve on the "salary study committee" because I was operating under the false conception that I would be begging for my own and fellow teachers' salaries. Not knowing what actually happened at those meetings, I do not know if my assumptions were correct. Now, being a board member and serving on a salary committee of a small school, I delight in recommending increases for the teachers because I know their compensation is inadequate. Having many resources available, including the school society's ability to meet their financial obligations, gives me confidence in making these recommendations. Teachers serving on the compensation committee of their schools should have all of the information available to them, including the board vision for the future of the school. Normally the salaries and benefits of the staff compose the greatest portion of a school's budget. Teachers are also the greatest asset to the school. Without excellent, devoted, committed teachers who enjoy their calling, and their students, the high caliber of Christian education we expect will not continue.

In addition to a fair and equitable salary, the school boards must insure that their teachers have adequate medical coverage as well as assisting them by contributing to a retirement plan. As a Christian community, we are to provide for the needs of one another. Teachers provide a service to the Christian community by using their gifts and talents to educate the children of believers. The Christian parents and guardians are called to adequately compensate the teachers and staff for the service they provide. Micah 6:8 says that the Christian community is to love mercy, seek justice and walk humbly with our God.



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## Keeping the vision

### Question # 2:

How should we view colleagues in our schools who are not Reformed at all and teach from a fundamentalist or other perspective? How can we keep our schools distinctly Reformed?

### Response:

If you are in a leadership position in your school, you are obligated to uphold and make clear the vision of your school. If your school is distinctly Reformed, you have a responsibility to hire staff members who can articulate that vision and make it practical in their day-to-day teaching. You must have a clear understanding of that vision and provide professional development and daily encouragement which supports that vision in your school. Your leadership, which comes to expression in the formation or revision of policies in both staff meetings and board meetings, must demonstrate understanding of a Reformed vision.

If, however, you are a teacher asking this question, your approach will be a bit different. You apparently are aware of your school's vision. Either this vision was not in the forefront when some colleagues were hired, or candidates who held to this vision were not available for hiring. As brothers and sisters in Christ we are to love one another. We are to be tolerant of differences, realizing that the body (in this case the teaching staff) is made up of many parts, none of whom perform the same function. God has blessed us with many gifts, and we can use all our gifts in service to him.

You must have reasons for believing that it is important to teach from a Reformed perspective. Determine what is most important to you and focus on living and working out of that perspective. Our actions often speak louder than our words. Mentor others as you find the opportunity. When you work with your colleagues on curriculum development, integrate your ideas into the curriculum. Focus on what you have in common with your colleagues and seek to build bridges. Consider the following as you strive for greater understanding.

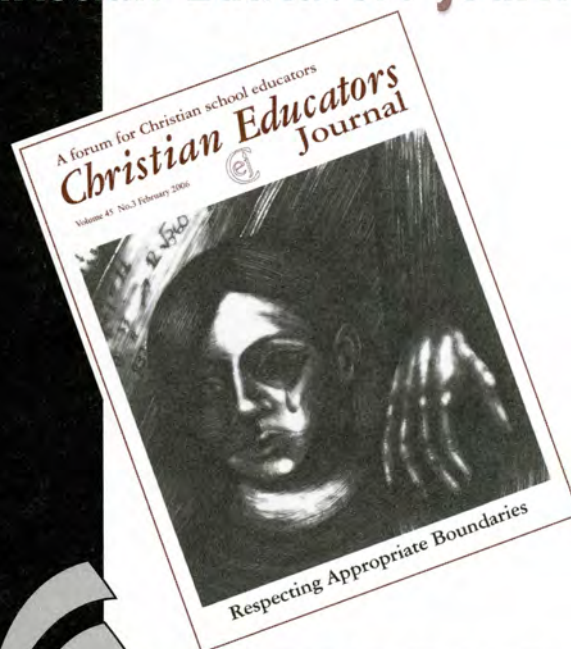
"A life and world view, a vision of the sovereignty of God and the lordship of Jesus Christ manifest in every sphere of life, a theology of the kingdom of God which transcends time and space — that is the grand design of Reformed theology at its best" (Hesselink, 1983, pg. 111).

In reference to being God-centered Hesselink states: "God's grace is not simply an individual thing that affects only me and my salvation. The sovereignty of God has cosmic dimensions. His sovereign will is working itself out in the farthest reaches of

the universe, and throughout time and eternity as well. The Reformed outlook is one of great scope and grandeur. It stresses the power of God manifest not only in creation, preservation, and providential ruling but, above all, as it is seen in the resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ. He is the 'King of kings and the Lord of lords' (Revelation 19:16; cf. 17:14), whose kingdom shall have no end (Luke 1:33). He shall reign until 'the kingdoms of the world have become the kingdom of our Lord and His Christ'" (Revelation 11:15) (pg. 97).

As I stood in front of the Wall of Reformers in Geneva, Switzerland, I was reminded that the reformers influenced many countries and many denominations. Ultimately their focus was to give praise and honor to God. That must be our focus as well as we work with our colleagues in helping our students see the full-orbed life to which they are being called. €

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# Book Reviews

George Weigel, *The Cube and the Cathedral: Europe, America, and Politics Without God*. New York: Basic Books. 2005. 181 pages + 19 pages of notes and index.  
Reviewed by Steve J. Van Der Weele, Calvin College (Emeritus)

This book may not be immediately relevant for a teacher sketching out next week's lesson plans, but the implications of the issues George Weigel raises are enormous and will in due time affect us all. In important ways, they are affecting us already. For Weigel, official biographer of the late Pope, John Paul II, a historian and theologian, is sketching out for us the history of Europe — past, present, and possible future. That future looks bleak, for Europe has squandered its Christian heritage and has set out on a course of atheistic humanism which, like all human constructions, is bound to fail, but not before inflicting extensive damage along the way. A malaise lies over the continent, Weigel reports, and Europe faces “a crisis of civilization.” He quotes Father de Lupac to underscore the point: “It is not true, as is sometimes said, that man cannot organize the world without God. What is true is that, without God, he can only organize it against man.” (48). Weigel pits the two Parisian edifices of his title — Notre Dame and La Grande Arche de la Défense — as representing two cultures, two anthropologies, two sets of answers to the problems of our time. He notes that guidebooks playfully observe that the Arche de la Défense, a colossal cube-shaped building, is large enough to contain the entire Notre Dame Cathedral, with all the outcroppings, chapels, and vestibules added to the cathedral over the centuries.

Europe has played a unique role in the history of Christianity. Weigel uses a novel device — devoting one chapter to simply listing, selectively, names of European worthies and achievers — all of them, and their work, imbued with the Christian faith. The Bible served as the basis for theology, defined for Europeans what it means to be human, and set forth our place and purpose in the world. Over the centuries, the Church confronted totalitarian rulers and learned as well how to deal with the secular world — how to accept the role of the state and what strategies permit the two domains to function together for the welfare of the Christian community. The Christian Commonwealth, by applying Scriptural wisdom, and taking the Incarnation seriously, developed ideals of justice, the political system we call democracy, and a definition of freedom based on loving obedience to the Creator. The Church called sinners to repentance and offered forgiveness.

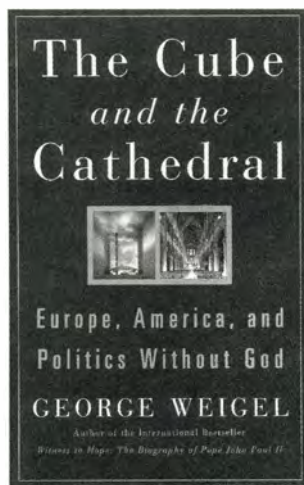
But the glory, Weigel laments, has departed. Entranced by technology and influenced by alien ideas, Europe has decided that it no longer needs God, or the Church. It has concluded that the obedience exacted by the Christian faith was not, after all, true freedom, but bondage. Europeans, by and large, have adopted a secular outlook, have dismissed God and the Church as irrelevancies to their pursuit of pleasure, and turned over to bureaucracies and political technicians matters which at one time

invoked vigorous debates over principles. “Metaphysical boredom” has set in — an unwillingness to confront the deep questions about cosmic purpose and the moral compass by which we need to direct our lives. The vocabulary of sin and forgiveness has all but disappeared from general conversation. And no confession means no repentance and no forgiveness. And the wars and the violence of the twentieth century, Weigel contends — agreeing with Solzhenitsyn — can be linked directly to this spiritual pathology.

This aggressive drive of the Europeans to be laws unto themselves has come to bear on the current debate about the preamble to the Constitution of the European Union. Those charged with designing this statement are determined that no acknowledgment of Europe's Christian heritage will appear in the document. Eighteen hundred years of Christian history are to be airbrushed away. We need La Grande Arche de la Défense more than the Cathedral, they are saying. Society is better served, they imply, by the values which the Cube represents than by the piety of the Church.

A further consequence of this malaise can be seen in the demographic vacuum to which Europe has succumbed. Europeans are not replacing themselves; they are not bringing a successor generation into being. A visit to the churches in the large cities of Europe shows a preponderance of older people, a dearth of children. Weigel attributes this reluctance to bring children into the world to the absence of a lively hope in the future. “No faith, no future,” Weigel says, in agreement with David Hart, whom he quotes: “This is why post-Christian Europe seems to lack not only the moral and imaginative resources for sustaining its civilization, but even any good reason for continuing to reproduce.” (163) And this demographic imbalance accounts for the flood of immigrants from especially Middle Eastern countries to Europe — most of the newcomers adherents of the Islamic faith. Weigel's concern about the role second generation Muslims are beginning to play in England, France, and the Netherlands appears in several parts of his book. It emerges as one of the major emphases in this treatise.

Is there hope for the future? Or will French people some day hear the Muslim call to prayer from Notre Dame Cathedral? God can, of course, once again open the hearts of the Europeans to their legacy of Christian wisdom. Weigel reminds us of the enormous role believers and the Church played in the downfall of the Communist regime in 1989. He credits the Slavic countries — especially Poland — with this achievement and regards these countries not only as models for a renewal of Christian faith in Europe, but also as buffers against European pathologies developing in America. And he insists that, as the late Pope



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showed, the not shun Youth Day of an example of a renewal of the —a repudiation

the 1960s and a return to European roots. He asks this question: “Is it possible to construct and sustain a democratic political

Church need modernity. The 1997 serves as possibilities for Christian faith of the temper of

community absent the transcendent moral reference points for ordering public life that Christianity offers the political community?” (162) He pleads for Europe to come out of its spiritual doldrums and for North Americans to resist what, metaphorically speaking, the Europeans are doing — eating their spiritual seed corn as it grows, and sawing off the branch on which they are sitting. Weigel’s prophetic voice is apt; it need not, but could, happen here. ☺

John Wilson and Mark Noll, editors, *The Best Christian Writing, 2006*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, a Wiley Imprint. 2005. 214 pages of essays (20), 7 pages of Biographical notes and credits.

Reviewed by Steve J. Van Der Weele, Calvin College (Emeritus)

Houghton Mifflin has recently released the 20th annual anthology of best essays. But it no longer has the field of annual anthologies to itself. Five years ago, a project was launched to anthologize the best Christian essays of the year. I propose to give an overview of this year’s selections.

One essay is devoted to the art of writing itself — with lively comments about two writing organizations — The Christian Writers Guild, and the biannual Festival of Faith and Writing sponsored by Calvin College. One essay consists of a translation of Augustine’s Christmas sermon #13. Augustine is at his best — a pithy style with lively insights, including a hard-hitting rebuke to some folk who had indulged in a pagan festival which the Christian rite of Baptism had relegated to the trash heap. Two essays are based on movies — *Groundhog Day* and Mel Gibson’s *The Passion of the Christ*. Several deal with church life — the unique sorrows and joys of the pastorate, and the “high fidelity” of long-time church members who stay with the congregation despite all the changes in church life that transpire during a lifetime.

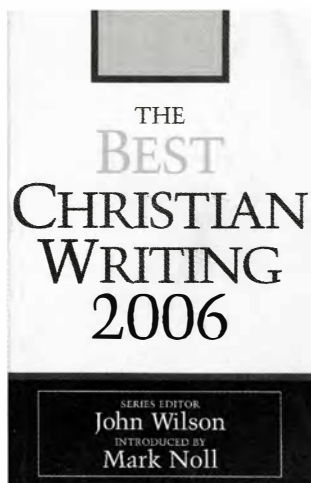
I include in this group the pilgrimage by Daniel Taylor of the Skellig Monastery, situated on a rugged island off the coast of Ireland, with his insightful reflections on the history of monasticism and how this site was abandoned because of the “Horrible Hagars” — the fearful Viking invaders. And August Turak portrays for us the holiness of a saint, in the essay “Brother John,” who had the art of always foreseeing the needs of people and being prepared to respond to those needs.

Several deal with global ecclesiology. “Islamic Counter-Reformation,” by Paul Marshall, contends that Islam needs to be reformed not so much on the Protestant model as on the Catholic model of the Counter-Reformation. Islam needs to develop a

greater respect for its traditions and must avoid direct responses to contemporary problems without filtering them through the wisdom of past Muslim sages. Islam needs to develop something like a magisterium, to bring some unity and authority to its fragmented hegemony. And Richard John Neuhaus, editor of the Catholic journal *First Things*, calls upon the Catholic magisterium to reassert its authority and influence over those recalcitrant “liberal” Catholics who keep raising those vexing problems of sexual abuse by the clergy, who call for the ordination of women, plead for permission of the priests to marry, and the practice of contraception. Neuhaus will have none of these. Obedience, he says, is what has unified the 2000-year old Catholic Establishment and has provided a continuum of doctrine, teaching, practice, and world view which has offered a haven of salvation for millions of believers over the centuries. (He must be pleased with the recent Bishop’s Conference, where all the major positions of the Church were reaffirmed, though not without some dissenting voices.)

Several essays are personal, informal. Richard Mouw’s global contacts with religious folk have heightened his appreciation for Calvinism in some ways, but has taught him to mistrust such simplistic formulations as TULIP and claims by such theologians as Benjamin Warfield that “Calvinism is just religion in its purity. We have only, therefore, to conceive of religion in its purity, and that is Calvinism.” (85) But he has R. B. Kuiper put a kindly face on this claim. Kuiper said that what he and others mean is that all believers, if they live in dependence on God, whether they realize it or not, are Calvinists. Mouw has observed, to his regret, that Calvinists have not always acted humanely on the world’s stage — in terms of tolerance, racism, an openness to the faith of other religions, appreciating appropriate diversity, and willingness





to be corrected. some of these traits inherent in John Calvin himself humility and

Stephen an essay entitled *Unbracketed*,” theorists of especially in academia, to be more open about their personal religious commitment. Time after time, in journals, talk shows, TV interviews, religious pundits talk at length about religious issues while “bracketing” their own views — refusing to let people know which version of Jesus they hold, how they interpret American spirituality, what position they hold on a number of ethical issues. Prothero has come to eschew such timidity and is having fun reading about how he has violated the (supposed) principle that “Religious Studies is not a moralizing discipline. It exists in the suspension of the ethical.” (122)

Virginia Stem Owens and Lauren F. Winner (recently married) present essays centered on our rituals. Owens traces her changing attitudes towards the elderly, from the time she joked flippantly as a member of a church youth group about the annual visits to the “Old Folks’ Home” to the events which brought her mother to Fair Acres Nursing Facility, suffering from Parkinson’s disease, dementia, and osteoporosis. Her father joins the mother at the Facility. She tells with gentleness, warmth, and compassion how the family, along with other residents, worked through a Thanksgiving dinner together. Her tale is being repeated times beyond number in the various residential facilities of our nation, and of the world. With great wit and courage, Winner holds up to the wisdom of our raillery what she calls our national “Wedding Insanity.” What in the world, she asks, do all these endless preparations, all this pile of wedding journals, this mountain of advice about endless details concerning the wedding and reception, have to do with marriage? She calls for some sanity. Her father, she confesses ruefully, could have sent an in-state student to a local college for four years with the money he spent on her wedding. Where in all these preparations does the word go out that marriage is, well, a melding of two lives, in which each partner loses himself by commitment to the other, and, in which, in some mysterious way, each partner truly finds himself or herself? Let the preparations, she admonishes, be appropriate to the true meaning of marriage. Gideon Strauss tells us of his burden for Africa — it should also be ours.

Frederica Mathewes-Green comes closest to providing a theological essay. Like Gregory Wolfe, in “Picturing the Passion,”

Although may be Calvinism, called for openness.

Prothero, in “Belief challenges religion,

she pushes against Mel Gibson’s movie, *The Passion of the Christ*. Hers is a historical account of attitudes to the suffering of Christ. She points out that the focus on the physical, painful suffering of Christ did not appear until the fourteenth century. Prior to that time, the focus was on Christ’s rescuing mankind from sin — his role as a hero whose scars testified to a bruising contest from which, nevertheless, he emerged victorious. He was like a policeman rescuing hostages — in an operation requiring a ransom, though not due to anyone in particular. She regards the emphasis on the wounds and suffering of Christ as a distortion. They conceal the truth that the sickness is within us, and that we need to be healed. The writers of the Gospels had it right: “Instead of evoking empathy they invite us to grateful, respectful awe, because they had a different understanding of the meaning of his suffering.”

Wolfe is more sympathetic to Gibson’s portrayal. And Amy Laura Hall provides a very thoughtful essay, challenging especially Protestants to abandon their calculating ways when it comes to planning their families. They need to rear children for service rather than for self-gratification.

Nicholas Wolterstorff’s essay, “Is Art Salvific?” takes us on a historical tour of interpretations about the role of art in the life of mankind. He laments that a recognition of the role of religion — in all the disciplines, including philosophy — is being progressively diminished. And the eighteenth-century Enlightenment, by asserting that the importance of art lies in contemplation, did art no favor. Such an approach can, at one level, lead to idolatry. But it also cuts off those who go to the arts for refreshment from the vital source of what the artist has produced. The artists’ work, though it may have transcendent, intrinsic meaning, is grounded, understandably, in his life and times, his biases, his possible racism or ethnic predilections. These are not to be eschewed, but embraced. And art must have purpose — as do the icons of the Orthodox Church. Memorial art, such as the Vietnam Memorial, and whatever will come out of the negotiations about Ground Zero in New York, and some of the contemporary masses — all these more truly represent the ideal of “art coming into its own” than art regarded as an aesthetic experience for the elite.

Though these comments are necessarily sketchy, my hope is that they will incite the curiosity and interest of readers who wish to keep abreast of what Christian thinkers are concerning themselves with these days. Lamentably, I have run out of space even to name the publications in which these essays originally appeared — most of them a number of us read, others appear in lesser-known journals. We need to celebrate those who cast out their lines and discovered these engaging essays for us. ☪