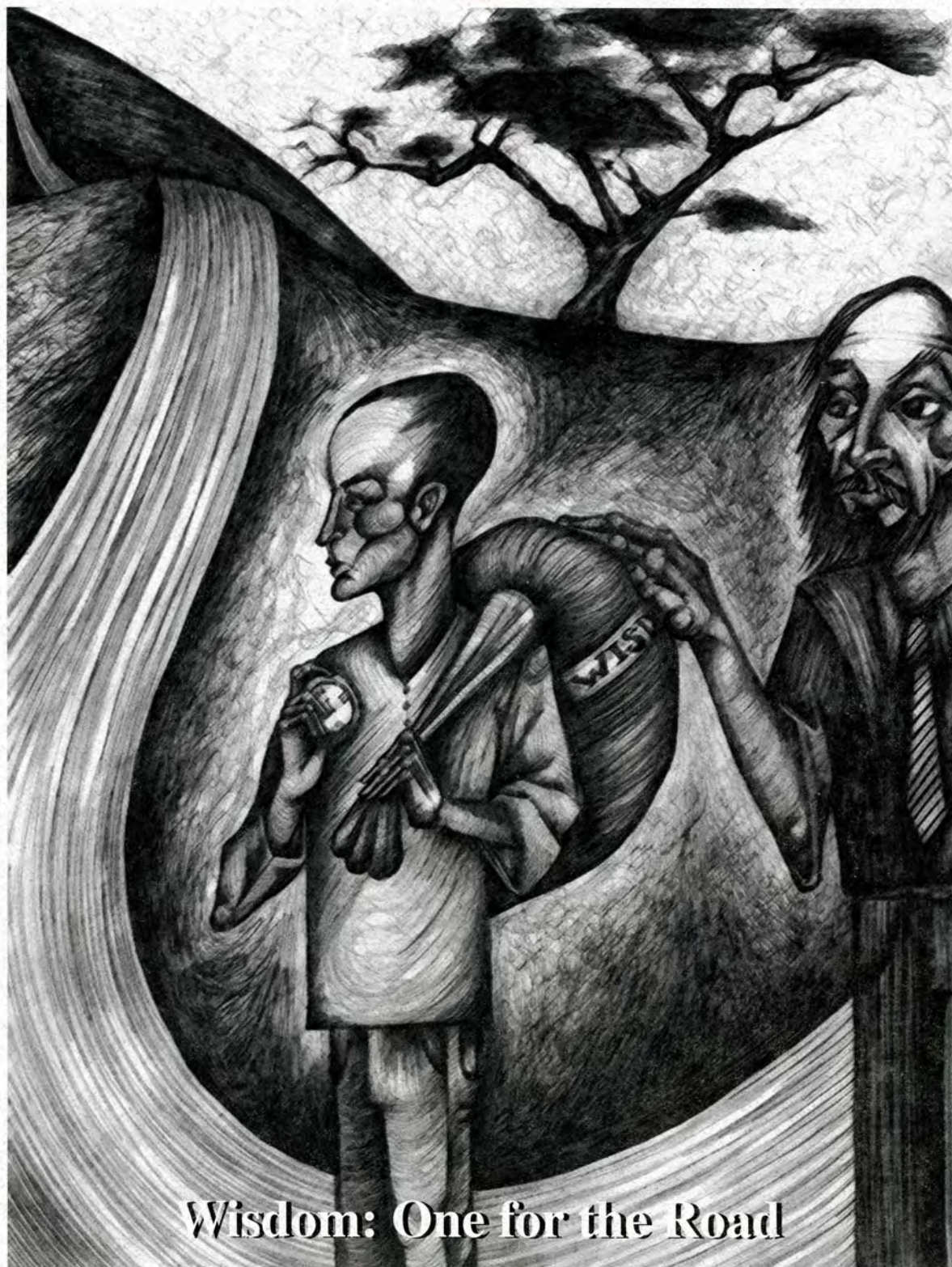


A forum for Christian school educators

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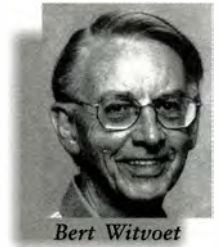


Wisdom: One for the Road

Editorial

This editorial is laced with wise sayings printed in bold to underscore the notion that Wisdom cries out from all street corners of this world.

Lady Wisdom Wants In



Should “Wisdom” be taught as a subject in our schools? Should we have wisdom teachers alongside math teachers, English teachers and phys. ed. teachers? Maybe you think that Bible teachers are the secondary school’s equivalent of wisdom teachers, or that the college equivalent is professors of philosophy. Philosophers or philosophy professors are supposed to be lovers of wisdom, according to the etymological origin of the term. But I wouldn’t bet on it. Teachers are by nature dispensers of knowledge, not necessarily of wisdom (**“Science is organized knowledge; wisdom is organized life” — Immanuel Kant**).

The more I think about it, the less attractive the proposition to hire wisdom teachers looks to me. It’s like hiring professional mourners who don’t really understand your grief. Wisdom is not something you can teach, even though you might be a specialist in your field (**“An expert is a person who has made all the mistakes that can be made in a very narrow field” — Niels Bohr**). Wisdom is something you catch, like a cold. It has no curriculum of its own. How in the world can you design lesson plans on wisdom? Wisdom is not a subject. Wisdom is a person.

You can have wise math teachers and foolish Bible teachers. You can have smart philosophers who haven’t got a clue when it comes to sensibly applying good knowledge (**“It’s so simple to be wise. Just think of something stupid to say and say the opposite” — Sam Levenson**). No, the best we can do as boards and principals is to hire teachers who have wisdom bred into their bones. More than likely they picked up wisdom from their parents first of all. Maybe they had a grandparent who subconsciously exhibited wise behavior (**“The function of wisdom is to discriminate between evil and good” — Cicero**).

Public cry

Wisdom is all around us, of course. According to Solomon, *“Lady Wisdom goes out in the street and shouts. At the town center she makes her speech. In the middle of the traffic she takes her stand. At the busiest corner she calls out: ‘Simpletons! How long will you wallow in ignorance? Cynics! How long will you feed your cynicism? Idiots! How long will you refuse to learn?’”* (Proverbs 1: 20-22 in *The Message*). Interesting how Solomon personifies wisdom. Apparently he agrees that wisdom is a person, not a subject. Interesting, too, that he sees her as a woman. Maybe his mother, Bathsheba, was a greater influence for good on him than his father, the busy warring King David. Even more interesting, Solomon does not have Lady Wisdom calling out in the temple (**“Men never do evil so completely and cheerfully as when they do it from religious conviction” — Blaise Pascal**) or in a *sjul* (pardon the anachronism), but he places her in the public square. All around us creation speaks, life testifies,

people witness in spite of their sinful conduct and speech. Wisdom is the voice of God in the world.

As such it is also present in Christian institutions of learning (**“The true call of a Christian is not to do extraordinary things, but to do ordinary things in an extraordinary way” — Dean Stanley**). But do we always recognize that voice? There is something about wisdom that is unpredictable. It’s a mysterious voice. You need to sit down and allow it to sink in (**“No question is so difficult to answer as that to which the answer is obvious” — George Bernard Shaw**).

Sometimes wisdom has to *infiltrate* the Christian school. The word “infiltrate” suggests that it has to pass through a filter. Isn’t it true that we sometimes attach invisible screens to entrances into our schools, classrooms and administrative offices? I’m thinking of the filters of efficiency, political correctness, public image, fear of the unknown, discrimination, cultural blinders, status concerns. Some filters are necessary. Schools will install filters on their computers so that students will not visit unwanted websites. Dress codes act as a kind of filter, as do behavioral and speech standards. I’m not talking about those kinds of restraint on student conduct. I’m more concerned with filters that make wisdom an infiltrator (**“Nobody is more dangerous than he who imagines himself pure in heart, for his purity, by definition, is unassailable” — James Baldwin**).

Smorgasboard

In this issue we present several articles that indirectly deal with wisdom. Former Principal Jim Stapert addressed the 2005 graduates of Grand Rapids Christian High School in what proved to be his last public speech. He spoke words of wisdom. One might *expect* wisdom to come from the mouth of a Christian school principal. Another article relates how Christian schoolteacher Al Schut learned from his special-needs daughter, Tracy. Years behind in academic knowledge, she, nevertheless, spoke words of wisdom as she told her dad not “to sweat the small stuff.” One might think that she would be an unlikely source of wisdom.

Calvin professor Kim Gall finds it necessary to remind her students to be more expressive of their gratitude, something we cannot take for granted even with the finest students in our classes. What filters out gratitude, I wonder? (**“The world is a dangerous place to live, not because of people who are evil, but because of the people who don’t do anything about it” — Albert Einstein**). Two unusual teachers at Bulkley Valley Christian School in Smithers, B.C., Peter Rhebergen and Curt Gesch, are dreaming about holding themselves and students accountable for spiritual growth in a world that wants to quantify everything. Is

“quantification” the culprit filter here? Covenant College professor of education Jack Fennema wrote a book about biblical nurture, which high school teacher Sean Schat reviews for us in this issue. Apparently, Fennema does not give many practical suggestions but relies on our willingness to put our wisdom to work, which is another way of saying that we have to dig deep. Wisdom does not fly us in the face, even in Christian institutions of learning (“Too bad that all the people who really know how to run this country are busy driving taxi cabs and cutting hair” — George Burns).

Defining wisdom

So what is wisdom? (“Besides the noble art of getting things done, there is the noble art of leaving things undone. The wisdom of life consists in the elimination of non-essentials” — Lin Yutang).

My Dutch Christian Encyclopedia has a number of helpful suggestions to provide some insight here. Wisdom is more comprehensive than knowledge, I read. One cannot study wisdom; one can only train oneself in wisdom. Wisdom implies life experience and practicing the art of living. (This is why we often associate wisdom with old age. The elderly among us have experienced more and have a better chance of being wise than a young person. But age is no guarantee of wisdom, as we all know.) Wisdom has to do with insight into the character of people, into human relationships, and, even more fundamentally, into the interdependence of deed and fate. (I’m trying to understand what this last statement means. I think it has to do with understanding how circumstances influence our deeds, and *visa versa*.) (“Wisdom consists of the anticipation of consequences” — Norman Cousins).

Personally, I work with a simpler definition of wisdom. Wisdom for me is applying good knowledge judiciously, making good

choices — choices that ultimately benefit people, even though they initially seem to make life more difficult. (The last part explains why in a society that seeks instant gratification, wisdom is not much in demand). A wise person for me is someone who lives in harmony with God’s intent for his creation. That intent is laid in creation (“As scarce as truth is, the supply has always been in excess of the demand” — Josh Billings). But that intent is even more sharply delineated in the Scriptures. That’s why Psalm 119 speaks so eloquently about wisdom: “Your commands are always with me and make me wiser than my enemies. I have more insight than all my teachers, for I meditate on your statutes. I have more understanding than my elders, for I obey your precepts.... Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path.”

Shining teachers

Wisdom is walking by the light and becoming a light that others walk by. Any kind of teacher can walk in the light and be a light — teachers of math, phys. ed., Bible, music, drama, art, science, yes, even guidance. It starts with how they live out their own lives in society: in family, church, neighborhood, city, country (“We cannot hold a torch to light another’s path without brightening our own” — Ben Sweetland), and it continues as they teach in schools. These wise teachers are known for making good choices that ultimately benefit everyone around them. And they will be remembered by their students because they work with one of the wisest statements one can find in the Bible: “Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking. It is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs ... Love never fails” — St. Paul in I Corinthians 13:4-8).

Bert Witvoet

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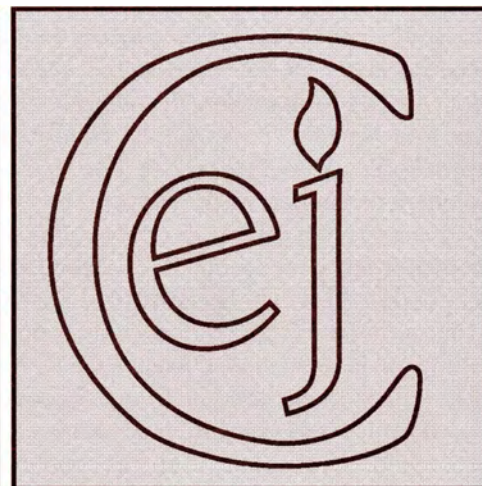
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After High School – WHAT WILL STICK?

by Jim Stapert

Jim Stapert was the principal of Grand Rapids Christian High School when he gave this graduation speech to the class of 2005. No one suspected that this would be the last time he would attend a graduation ceremony. Jim passed away suddenly on September 26, 2005, a few months before he planned to retire.

Thank you, Class of 2005, for the invitation to me to speak to you tonight. I want you to know that I have a history of getting really uptight about graduations. Being your speaker this year has not helped, but thanks anyway.

Actually, it's not so bad. Like Abraham Lincoln, I can say, "The world will little note nor long remember what we say here...." Of course, he was wrong about his Gettysburg remarks. But I tell you, this graduation speech and most others are not long remembered. I do not remember who spoke at my graduation nor what was said. The same can be said for chapel talks and Sunday sermons. How many chapels have I attended in my four years as a student at Kalamazoo Christian High and my thirty years at Grand Rapids Christian High? How many Sunday sermons have I heard in sixty years? What specifics do I recall from all those words? Not many. But that is not to say that nothing stuck from graduation speeches, chapel talks and Sunday sermons.

In spite of

By the way, I did a little rough math about the number of graduations in which I have been a direct participant, the number of high school chapels I have attended, and the number of Sunday sermons that have

been preached to me. Here are the results: number of high school graduations, including my own — 31; number of high school chapels attended — 1,908; number of sermons — 4,680. Now isn't that interesting? This speech seems to be going nowhere.

But I do have a point. I may not remember

convictions will stick with you. Embedded in your person.

Ten hits

Well let's get to the points. What is it that we, your teachers and parents, want to have stuck on you, embedded in you, so to speak, from Christian home and Christian school? Maybe we could list ninety-nine of them or even one thousand. Where to start and where to stop? Most sermons have three points. David Letterman has his lists of ten. I'm going with David Letterman — ten points. I'm not sure they are the top ten and I have no rank order.

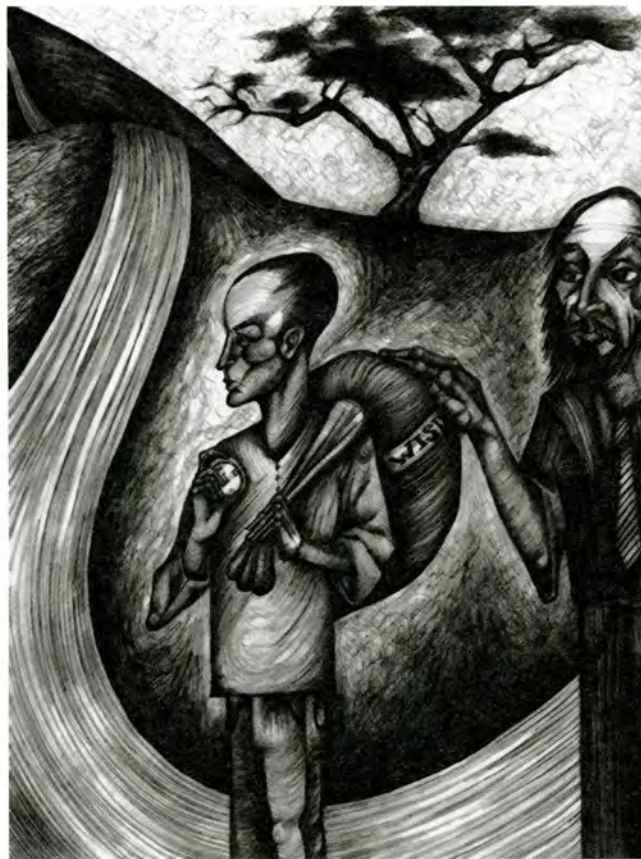
Actually, I'm going to give nine, because the first is just an example to get us into the pattern of things. Here's the example point.

◆ We want the importance of being on time to stick. In high school we try to help you understand that through — ugly high school word — "detentions." Now here's the good o's — none of you will ever get a detention again [According to teacher Lois De Vries, who was there, the graduates cheered]. Here's the bad news — outside of high school you don't get detentions, you get fired [According to Lois De Vries, this time the audience cheered]. Do you see

why we want to stick you with the importance of being on time?

OK — you got the idea. What do we want embedded in your character wherever you go, whoever you become? Now for the other nine sticking points:

◆ **Sticking Point:** Particular people will stick with you. I guess you should not turn around in your seats right now, but, if you



much about the specifics of 6,619 graduation speeches, chapel talks, and Sunday sermons, but I know they played a big part in shaping who I am.

And that, I think, is what high school will have been for you. Specifics? You will remember some facts and ideas forever. But way beyond that, many really important convictions and people who embody those

did, you would see your teachers. What a cast of characters. All different. Some especially touching your life, some especially touching the lives of others. You will always remember special teachers.

◆ **Sticking Point:** Always see life on this earth as depicted in the four box pictures of the artwork displayed in every classroom at Grand Rapids Christian High School. We want you stuck with the vision that God created all things good. Sin destroyed the perfect creation. Christ came to redeem us and restore creation. We commit ourselves to be his instruments in fixing that which is broken. We look ahead with hope and faith to a day when all is set right again in God's perfect creation.

◆ **Sticking Point:** Christ's salvation-giving is huge. In our lives on this earth we need to guard ourselves from judgments that are not ours to make. Be careful. God almighty is the only one with the really big picture and the only one to judge for eternity.

◆ **Sticking Point:** Religion and education cannot be separated. On that premise Grand Rapids Christian High School was established. Good education informs religious beliefs. Religious faith gives

focus to education — where we came from, where we are going, and what our obligations are in between. Good religion, good education — you can't have one without the other.

◆ **Sticking Point:** God's creation is huge. You ought never stop "wowing" and wondering about the breadth and depth of nature, the beauty of music and landscape, the marvel of words and communication, the logic and consistency of numbers and lines, the complexity and mystery of human beings and their potential for good and evil.

◆ **Sticking Point:** Truth is not relative. There is right and there is wrong. What we do or believe ought not be based on feelings about "what works for me." There is godliness and devilry. Be not deceived; God is not mocked.

◆ **Sticking Point:** The Christian life is all about truth and grace. What a difficult balance. We need to do both. Only Christ did it just right. Truth — sin is a serious matter, it condemns us to death. It needs to be confronted honestly. But then there is grace. Forgiveness that gives us life. Something given to an undeserving creature by a God not obligated to give it.

All your life work at this tough command: hate the sin; love the sinner. That's what Christ did.

◆ **Sticking Point:** We want you stuck with what in popular language is called a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. You should not expect this relationship to always be something cozy and comfy. You can expect this relationship to comfort you often but also to be quarrelsome, strained, and argumentative. Participate with Christ in struggle. Cherish his comfort. That's personal relationship.

◆ **Sticking Point:** God will pursue you all your life. You may have heard or read of our God described as the "Hound of Heaven." He will dog you. Some of you may be uncomfortable or even angry about that. So this may be a bit of a warning. But for each of you, our God's pursuit of your soul is a magnificent blessing to you and a wonderful promise to your parents. Well, there you are. Important convictions. Not just laid on you but embedded in you forever — part of who you are. There are more. But it's time to move on. You may now begin forgetting what was said at your graduation. Please, for my sake, wait a few weeks before you forget who spoke [These students will not likely forget who spoke at their graduation, seeing how their principal lived only a few more months]. But never, never ignore God's truths that were intentionally put in your mind and placed on your heart.

Class of 2005, I know one of you very well [Jim's daughter Annie was among the graduates], a few of you quite well, several of you on a rather shallow basis. I wish I knew each of you as a father knows his daughter and his son. But, I assure you, Christ knows each of you inside out. Congratulations. I'm wishing you a grand night and a wonder-filled life. God bless you. God bless the Class of 2005. ☪



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'Chasing After Fly Specks'

by Al J. Schut

Al Schut (ajschut@juno.com) is a teacher of English, media studies and drama at Western Michigan Christian High School in Muskegon, Michigan. He is also a member of the CEJ Board of Trustees. Al, his wife, Marilee, and two sons, Jeremy and Justin, fondly remember their daughter and sister Tracy, who died on April 12, 2005, at age 24.

It's the middle of play season again. As play director at our school, it is at this time of year when I question why I ever got myself into this mess. This is the time of long days, short nights, and my gradual metamorphosis from Mr. Hyde into Dr. Jeckyl. This is the season when I often wake up in the middle of the night from sweaty nightmares of missed cues, forgotten lines, and pregnant pauses.

The two weeks before the show invariably turn out to be the boiling point. This is the period at which I realize that everything needs to fall together in 14 days — and it seems as if I'm the only one with this insight.

Even my wife has gotten to the point of understanding the intricacies of the hectic play schedule. I'll come home late from rehearsal about two weeks before the play opens, and, by taking one look at me, she'll know enough to leave me alone for awhile. Later, when it's safer, she'll say, "You gave 'the speech' tonight, didn't you?" Nothing more needs to be said. Everyone knows what's meant by "the speech." The speech is directed towards the cast and is of the fire and brimstone variety, which could easily find a comfortable home ensconced within Jonathan's Edwards' "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God" sermon.

Uncanny trust

There was only one person who was never intimidated in the least by my moods.

Tracy, my special-needs daughter, never failed to give me that all-important reality check. "Don't worry, Dad," she'd say. "Don't sweat the small stuff." Then she'd open her arms wide, cock her head to the side and grin. "Do you need a hug?" And, of course, I always did.

Tracy was years behind others her age in educational development, but years ahead in knowing just what's important, and what's not. Even in the darkest hours,



Tracy's joy and laughter somehow made things better. And, of course, her childlike trust. "Don't worry — God will take care of it," she'd boldly state.

And on opening night, Tracy would be there in all her glory. She'd clap excitedly, and no one could hold a candle to her boisterous laugh. When we'd watch the tape later, we'd always clearly hear her joyous laugh coming from somewhere out of the darkness of the audience.

Then ... about six months ago, our

special light was taken. In the middle of the night, Tracy suffered a grand mal seizure, and God took her home. As anyone who has suddenly lost someone close can attest, the world suddenly screeches to a halt. It's almost impossible to even imagine life without this person who was a daily part of your life; suddenly most everything pales in comparison to the empty hole in your heart that you know will never completely heal again. Daily reminders find your eyes suddenly filling up with tears while your spirit is torn between anger and loss.

When I think of Tracy, I'm reminded of the play we did last year. We performed *Harvey*, the story about an unusual character (Elwood) who often talked to a six-and-a-half-foot invisible white rabbit named Harvey. His acquaintances tried to have him committed because he did not see the "reality" that the rest of us see. However, this was the only character that had time for others, was filled with kindness, and enjoyed life like a fine wine — meant to be sipped and savored.

One of my favorite lines comes from Dr. Chumley, a busy, harried psychiatrist, who, with Elwood's help, discovers what he'd been missing all his life. "Fly specks," he says; "I've been spending my life among fly specks, while miracles have been leaning on lamp posts on 18th and Fairfax."

In a way, Tracy was a lot like the character Elwood. Tracy seemed to know better than I did the difference between fly specks and miracles. She was filled with the miracles of childlike trust, joy, laughter, and, of course, millions of hugs ... and that was enough for her.

Time for questions

After Tracy died, I was filled with regrets. Why hadn't I done more things with her? Why didn't I spend more time talking with her when she wanted to talk and ask

questions? Why didn't I hug her more often? God knows what I wouldn't give to have an hour with her right now — to listen to her questions, to contemplate her simple advice, to hear her laugh ... and to feel her arms wrapped around me once more.

Suddenly James 4:14 holds a lot of meaning. "...you do not know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes."

Through this bitter experience I have discovered that there is only one thing truly meaningful on this earth — relationships. Our relationship with God and our relationships with people are the only things that really matter. Cars, homes, vacations, jobs ... all pale in comparison.

Wrong focus

James chides us when we slip into the mode of being busy with insignificant things. He mocks those who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money." (James 4:13) He states, "As it is, you boast and brag. All such boasting is evil. Anyone, then, who knows the good he ought to do and doesn't do it, sins." (vs. 16 & 17)

What is the "good" that Paul is talking about? He doesn't really specify, but my guess is that he is *not* referring to chasing after business deals, careers, or the like. Sadly, it often takes a death to make one finally ask, "Just how *am* I spending my time; what is the meaning of my busyness?"

So how *should* we fill our

time? If it's true that the most important thing in life is relationships, then perhaps that's where our focus should be: spending more time with God, getting to know him better; restoring relationships, both with God and others; helping others in need; spending time with family; asking that troubled student how he's *really* doing....

Renewed perspective

Over these past few months I learned that there is only one constant — God's strength; I've learned that life is to be

treasured; and I've learned that it's much easier to do without things than it is to do without those we love.

Time here on earth is truly a fleeting mist. During these few years that we're given, it's essential that we focus on the "good" that we ought to do. These are the true miracles that we should be chasing. During the coming year, I resolve to spend more time wondering at the miracle of a one-of-a-kind sunset painted by God; I plan to spend more time in God's word exploring the miracle of salvation given to me by

grace; I hope to spend more time developing meaningful relationships with my students and neighbors; and I intend to spend more time soaking up the joy and love from loving family members. These things alone could easily fill up most of my days. After all, why should I spend my lifetime chasing after fly specks when I can be enjoying these miracles all around me?

This year, I picked a comedy for the school play. I know that I need to go on in spite of sorrow, and I know that I need to hear laughter again. And when opening night comes around, and when the curtain rises, I'm going to try my hardest to spend less time focusing on that empty seat in the darkness and more on listening for the laughter and joy and hope that God has meant life to be. ☺

So Many Questions

by Al Schut

*You were always filled with so many questions
Where do street signs get their names?
Why are people mean to each other?
What does this verse mean?
Why does God allow wars and sadness?
Why was I adopted?*

*In some ways you had a limited capacity,
But with your questions,
you had the wisdom of Solomon.
Out of all the people in the world,
God chose this family for you to join;
and with your purity, your joy,
your ready smile
... and your questions...
you've changed each of us and made us better.*

*A few days ago you said,
"I've got so many questions to ask God."
Well, you now know the answers you sought.
And now it's us with all the questions
... and we look forward to seeing you again
so you can help us understand.*

Thank you, Tracy, for enriching our lives

Dad, Mom, Jeremy and Justin

A Lesson From That One Man Out of Ten

by Kimerly Gall

Kimerly Gall (kgall@calvin.edu) is professor of HPERDS (that's Health, Physical Education, Recreation, Dance and Sport) at Calvin College in Grand Rapids, Michigan.

Within the past year, a number of familiar Bible stories have impressed themselves on me with somewhat simple but important lessons. I've noticed in recent years that we as a society tend to be less thankful and appreciative. Our use of common courtesies is slipping. I don't think we use or hear the words "thank you" and "please" enough.

Perhaps it is because of our expectations. We *expect* store clerks and waitresses to serve us; after all, we are paying them. Perhaps it is a fall-out from an unhealthy focus on self that permeates society. I have sat around a banquet table where a "thank you" was rarely said to the server. I've also sat at a banquet table where I heard "thank you" said often to the server. Hmmm. If I were the server, which table would I find more enjoyable to serve?

A while ago, I saw a television ad that almost poked fun at our reluctance to say thank you, or our infrequent use of thank you. Have you seen it? It's an advertisement for a credit card company. A man and woman are sitting at a table in a restaurant. The woman asks the man, "Are we ever going to get married?" He starts fidgeting and, after a long pause, answers, "Thank you." The woman becomes somewhat emotional and choked up and says, "I don't think you've ever said that to me before."

Indirect praise

I've decided that I want to be more like that one man out of ten who suffered from leprosy in Jesus' days — you know, the one that is specifically mentioned because he comes back to thank Jesus personally.

As I read the story in Luke 17: 11-19, I discovered that Jesus didn't heal the men on the spot. Jesus told them, "Go, show yourselves to the priests." The Bible passage tells us that, as they went, they were cleansed. But then there's that one man who came back to thank Jesus. The others were most likely grateful, but they didn't bother to come back to thank Jesus personally. Jesus' response: "Were not all ten cleansed? Where are the other nine? Was no one found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?" Notice that Jesus links thanking him (the one who

"I don't think
you've ever said that
to me before."

provided a service) with praising God. Could we not make a similar connection between our thanking others who serve us and building up our relationship with God?

Especially during this past year and a half, I've challenged myself, as well as students in the physical education classes I teach, to think more about going out of our way to thank people. A challenge I have presented to my students is to find and thank some people who probably don't get much praise or thanks for the work they do. I've given the following challenge to my class: Consider thanking the waiter the next time you receive good service in a restaurant. In addition to thanking the waiter, when you are paying the bill, ask to see the manager. When I have done this, the manager usually approaches apprehensively, thinking that she is going

to get another complaint. Surprise her by praising your waiter, and by name. Don't forget to enjoy the reaction — it is usually a smile and a thank-you to you.

Gratitude test

This past semester I posed a similar challenge in the two elementary school physical education classes I taught, but I added some "accountability." I usually begin class with a short devotional. Around Thanksgiving time, I talked about being thankful. Then I had students write on a 3 x 5 card the name of someone they were going to go out of their way to thank. I told them they would be held accountable for this on the final test and provided reminders in the following two weeks of class. On the final test I had these questions: "You wrote that you were going to make it a point to thank someone. Briefly describe how this act made you feel. Describe any response you received from the one whom you thanked." I received many interesting responses, some of them quite touching. I'd like to relate a few responses from my students.

Student #1 thanked a lady server. **The student's feelings:** "At first I was really nervous because there were other students around, but this particular lady was so sweet and always has a smile on her face; so I really wanted to thank her. When I did, her face lit up, and I was so glad I did it. It made me very happy." **The response of the receiver:** "She smiled and said, 'Thanks hon.'" Since then she has smiled at me every time she serves me food."

Student #2 thanked a service worker at a local grocery store. **The student's feelings:** "It made me feel very good to thank a service worker at D & W, but it also made me realize that I should do it more often. It makes me feel horribly selfish to realize

Continued on bottom of next page

The Beginning of Wisdom You Say?

by Bert Witvoet

Many a Christian school was founded on the confession that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. This confession echoes the words of Psalm 111:10 and other related passages in Scripture. But the expression “the fear of the Lord” is not much in use these days. It seems to evoke negative vibes. Who wants to urge people to be afraid of God? Doesn’t that go against all teaching that God is a loving Father? What we *may* hear is a teacher saying that he will put the fear of God into some kids — meaning, that he will probably lose his temper or threaten them so that they won’t cross him again. But you can’t really put the fear of God into anyone, only the fear of punishment or suffering. The fear of God is a matter of the heart and can be given freely only by someone who wants to love and serve God.

Let me retell a fairly well-known story from the Bible to show how important it is to fear the Lord.

The fear of a potentate

Abraham and Sarah traveled a fair bit in

their day, even after they had arrived in Canaan. Sometimes famine drove them to other places. One time they entered the kingdom of Gerar, where King Abimelech held sway. Abimelech was a potentate, a ruler with almost absolute power. Whatever Abimelech wanted, Abimelech got. Rulers in those days could lay claim



to anything their (male) subjects possessed, including their women. Scouts would scour the land and find the most beautiful young women to please their king. Abraham knew about that practice, and he also knew that he had married a beauty in Sarah. This meant that, since he was Sarah’s husband,

he could be in grave danger. Just think of the story of King David and Bathsheba to realize that husbands can be gotten rid of if the king desires his wife.

So Abraham and Sarah had an understanding. If in their travels they would enter a land in which the king wanted Sarah, she was to say that Abraham was her brother. Now I have a lot of respect for Abraham, the father of all believers. He was beloved of God and a far better saint than most of us put together. But in this matter, Abraham lost his spiritual marbles. He blew it.

Technically, what he asked Sarah to say was correct. Abraham and Sarah had the same father, though not the same mother. Sarah was Abraham’s half-sister. If you’re a legalist, you would say that Sarah and Abraham were telling the truth.

Many people would even consider them clever people. But in most courts of law you are expected to tell the *whole* truth and *nothing but* the truth. Certainly in God’s court of law, Abraham and Sarah stood accused of lying. Telling a half truth is the same as lying, especially when the hidden half of the truth is the most

Continued from previous page

that this was the first time I went out of my way to thank a stranger, and it was only because I was asked to do it by my teacher.”

The response of the receiver: “The response was a simple “You’re welcome,” but a very big smile went along with it. This man is always very nice and friendly, but the brighter smile allowed me to realize that it meant something to him.”

Student #3 thanked a cleaning lady at her dorm. **The student’s feelings:** “At first it made me feel like I wasn’t doing it sincerely, since I was almost obligated to

do it for this exam. I would look for her in my dorm, then I would see her and turn the other way because it felt like I would not be thanking her out of a sincere heart.”

The response of the student and receiver: “When I did thank her and when I was saying it, I realized that I did mean it. She was very appreciative and said, “Thank you.”

These were just three examples of positive responses to saying thank you. It’s a rather simple courtesy, but it’s one we sometimes neglect. And there can be

meaning, and blessing to both the giver and receiver when we show our thankfulness.

I confess that there have been many times when I have not reflected a thankful and grateful heart. But God is reminding me of more ways to reflect a thankful heart. In the good times and in the midst of the struggles and challenges of life, may I show more gratitude to others and to God. I want to be more like that one leper out of ten who was singled out by Jesus because he took the time to come back and thank him personally. ☺

important part of the story. But Abraham was afraid of losing his life over Sarah, so he preferred to sacrifice her for his survival.

Timely warning

What Abraham had feared did happen. Abimelech was told of this amazingly beautiful young woman that had taken up residence in his realm, along with a man who claimed to be her brother. So Abimelech took Sarah and made her part of his harem. But God came to Abimelech in a dream one night and told him that he was as good as dead because he had taken to himself a married woman. Not only that, the woman was married to a prophet. So if Abimelech, who had not yet touched Sarah, knew what was good for him, he would return the woman and beg the prophet to pray for him so that his life and that of his family would be spared.

Abimelech got the message, loud and clear. He summoned Abraham and questioned him. "What have you done to us? How have I wronged you that you have brought such great guilt on me and my kingdom?"

A lack of safety

Abraham gives him a very interesting response. He tells him, of course, that part of the reason was that Sarah was his sister. But the reason he did not tell him that she was also his wife was that he was afraid he might lose his life. "I said to myself, There is surely no fear of God in this place, and they will kill me because of my wife."

Now, whatever we think of Abraham's cowardly and unfaithful move, he was right in this one thing: when you enter a place where there is no fear of God, you are not safe. There was nothing wrong with his powers of discernment.

Today, we have reason to make the same kind of observation about our society that Abraham made of Abimelech's society.

There is no fear of God in our land and we have reason to feel that Canada and the United States are not very safe places. One can apply this to the physical reality. Compared to the time when our grandparents were young, our society is much more dangerous. A hundred years ago, most people did not lock their doors because burglaries were rare. Certainly home invasions were unheard of. Drive-by shootings and random killings were not known. Women had less reason to be afraid of the night. But morally and spiritually, too, our society is less safe. The kind of entertainment that our children are subjected to is far more offensive than anything our grandparents had to cope with. Going by what Abraham observed in his situation, it would not be far-fetched to say that the reason our society is so dangerous is that there is no fear of God in the land.

The key to the safe

Isaiah picks up this positive view of the fear of the Lord again (cf. Isaiah 33:6). We read that the Lord God "will be the sure foundation for your times, a rich store of salvation and wisdom and knowledge" and that "the fear of the Lord is the key to this treasure." Imagine the treasure chest of God filled with such life-giving forces as salvation, wisdom and knowledge. If you want to open that chest you need the key called "the fear of God." With it, you unlock the storehouse of health and happiness. Without it, your country, churches, homes and schools are forever on the outside looking in.

The main thrust of the fear of the Lord is a healthy respect for God's will and a trust that he will protect those who love him above all other things and people.

In Acts 9: 31, the early church is described as experiencing a time of peace: "It was strengthened and encouraged by the

Holy Spirit, it grew in numbers, living in the fear of the Lord." Again we are reminded that the Christian life and the fear of the Lord go together like love and marriage: you can't have one without the other.

So look at your school and ask yourself whether the fear of the Lord is the beginning of its instruction in knowledge and its learning of mathematics. Is true piety the spirit that permeates your classrooms? Are you holding the right key for the treasure chest that holds wisdom, understanding, counsel, power and knowledge? ☺

CEJ Website Now Open

Readers may want to know that the Christian Educators Journal has its own website. Go to cejonline.com to inspect the first efforts at making the magazine better known and accessible. At this time we are still adding features as we go along. If you want to make suggestions for how we can improve the site, please do so. We would also encourage others who have websites to link to ours.

Editor

Slouching Toward Bedlam

2006: A Graduation Odyssey

Or The Wit and Wisdom of Rex Kane

Jan Kaarsvlam has recently ended his term as webmaster for the Christian Academy of Japan. He was asked to step down after inventing an infinite loop in which visitors to the website interested in finding out more about the school's mission were directed to the vision page, which then directed them to the mission page, which then directed them back to the vision page and so on. An estimated 670 inquiring parents are now trapped in cyberspace, and CAJ is considering mounting a rescue mission.

Almost two hundred Bedlam Christian senior students were lined up in the basement hallway of the new multi-million-dollar Prosperity Worship Center, ready to graduate. It was the largest graduating class in Bedlam's history.

"The students have probably kidnapped him," thought Faculty Marshall and paranoid Bedlam librarian Jon Kleinhut as he wandered down yet another hallway in what seemed to be the third education wing he had encountered in the airport-like megachurch. He was looking for Cal VanderMeer. Cal was supposed to be giving the graduation speech. The ceremony was scheduled to start in three minutes, but no one could find him.

Out in the parking lot, physical education teacher Rex Kane and shop teacher Gord Winkle were going about their job as the parking lot directors with gusto. Rex stood at the main entrance, his lips pursed around a whistle that he sounded shrilly as he waved his orange traffic wand in wide arcs. The whole affair was strangely rhythmic, as if he were dancing — as in fact he was. He had tucked his Ipod in his breast pocket and had run the wire for the earpiece discreetly through his shirt and out his collar. He now directed traffic to the intoxicating rhythms of his favorite band, Duran Duran. Meanwhile, Gord stood deeper in the lot, his arms pumping as he tried to direct the incoming flow of cars toward the overflow parking lot in the back. Nicely dressed parents smiled at him as they ignored his efforts and double-parked closer to the building.

Kleinhut quickly sidled out a side door, looking to the left and the right as he approached the traffic controllers. Gord had given up. He sat on the trunk of a Chevy Impala, his chubby face resting on his closed fists, looking glum. Rex, however, his back to Kleinhut and the parking lot, continued waving his wand, blowing his whistle, and, Kleinhut couldn't help noticing, shaking his butt — all this despite the fact that absolutely no cars were entering the lot anymore.

Kleinhut walked up to Rex and called his name. Rex seemed not to notice. Kleinhut tapped him on the shoulder, startling Rex in the midst of his patented bolo wand wave. His eyes wide, he jumped forward, spun, and dropped into a defensive jujitsu position. The traffic wand sailed from his hand and landed on

the back of a shiny new Hummer 2, setting off its car alarm.

"Don't be doin' that, man!" Rex said, removing the earphones from his ears. "I might have killed you."

"Before the night's over, I'm going to wish you had," Jon whined. "Rex, Cal's not here. We're doomed."

Rex smiled and patted Kleinhut on the cheek. "Don't you worry, ol' Jon-a-rooney! Rex is here, no need to fear." Before Kleinhut could say a word, Rex had slipped out of his orange vest, handed it off, and pushed boldly toward the building. Thunderstruck, Kleinhut followed.

By the time Rex reached the auditorium, the Salutatorian had already greeted the assembled family and friends, and the Concert Singers, Bedlam's premier vocal group, had finished singing its traditional graduation song, "Soar Like Condors." Without breaking stride, Rex walked down the center aisle and mounted the podium.

"Good evening, ladies and gentlemen," he began, waving a dismissive hand at Principal Vanderhaar's inquisitive gaze. "I think that takes in most of you. It seems that Mr. VanderMeer has mysteriously failed to appear tonight, so I've been asked to say a few words in his stead. So, dear graduates, as you prepare to enter the world, I thought I would share with you a few things that I believe.

"I believe it takes a village to raise a child — though, parents, I wouldn't be surprised if some of your children didn't require at least two villages. Or maybe a whole metropolitan area.

"And I believe there is a deep-seated irony in the universe, planted there by God himself, and that this evening is a manifestation of that irony. Tonight is called commencement, which means beginning, but really tonight is an ending. It is an ending to your childhood, your innocence, and your guarantee of a hot lunch every Tuesday. So tonight is an ending, and tomorrow is a beginning, the first day of the rest of your life. Of course, really every day is the first day of the rest of your life. The funny thing about that is that there is never a second day of the rest of your life.

"And I believe that life is like a butterfly. If you catch a butterfly, let it go. If it comes back to you, it is yours. And if it does, then for crying out loud put it in a container before it changes its mind. But don't forget to punch holes in the top. Otherwise, that little bugger can't breathe.

"And you might call me crazy for believing this, but I believe the C.I.A. is monitoring my phone calls to Barducci's Pizza Emporium."

In the back of the auditorium, Kleinhut nodded knowingly. He too had heard strange crackling on the phone line last time he had ordered a pizza. Trying his best to look both commanding



and thoughtful, Rex forged ahead.

"In answer to the age-old question, I believe that, with the right amount of hard work and dedication, a woodchuck can chuck just as much wood as he wants. Now you think about that for a minute." Rex put his finger to his temple and looked across the rows of students, as if waiting for lightbulbs to appear above their heads.

"I believe that ... um, I believe" A brief look of panic crossed Rex's face, and after an awkward moment, he said the only words that came to mind, words he'd been dancing to only a few minutes earlier. "I believe her name is Rio and she dances on the sand / Just like that river twisting through a dusty land."

Parents and grandparents exchanged baffled looks, but the students, accustomed to Mr. Kane's odd elocutions, merely smiled. The panic had passed, and Rex seemed once more in full control.

"And that brings me to what is perhaps my most important point. Listen people, when life hands you lemons, you need to take those lemons and go trade them with somebody. Get yourself some Oke-dokee cheese popcorn. Or, wait, better yet, get some mozzarella cheese. Then all you need to do is find somebody walking around with a pizza crust. And somebody else who has a can of tomato sauce, and maybe a can opener. Together you make pizza, but alone you make, well, cheese. Of course, you'll also need to find somebody with a working oven. Or you could just order out.

"In short, my little scholars of both genders, what I am trying to get across to you is this: Whether you're making pizzas or catching butterflies, whether you're playing dodge ball or chucking wood, do it with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength. And do it listening for God's still, small voice. There is a lot that is loud and brash that passes for wisdom in this world. But most of it is nonsense. What we have tried to teach you in your years here at Bedlam is to discern the truth that God makes available in even the most trivial or apparently silly message. To do that takes discernment, which comes from the Greek word *urnment* meaning 'to place within a clay vessel, or urn. It is important that....'"

Rex stopped mid-sentence and stared, flabbergasted. Cal VanderMeer, coat off and shirtsleeves rolled up, his hands black with grime, was walking down the center aisle.

"Cal, you're supposed to be missing."

Cal leaped up the steps and whispered into Rex's ear. Rex smiled and turned back to his audience.

"Mr. VanderMeer is late, ladies and gentlemen, because he gave roadside assistance to an elderly gentleman with a blown

gasket in his engine. He has a humdinger of a speech prepared for you, so I'm going to turn things over to him, but first let me say this: Cal VanderMeer is a shining example of what I was just talking about. You kids listen to him."

Cal was the sort of teacher who had won quiet respect of almost everyone because of his years of faithful teaching. He took his speech out of his back pocket, unfolded it, then folded it back up and put it back in his pocket. Cal VanderMeer's voice was short of breath and a bit ragged, but it came through strongly.

"I don't know what Mr. Kane has been saying to you, and I don't have time to give you my whole speech, but it boils down to this. Graduates, the Bible says that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. You have heard that so many times, I imagine you don't even think about what it means. So humor an old man for a minute and I'll try to explain what it means as best as I can understand it.

"It means that we don't take our priorities from the world, but from God. Think about that for a minute. It means that we don't live our lives to get the best job, or live in the best neighborhood, in the best house — but we live our lives to serve God. It means we spend our lives learning how not to judge people — by the color of the skin, the cut of their clothes, the number of piercings they have, or anything else. Instead, we try to see in all those we meet, the image of God.

"And, most of all, graduates, we know that we will not get it right. We cannot get it right. In fact, if fixing the world were left to us, all would be lost. The good news is, Jesus died for us, though we didn't deserve it, and everything we do should be motivated by thanks for that act. So, go out there, my brothers and sisters, and live good lives of thanksgiving for our God."

Conventional wisdom says that no one remembers what their graduation speaker says — not even a year later. The graduating class of Bedlam High School in 1996 proved that conventional wisdom is sometimes wrong, and remembered the words of their scruffy, grease-encrusted speaker for decades to come. Of course, no one could remember what Rex had said. ☹

Living and Working in Community:

by Peter Rhebergen

PeterRhebergen (peternelly@bulkley.net) is a teacher at Bulkley Valley Christian Elementary School in Smithers, British Columbia.

My colleague Curt Gesh and I have been doing some brainstorming on how we can help each other address an area of accountability that often gets overlooked. Curt thinks we are two paleolithic “kids in the hall” who are out of place in today’s pedagogical centers. Here we are, wondering if there is a way we can help other teachers with a few weird suggestions. We were thinking about the whole business of reporting on the progress of a child’s spiritual development.

Teachers don’t want to make a qualitative judgement, because “You can’t really judge spiritual things,” and, yet, teachers do so in a whole bunch of ways on report cards. Is it true that we cannot intentionally report on a student’s spiritual development? We decided to give it a whirl and see what shakes loose.

Structure versus growth

In some sense, the most difficult area to evaluate is the one that describes how students live and work in community. If reverence for God is judged negatively by the use of profanity or taking God’s name in vain, or positively by the length of one’s prayers, then, perhaps, our students’ spiritual *stature* could be measured. But if we can observe how students generally regard their role here on earth, whether their lifestyles show a servant attitude, and how they respect or disrespect God’s creation, then maybe we could evaluate their spiritual *growth*. Maybe we can conclude that most students should receive an X for this item (an X means that improvement is needed). So far our report cards have been silent on the area of spiritual growth.

The theme for my class (Peter Rhebergen

is speaking here) this year was, “But now you are the people of God” (1 Peter 2:10b). This has been a reminder that all our thoughts and actions should be consistent with our claim that we are the people of God. In our daily devotions, and in our course work, we often took time to reflect on the awesome presence of God in all of life, and how we can better bring honor to his name. I expected that in the ensuing few months I would see growth in my students’ awareness of how they can be the people of God. I would see deeds that clearly point to this noble objective. Perhaps by the end of June, they will be more worthy of the check mark that signifies God’s approval and pleasure with their efforts to be God-honoring people of God.

A check list

Here are some ways students might distinguish themselves as people of God in our school:

- ✿volunteering to assist with our composting program
- ✿collecting compost and washing the stinking collection buckets
- ✿cutting up compost for our worms (What?! Your school doesn’t have a worm bed?)
- ✿enjoying opportunities to work in the garden
- ✿willingness to assist with recycling of various items: drink containers, cardboard, paper
- ✿voluntarily picking up trash on the playground, in hallways, on the bus
- ✿examining the nature of prayer requests: moving from self-centered thoughts to a more comprehensive view of life, including the needs and blessings of global children, our governments and leaders, our air and water
- ✿developing current events

awareness: knowing about what is going on in God’s big world

✿observing the news, and bringing to class clippings or reports

✿probing life and society, coming up with “high level” questions and responses that show a deep thinking about life and one’s faith

✿continuing the recent discussion of the words Christmas versus holiday, festive, seasonal

✿sharing an article, an experience, a poem, a letter to the editor, and making it a personal manner

✿offering assistance and friendship to others, to students who need encouragement, to those who are lonely

✿noting what children read, do, watch, say, think about, care for, and writing about that in journals.

Perhaps I will get my students to sign a contract at the beginning of the next school year. In that contract they would agree to certain objectives having to do with living in community, and they would agree to be graded on how well they kept their side of the bargain. I have an idea that if I don’t make them active participants from the start, my ideas will simply evaporate into a mere dream that ends each June.

We believe that, while we can’t make a fancy rubric for considering spiritual development, we can, by carefully observing student responses to the sort of things listed, make helpful and accurate comments on a report card.

The more we thought about spiritual development and report cards, the more we found ourselves doing healthy introspection about our own lives as members of God’s kingdom, members of a school staff, and teachers who sometimes have a lot in common with these younger “kids in the hall.” ☺

Christian Education: Investment, Not Cost



by Don Oppewal

Don Oppewal is professor emeritus of education at Calvin College in Grand Rapids, Michigan.

With all the talk of the increasing costs of Christian education, it is well to remember that Christian education is more an investment than a cost. Even though teachers may say that teaching in Christian schools “costs” them so much in loss of salary or that it “costs” parents so much per child, let it never be forgotten that money used for education, Christian or otherwise, is an investment more than an expenditure. Money viewed as *expenditure* is money gone, departed; money viewed as *investment* is money stored up, money bringing a return.

Cars depreciate, clothes wear out or become outdated, and bicycles rust and break down; these represent costs — money spent and never to return. Education is different. In our bookkeeping, ledgers-of-life money devoted to Christian education is not money spent and gone, but money stored up for Kingdom possibilities.

Working capital

J.J. Rathbone, Chair-person of the Board of Standard Oil Company, put it this way: “The most important capital that any economy possesses is the skills which people carry around in their heads.” He knows what we tend to forget: Money put into people is not spent but invested; it is working capital for future returns. Children and their talents are like natural resources, needing only investment of capital to bring a return in the future.

These returns are many. The expected returns are in the form of competent laymen and leaders in all the areas that church and community require. From Christian schools — and hopefully because of them — come the salespersons dedicated to the ethic of Christian service in selling, the construction workers committed to show their love and concern in carpentry, the mothers and fathers motivated to exhibit Christ-like qualities for their children to imitate, the citizens who see where the will of God can work in the voting process at the polls.

Note that the whole Christian community, and not just the investor, benefits from these returns. And that is why the whole Christian community, and not just the parent, should support Christian schools. The entire community is strengthened in its work and witness when one child is strengthened in work and witness. There are no investments for purely private gain in the Christian school; they build interest redeemable by any organization, corporation, political party, or civic committee that needs the talents

developed in the young. If all members of the Christian community — pre-parent, post-parent, and single person — could see this investment opportunity, support for Christian school would be even more widespread than it is now.

On the move

Parents and pedagogues who catch the vision invest not only many dollars but many days of energy in the younger generation, and do it gladly. They see that putting money into Christian schools is one of the best ways to invest in the coming of the Kingdom of God. Without the emerging talents and developing potential of the next generation of Christians, the onward march of the Kingdom will surely be slowed.

Some wag paraphrased a familiar hymn to say, “Like a mighty tortoise moves the Church of God; brothers we are treading where the saints have already trod.” A bit of a caricature, don’t you think? At least, the church moves, however slowly. And it moves, at least partly, because of dedicated teachers who see salary loss not as “cost” but investment. It also moves because parents pay tuition and enter it into their ledgers-of-life in the “capital investment” column and not in the “profit-and loss” column. It is they who are not a debit but a credit to the Christian School and the Kingdom.

An added note: Viewing textbooks as investment, not expenses, may make paying for these materials more palatable. In fact, we may wish to keep them for a reasonable period of time instead of looking for the best price we can get on E-bay. ☺

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CREATIVE TEACHING

The Best Weapon Against Boredom

by Jon Kroeze

Jon Kroeze (jkroeze@calvinchristian.org) is a fourth-grade teacher at Calvin Christian School in Blaine, Minnesota.

I sat at my desk late Thursday night typing in “week 20” on the top of my lesson plan file for the 13th time in my career. It’s mid-winter, and the motivation to fill those 26 little boxes in my lesson plan template is a bit hard this time. Where do I start? I hate to admit that I usually start with a math textbook, as that one is easiest to write down sequentially for me. However, lesson plans always take me a long time — usually because I start to dream.

Yes, I could give a test on our *Jacket* novel, but are there other ways in which I can assess whether students have really comprehended the book and actually understood what it teaches about prejudice and unspoken racism? Some kids have already mastered one-digit multiplication — what could they be doing while the others are practicing? Sure, the Bible manual has a worksheet on using money wisely, but is there a way to make it more real for the fourth-graders? These questions always bog me down and keep me from filling in these boxes quickly or easily.

I can’t decide whether lesson planning should be easier or not. I’m not sure there is an efficient and easy way to unfold God’s massive and intricate creation. When we try to help students see the brokenness of our world and challenge them to find ways to restore it to God’s intended purposes, I hope we don’t approach lesson planning thoughtlessly — or without creativity!

Imaginative planning

It’s often said that our imaginations diminish as we age. My toddler sons are always dreaming up things for their toys to accomplish, and their dreams include long-horn cattle approaching our garage and

thoughts of God deciding to trick the weatherman and send snow when it isn’t forecast. I hope that as teachers we are doing everything we can to reclaim and foster our imaginations. It’s crucial for our students that we do. But how do we use our imagination in the classroom?

First, we need to engage our imagination to help us understand who our students are. At times, we need to imagine what God intended for this child. What did he create this student to be? She isn’t there

I have to use my imagination to think of what it would feel like to see a mass of letters on a page without meaning.

now, but what could I do to help her be what God wants her to be? I sometimes can’t relate to a student who struggles with reading, but I have to use my imagination to empathize with him and think of what it would feel like to see a mass of letters on a page with no meaning. My family life has always been stable, so when a student comes from a broken family, I need to use my imagination in recognizing how she might feel and how I should relate to her.

Secondly, an imaginative teacher will eliminate boredom among her students. John Piper, in *Life as a Vapor*, says this about the imagination: “The supremacy of God in the life of the mind is not honored when God and his amazing world are observed truly, analyzed duly, and communicated boringly. Imagination is the key to killing boredom in the classroom.

We must imagine ways to say truth for what it really is. And it is not boring.” I am not calling teachers to be entertainers. Too many kids, who expect school to match their fast-paced world of video games and television, say that their classroom or teacher is boring. To those kids I usually apply a statement I have taped to my desk attributed to Walter Percy: “Boredom is the self being stuffed with itself.”

However, it is our responsibility to show God’s world as it truly is — a wonderfully diverse place filled with opportunities to be uncovered in new and imaginative ways. God blessed each of us with a mind that can imagine. Piper adds, “The imagination calls up new words, new analogies, new metaphors, new illustrations, new connections to say old, glorious truth. Imagination is the faculty of the mind that God has given us to make the communication of his beauty beautiful.” What an opportunity we have to fulfill our own mandate to be image bearers through our teaching. Our creative God formed this world out of nothing.

From our imagination — from out of nothing — we can form new ways of presenting this truth to our students. We may think of a new way for students to explore the conflict in the Civil War. We might imagine a new method for students to practice their multiplication facts. We could develop a time of classroom worship during which students consider the qualities of God in a new light. Nine times in the Bible do writers encourage us to “sing a new song” to the Lord — these new songs come from the sanctified imagination of the worshippers. When the imagination of the teacher and students is unleashed in the classroom, boredom will no longer be even an occasional visitor.

Infectious approach

The third reason that I am calling us to

creative teaching with our imagination is that it is contagious — both among our colleagues and students. The imagination seems to be like a muscle — it can either atrophy if not used or gain strength when exercised. It also has the quality of feeding other's imaginations. Therefore, when students see us using our imagination and modeling creative thought, creative writing, creative use of language in our speech, creative approaches to problem solving, creative prayers, creative worship — they will be drawn to develop their imaginations as well. The opposite is probably also true. If students see us reading verbatim what a

textbook publisher has prompted us to say, or asking dull, low-order questions — how can we expect them to be motivated to find creative ways to respond to tasks and projects we ask them to do?

As I settled back in my chair to consider my lesson plans, I connected with Solomon's thoughts from last week's Bible lesson. This is the prayer Solomon prayed as he started his reign as king: "Now, O LORD my God, you have made your servant king in place of my father David. But I am only a little child and do not know how to carry out my duties. Your servant is here among the people you have chosen, a

great people, too numerous to count or number. So give your servant a discerning heart to govern your people."

Our prayer as teachers might be, "O Lord, you have given us the tremendous opportunity to unfold your world to our students for six hours each day. But we are fallen, tired children ourselves who really don't know how to carry out our teaching duties. We are here among your children — 25 or more each year. So give your servants a creative, imaginative mind to teach your children." ☪

In the Hands of a Barber

by Paul Theule

Paul Theule (ptheule@rochesterchristian.school.org) is principal of the Christian School in Rochester, New York.

I quietly waited, not quite around the corner, paging through Russian and Lithuanian magazines scattered on the table before me. Then she invited me to her chair. I silently showed her the note, carefully written in Lithuanian by one of my students, asking her to give me a haircut, not too short, but a bit more than just a trim. Smiling and relieved that the note had served its purpose, I settled into her chair. She covered me as barbers do.

As a rule, I resist forming opinions from stereotypes, but I have observed in my four summers that Lithuanians are quite gentle folk, but that the Russians, who make up 17% of Lithuania's population, are generally more brusque and aggressive. When she grabbed me by the top of the head and jerked my head to the left, I

concluded that yes, she is Russian...Then she attacked.

Now, I know a few words of Lithuanian, important words like *ledai* (ice cream), and I know about two words in Russian (*nyet* and *bubushka*). Thus, I have no vocabulary that carries into the barber chair. So I tried to relax and just watch what was going to happen, figuring that the worst hair cut possible would, eventually, grow out for repairs. Then with a pang of anxiety, I considered that at my balding age, it might never grow back.

The hair flew in all directions as she vigorously removed 90 percent of my hair. Then, with a glint in her eye as I recall, she attacked my eyebrows, and, then, with satisfaction, my beard.

Wordless, I just watched what was happening, powerlessly wondering what was going to happen next, where it would end, and what I would look like. She had obviously seen me as a project, and when she boldly brushed the loose hair off me

and snapped the towel free from around my neck, she didn't really smile, but she was obviously proud of her workmanship.

By bringing a translated request to her, I thought I had come prepared. As I mused with wonder in the chair, I considered that living in faith is like getting this haircut in Lithuania: We may make all the right preparations, but when in the chair of the realities of life, sometimes we can only hang on, hope, and take a look at the results.

Raising and educating kids is similar. We can do all we can, and must do so, but in the end we just trust God. Parenting and teaching is a lot of work, and we must do all we can before God, but in the end, our kids are God's kids, in God's Hands, and he is the one who is really forming them.

I need to send a photo to my mom and show her my return to the brushcut. ☪



Nancy Knol
Column Editor
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What to Wear

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

Several years ago now, a young minister accepted an invitation to speak to our student body in chapel. I always find this willingness admirable, since high school audiences — especially for outsiders — are notoriously challenging. This brave soul demonstrated even more courage (some would call it foolhardiness) by addressing how young people dress. His point, basically, was that each day when we choose what to wear in the morning, we are making “a religious decision.” You can imagine the response.

Because his delivery was polished and thoughtful, the students listened with a fair amount of respect, although there were suppressed giggles and muttered comments in various factions throughout the auditorium. When he got specific and started talking about Abercrombie and Fitch as examples of ungodly manipulators of not only fashion but also moral values, the level of response got turned up several notches.

In most classrooms after the chapel, there was lively discussion about his message, and the school newspaper revisited the debate a week or so later. It is my guess that most of the students found his message over the top and ridiculous, albeit entertaining. But a sizable minority was willing to consider it further and, perhaps, even take it to heart.

I think he was right. In many schools today, including Christian schools, how students dress is an important and, yes, religious matter. Catholic schools have been relatively unwavering in regard to this issue and have claimed that, in spite of the protest of many students and a handful of parents, big problems have been circumvented because of a strong emphasis on dress code.

It is not my intention here to urge schools to jump on the uniform bandwagon, even though that might be a good idea. Mainly I want to encourage teachers and administrators to be more thoughtful about setting standards for dress as one arena out of many where we need to take a long hard look at how our culture has (mis)shaped us.

Ask any male teacher how difficult it is to maintain a professional stance when the girls in his classroom are wearing low cut shirts or high cut skirts. Ask any teacher, male or female, how many times they have seen the top half of a boy's boxer shorts, or the colorful thong a girl reveals as she bends down to pick something up from the floor. I'm sure a few sly jokes about

this not being an altogether unpleasant experience will inevitably slide into the conversation at this point. But that, too, is a religious response.

Is anyone starting to bristle yet?

Just in case, why not read a recent book by Lauren Winner, author of such notable books as *Girl Meets God* and *Mudhouse Sabbath*? Winner has written for the *New York Times Book Review* and is currently completing a Ph.D. in American religious history at Columbia. Her book *Real Sex* is a frank discussion of what Christians need to consider in regard to what has happened to that quaint word *chastity*. In one chapter called “Lies our Culture Tells About Sex,” Winner says, “Modest dress — appropriate dress, if you will — is not simply about covering up potentially enticing body parts. What's lost when we let it all hang out is not simply the allure — or the Victorian primness — of modesty. What's lost is the recognition that how we dress shapes how we carry ourselves, how we interact with others, how we engage our communities and institutions.... There is, it seems to me, a certain power in modest dressing, an assertion that, though my body is beautiful, I am more than a sex object designed for your passing entertainment. But the power of dressing is also the power of narrative. For our clothes tell stories, and it would be naive and irresponsible to pretend otherwise. Clothes tell stories about sex and chastity, to be sure, but they also narrate a stance toward our environments; our dress suggests a set of priorities. That is why we enjoy clothing so much, of course — because we reinvent ourselves and our narratives when we try out a new look. So the question for Christians is not an absolute one about skirt length, but rather something about communication. What stories do we want to tell ourselves and others through our choices of clothing?”

I do not have answers to all the questions that such a debate might evoke; I just want to see us grapple honestly and productively with it both in regard to how our students dress and in regard to how we dress. It is my hope that teachers and administrators will not shrug or give hazy guidelines and hope for the best. This demonstrates a shortcoming in our assertion that we are meant to be “agents of unwarping” in our culture rather than allowing cultural trends to swallow us whole. Isn't that our vision? Tough business. The world is, indeed, as Wordsworth once wrote, “too much with us.” ☪

How Open Should Our Admissions Policy Be?

Clarence Joldersma (cjolders@calvin.edu), professor of education at Calvin College, Grand Rapids, Mich., writes that Tony Kamphuis set the stage for this issue's column with his question: "Whom should our schools serve? Should we serve anyone who desires our education, regardless of their own level of religious commitment? Or should we limit enrollment only to those whose parents or guardians testify to a relationship with Christ (in other words, any Christians)? Or should admission be limited only to those who have at least some understanding of a Reformed worldview, in order to ensure a good connection between home and school? How open should our admissions policies be?"

March 5, 2006

Tony, I am wondering if there is only one right answer. One principal will accept a student because the family values the school community and understands that Christian principles underlie this educational setting. Another board will expect a statement of faith from parents. A third school spends time with each parent, explaining the Reformed Christian worldview which directs the school these parents want to join.



Lois Brink

These three approaches represent an enrollment and governance policy that is directed either by the school leaders, by the community, or the prevailing situation. At times when diversity is valued and tuition dollars are needed, a desire for inclusion promotes an open enrollment policy, doesn't it?

My own perspective is that we all need to return to a procedure that clearly and deliberately informs parents about the Reformed Christian worldview. This entails explaining and articulating clearly what our schools provide and what the differences and similarities are with other Christian schooling traditions. In that way we can direct folks towards the expectations that participation in this kind of Christian school community entails. I know that some schools are already doing a good job here.

I wish we could spend more time "up front" with parents, supporting church groups, leaders, boards and staff members, in substantive discussion about our "Reformed worldview" as it impacts school curriculum and instruction, programs and students. This might lead to a grounded, coherent policy about whom our schools should serve, and why.

Lois

March 7, 2006

Lois, I would certainly agree with you and add that once the policy is clearly laid out, acceptance of it would then allow parents to send their children to that school. As long as parents understand and agree that the students will be taught from a Reformed perspective, they are likely to be satisfied with the school.



Agnes Fisher

Agnes

March 8, 2006

I agree with you, Agnes, that, as long as the admissions policy is clearly laid out and the parents know what kind of education the school offers, everyone can be satisfied. But I do think we need to ask deeper questions. If we do have the "Reformed" view, and we are convinced that is the best direction to take in education, are we communicating that view well to our parents? Is the "Reformed" perspective really put into practice in our schools? Has anyone clearly defined it? Do we want a "Reformed" perspective, or do we want a biblical perspective? Maybe we should start with a definition.



Johanna Campbell

Johanna

March 12, 2006

Johanna, I thought a Reformed perspective *was* a biblical perspective! After all if *sola scriptura* is a defining characteristic

The panel consists of:

Pam Adams (padams@dordt.edu), professor of education and director of graduate education at Dordt College.
Lois Brink (LBrink@grcs.org), curriculum coordinator and media director at Grand Rapids Christian High School.
Johanna Campbell (ctabc@twu.ca), executive director of the Christian Teachers Association of British Columbia.
Agnes Fisher (agnesfisher@easternchristian.org) teacher at Eastern Christian High, North Haledon, New Jersey.
Tony Kamphuis (TonyKamp@aol.com), executive director of the Niagara Association for Christian Education.
Tim Leugs (tleugs@cutlervillecs.org) a fifth-grade teacher at Cutlerville Christian School, Grand Rapids, Michigan.



Clarence Joldersma

of Reformed thinking, we wouldn't be interested in being anything but "biblical." But to return to one aspect of my original question: If a family understands what sort of education they are in for, but doesn't necessarily "support" that worldview at home or through any discernible church attendance or other activities, should they be let in? How important for the effective education of our students do we judge cooperation between the home, school, and church to be, or have we moved "beyond" that formulation?



Tony Kamphuis

Tony

says "let's get more people to see how great this is!"

And that brings me to the way in which, in my opinion, the school should operate. It is important that the school reflect the Reformed worldview of most of its constituents and attempt to help others gain the vision as well. After clearly communicating what the school's philosophy of seeking Christ in all subjects and activities looks like, the representatives of the school should work to help others to understand what a Reformed perspective of education means. After that, those prospective parents who can agree to support and echo a Reformed worldview in the instruction of their children should be welcomed.

Tim

March 14, 2006

Hello, everyone. This is my first posting. I will be looking forward to getting to know you all better in the months ahead.

Tony's question demands that we more clearly define the roles of and interaction among church, home, and school in the development of a child in all areas—including spiritual formation, cognitive development, and social-emotional development.

Believing that church, home, and school can (or should) contribute to student development, I think it's important to insure that there is communication between the three. The difficulty with the "three-legged stool" metaphor is that, in today's world, schools maintain contact with families and families maintain contact with the church, but the third link is often lacking. This is in no small part due to the population sprawl so common in North American culture. In the past, a school's constituents were restricted to a specific geographical area, and the school was founded by neighbors and fellow parishioners. Today, neighbors do not necessarily attend the same school or church. Rather than a school serving the children of five churches, it may serve the children of 80 churches. How does a principal or other school representative work to build communication or a partnership with all of them, especially when not all of those churches operate from a Reformed (i.e., Kuyperian) perspective?

The way that I see the church and school coping with this disconnect is that schools have attempted to be the center of a community formerly built by neighborhoods and congregations. This does not help the school to connect with the churches because community formation by nature tries to draw families from all over into a tightly knit group that says, "We're in it together." This prevents them from being an outreach-minded group that



Tim Leugs

March 15, 2006

Welcome to our conversations, Tim. This is indeed a complex and real problem, as all suggest. If we accept students when their families assent to our Reformed principles simply because they want a "private" education for their children, our schools are in danger of losing their groundings. The teacher sets the stage in the classroom but really can't do much if parents are not cooperating with the basic tenets that the school was founded on.

The admissions policies need to be clear. But there will be times when decisions need to be made because families don't appear to be living out the Christian life. As Lois writes, each school needs to consider the family and the unique make-up of the school.

I can think of several instances where I would accept and nurture a child in the school even when the parents don't back up the teachers, and don't even attend church. One such instance occurs when the grandparents want their grandchildren in Christian schools and support the mission of the school. The parents might or might not have been raised as Christians. However, the grandparents, either through a recent commitment to Christian education or a life-long commitment, want their grandchildren to be raised in the fear of the Lord. The grandparents might even be paying the tuition.

I am sure there are other unique situations. There will always be some disagreement between what teachers expect parents to do in terms of Christian discipleship at home and what actually happens or, at least, what we perceive is happening.

Not an easy issue. ☹

Pam



Pam Adams

Finding the Pearl of Great Treasure

Reflections on the Right Use of School Studies

by Simone Weil

Simone Weil, was a French Jew who converted to Christianity. But she refused to become a member of the Catholic Church, the only church she felt drawn to. She felt she could be faithful to Christ without being a member of the church. "A few sheep should remain outside the fold," she wrote, "to bear witness that the love of Christ is essentially something different." André Gide declared her "the most spiritual writer of this [twentieth] century." Albert Camus called her "the only great spirit of our time." She could be described as a born-again Jew, a Christian anarchist and a radical mystic.

The key to a Christian conception of studies is the realization that prayer consists of attention. It is the orientation of all the attention of which the soul is capable towards God. The quality of attention counts for much in the quality of the prayer. Warmth of heart cannot make up for it.

It is the highest part of the attention only which makes contact with God, when prayer is intense and pure enough for such a contact to be established; when the whole attention is turned towards God.

Of course, school exercises only develop a lower kind of attention. Nevertheless they are extremely effective in increasing the power of attention which will be available at the time of prayer, on condition that they are carried out with a view to this purpose and this purpose alone.

Although people seem to be unaware of it today, the development of the faculty of attention forms the real object and almost the sole interest of studies. Most school tasks have a certain intrinsic interest as well, but such an interest is secondary. All tasks which really call upon the power of attention are interesting for the same reason and to an almost equal degree.

School children and students who love

God should never say: "For my part I like mathematics"; "I like French"; "I like Greek." They should learn to like all these subjects, because all of them develop that faculty of attention which, directed towards God, is the very substance of prayer.

If we have no aptitude or natural taste for geometry this does not mean that our faculty for attention will not be developed by wrestling with a problem or studying a



theorem. On the contrary it is almost an advantage.

No effort wasted

It does not even matter much whether we succeed in finding the solution or understanding the proof, although it is important to try really hard to do so. Never is a genuine effort of attention wasted. It always has its effect on the spiritual plane and, in consequence, on the lower one of the intelligence, for all spiritual light lightens the mind.

If we concentrate our attention on trying

to solve a problem of geometry, and if at the end of an hour we are no nearer to doing so than at the beginning, we have nevertheless been making progress each minute of that hour in another more mysterious dimension. Without our knowing or feeling it, this apparently barren effort has brought more light into the soul. The result will one day be discovered in prayer.

Concentration bears fruit

Moreover it may very likely be felt besides in some department of the intelligence in no way connected with mathematics. Perhaps he who made the unsuccessful effort will one day be able to grasp the beauty of a line of Racine more vividly on account of it. But it is certain that this effort will bear its fruit in prayer. There is no doubt whatever about that.

Certainties of this kind are experimental. But if we do not believe in them before experiencing them, if at least we do not behave as though we believed in them, we shall never have the experience which leads to such certainties. There is a kind of contradiction here. Above a given level this is the case with all useful knowledge concerning spiritual progress. If we do not regulate our conduct by it before having proved it, if we do not hold on to it for a long time only by faith, a faith at first stormy and without light, we shall never transform it into certainty. Faith is the indispensable condition.

Longing for light

The best support for faith is the guarantee that if we ask our Father for bread, he does not give us a stone. Quite apart from explicit religious belief, every time that a human being succeeds in making an effort of attention with the sole idea of increasing his grasp of truth, he acquires a greater aptitude for grasping it, even if his effort

produces no visible fruit. An Eskimo story explains the origin of light as follows: "In the eternal darkness, the crow, unable to find any food, longed for light, and the earth was illumined." If there is a real desire, if the thing desired is really light, the desire for light produces it. There is a real desire when there is an effort of attention. It is really light that is desired if all other incentives are absent. Even if our efforts of attention seem for years to be producing no result, one day, a light, which is in exact proportion to them, will flood the soul. Every effort adds a little gold to a treasure which no power on earth can take away. The useless efforts made by the Curé d'Ars, for long and painful years, in his attempt to learn Latin, bore fruit in the marvelous discernment which enabled him to see the very soul of his penitents behind their words and even their silences.

Students must therefore work without any wish to gain good marks, to pass examinations, to win school successes; without any reference to their natural abilities and tastes; applying themselves equally to all their tasks, with the idea that each one will help to form in them the habit of that attention which is the substance of prayer. When we set out to do a piece of work, it is necessary to wish to do it

correctly, because such a wish is indispensable if there is to be true effort.

Spiritual objective

Underlying this immediate objective, however, our deep purpose should aim solely at increasing the power of attention with a view to prayer; as we draw the shape of a letter on paper, not with a view to the shape, but with a view to the idea we want to express. To make this the sole and exclusive purpose of our studies is the first condition to be observed if we are to put them to the right use.

The second condition is to take great pains to examine squarely and to contemplate attentively and slowly each school task in which we have failed, seeing how unpleasing and second-rate it is, without seeking any excuse or overlooking any mistake or any of our tutor's corrections, trying to get down to the origin of each fault. There is a great temptation to do the opposite, to give a sideways glance at the corrected exercise if it is bad, and to hide it forthwith.

Most of us do this nearly always. We have to withstand this temptation. Incidentally, moreover, nothing is more necessary for academic success, because, despite all our efforts, we work without

making much progress when we refuse to give our attention to the faults we have made and our tutor's corrections.

Above all it is thus that we can acquire the virtue of humility, and that is a far more precious treasure than all academic progress. From this point of view it is perhaps even more useful to contemplate our stupidity than our sin. Consciousness of sin gives us the feeling that we are evil, and a kind of pride sometimes finds a place in it. When we force ourselves to fix the gaze, not only of our eyes but of our souls, upon a school exercise that we have failed through sheer stupidity, a sense of our mediocrity is borne in upon us with irresistible evidence. No knowledge is more to be desired. If we can arrive at knowing this truth with all our souls we shall be well established on the right foundation.

If these two conditions are perfectly carried out, there is no doubt that school studies are quite as good a road to sanctity as any other. To carry out the second, it is enough to wish to do so. This is not the case with the first. In order really to pay attention, it is necessary to know how to set about it.

Will power is useless

Most often attention is confused with a kind of muscular effort. If one says to one's pupils: "Now you must pay attention," one sees them contracting their brows, holding their breath, stiffening their muscles. If after two minutes they are asked what they have been paying attention to, they cannot reply. They have not been paying attention. They have been contracting their muscles.

We often expend this kind of muscular effort on our studies. As it ends by making us tired, we have the impression that we have been working. That is an illusion. Tiredness has nothing to do with work. Work itself is the useful effort, whether it

This article, written by Simone Weil, probably in April of 1942, was sent to Father Perrin, when Perrin was Superior of the Dominicans of Montpellier. Its purpose was to help Catholic students develop greater powers of attention so they can learn the secret of prayer. For a Reformed Christian, the idea that all studies are mere preparation for prayer and should never be done for the sake of mastering the subject itself is a bit of a stretch. We might prefer to see study and work as unique forms of prayer in themselves. We are notoriously "un-mystic." However, it never hurts to have one's ideas challenged, especially not if the challenger is a profoundly spiritual person like Simone Weil. We encourage the readers of CEJ to treat this article as a test of their ability to profit from making an effort of attention while reading this somewhat difficult essay, and to do so without worrying about the outcome. If you're a lover of wisdom, immerse yourself in this profound treatise.

is tiring or not. This kind of muscular effort in work is entirely barren, even if it is made with the best of intentions. Good intentions in such cases are among those that pave the way to hell. Studies conducted in such a way can sometimes succeed academically from the point of view of gaining good marks and passing examinations, but that is in spite of the effort and thanks to natural gifts; moreover such studies are never of any use.

Will power, the kind that, if need be, makes us set our teeth and endure suffering, is the principal weapon of the apprentice engaged in manual work. But, contrary to the usual belief, it has practically no place in study. The intelligence can only be led by desire. For there to be desire, there must be pleasure and joy in the work. The intelligence only grows and bears fruit in joy. The joy of learning is as indispensable in study as breathing is in running. Where it is lacking there are no real students, but only poor caricatures of apprentices who, at the end of their apprenticeship, will not even have a trade.

It is the part played by joy in our studies that makes of them a preparation for spiritual life, for desire directed towards God is the only power capable of raising the soul. Or rather, it is God alone who comes down and possesses the soul, but desire alone draws God down. He only comes to those who ask him to come; and he cannot refuse to come to those who implore him long, often and ardently.

Empty attention

Attention is an effort, the greatest of all efforts perhaps, but it is a negative effort. Of itself, it does not involve tiredness. When we become tired, attention is scarcely possible any more, unless we have already had a good deal of practice. It is better to stop working altogether, to seek some relaxation, and then a little later to

return to the task; we have to press on and loosen up alternately, just as we breathe in and out.

Twenty minutes of concentrated, untiring attention is infinitely better than three hours of the kind of frowning application which leads us to say with a sense of duty done: "I have worked well!"

But, in spite of all appearances, it is also far more difficult. There is something in our soul which has a far more violent repugnance for true attention than the flesh has for bodily fatigue. This something is much more closely connected with evil

"It is perhaps even more useful to contemplate our stupidity than our sin."

than is the flesh. That is why every time that we really concentrate our attention, we destroy the evil in ourselves. If we concentrate with this intention, a quarter of an hour of attention is better than a great many good works.

Attention consists of suspending our thought, leaving it detached, empty and ready to be penetrated by the object. It means holding in our minds, within reach of this thought, but on a lower level and not in contact with it, the diverse knowledge we have acquired which we are forced to make use of. Our thought should be in relation to all particular and already formulated thoughts as a man on a mountain who, as he looks forward, sees

also below him, without actually looking at them, a great many forests and plains. Above all our thought should be empty, waiting, not seeking anything, but ready to receive in its naked truth the object which is to penetrate it.

Need for patience

All wrong translations, all absurdities in geometry problems, all clumsiness of style and all faulty connection of ideas in compositions and essays, all such things are due to the fact that thought has seized upon some idea too hastily and being thus prematurely blocked, is not open to the truth. The cause is always that we have wanted to be too active; we have wanted to carry out a search. This can be proved every time, for every fault, if we trace it to its root. There is no better exercise than such a tracing down of our faults, for this truth is one of those which we can believe only when we have experienced it hundreds and thousands of times. This is the way with all essential truths.

Waiting for Truth

We do not obtain the most precious gifts by going in search of them but by waiting for them. Man cannot discover them by his own powers, and if he sets out to seek for them he will find in their place counterfeits of which he will be unable to discern the falsity.

The solution of a geometry problem does not in itself constitute a precious gift, but the same law applies to it because it is the image of something precious. Being a little fragment of particular truth, it is a pure image of the unique, eternal and living Truth, the very Truth which once in a human voice declared "I am the Truth."

Every school exercise, thought of in this way, is like a sacrament. In every school exercise there is a special way of waiting upon truth, setting our hearts upon it, yet

not allowing ourselves to go out in search of it. There is a way of giving our attention to the data of a problem in geometry without trying to find the solution, or to the words of a Latin or Greek text without trying to arrive at the meaning, a way of waiting, when we are writing, for the right word to come of itself at the end of our pen, while we merely reject all inadequate words.

Our first duty towards school children and students is to make known this method to them, not only in a general way but in the particular form which bears in each exercise. It is not only the duty of those who teach them, but also of their spiritual guides. Moreover, the latter should bring out in a brilliantly clear light the correspondence between the attitude of the intelligence in each one of these exercises and the position of the soul, which, with its lamp well filled with oil, awaits the Bridegroom's coming with confidence and desire.

May each loving adolescent, as he works at his Latin prose, hope through this prose to come a little nearer to the instant when he will really be the slave – faithfully waiting while the master is absent, watching and listening – ready to open the door to him as soon as he knocks. The master will then make his slave sit down and himself serve him with meat.

Only this waiting, this attention, can move the master to treat his slave with such amazing tenderness. When the slave has worn himself out in the fields, his master says on his return: "Prepare my meal, and wait upon me." And he considers the servant who only does what he is told to do to be unprofitable. To be sure, in the realm of action we have to do all that is demanded of us, no matter what effort, weariness and suffering it may cost, for he who disobeys does not love; but after that we are only unprofitable servants. Such

service is a condition of love, but it is not enough. The thing which forces the master to make himself the slave of his slave, and to love him, has nothing to do with all that. Still less is it the result of a search which the servant might have been bold enough to undertake on his own initiative. It is only watching, waiting, attention.

Near to God

Happy, then, are those who pass their adolescence and youth in developing this power of attention. No doubt they are no nearer to goodness than their peers working in fields and factories. They are near in a different way. Peasants and working people possess a nearness to God of incomparable savor, which is found in the depths of poverty, in the absence of social consideration, and in the endurance of long drawn-out sufferings. If, however, we consider the occupations in themselves, studies are nearer to God because of the attention which is in their soul. Whoever goes through years of study without developing this attention within herself has lost a great treasure.

Not only does the love of God have attention for its substance; the love of our neighbor, which we know to be the same love, is made of this same substance. Those who are unhappy have no need for anything in this world but people capable of giving them their attention. The capacity to give one's attention to a sufferer is a very rare and difficult thing; it is almost a miracle; it *is* a miracle. Nearly all those who think they have this capacity do not possess it. Warmth of heart, impulsiveness, and pity are not enough.

In the first legend of the Grail, it is said that the Grail (the miraculous stone vessel, which satisfies all hunger by virtue of the consecrated host) belongs to the first comer who asks the guardian of the vessel, a king three-quarters paralyzed by the most

painful wound: "What are you going through?"

Connecting attention

The love of our neighbor in all its fullness simply means being able to say to him: "What are you going through?" It is a recognition that the sufferer exists, not only as a unit in a collection, or a specimen from the social category labeled "unfortunate," but as a person, exactly like us, who was one day stamped with a special mark by affliction. For this reason it is enough, but it is indispensable, to know how to look at such a person in a certain way.

This way of looking is first of all attentive. The soul empties itself of all its own contents in order to receive into itself the being it is looking at, just as he is, in all his truth. Only he who is capable of attention can do this.

So it comes about that, paradoxical as it may seem, a Latin prose or a geometry problem, even though they are done wrong, may be of great service one day, provided we devote the right kind of effort to them. Should the occasion arise, they can one day make us better able to give someone in affliction exactly the help required to save that person, at the supreme moment of need. For an adolescent, capable of grasping this truth and generous enough to desire this fruit above all others, studies could have their fullest spiritual effect, quite apart from any particular religious belief.

Academic work is one of those fields which contain a pearl so precious that it is worth while to sell all our possessions, keeping nothing for ourselves, in order to be able to acquire it. ☪



To Cheat or Not to Cheat — Some Question!

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.

Promoting honesty

Question # 1:

Cheating is always a serious problem whenever students feel the pressure of having to perform or when they have not adequately prepared for a test. Can you recommend certain approaches that promote honesty and personal pride in doing well? Are there things we as teachers do as we test students that actually foster a climate of cheating?

Response:

As teachers, we have to set the tone for our classroom. Students should be able to tell that we value them as uniquely created individuals with God-given gifts and talents. They are not like any other student in the class, and, yet, they have the same task as every other student. Students are called to use what God has given them in service to him (I Cor. 4, II Tim. 2:15, Prov. 3:5, 6). I am also reminded of the precise workmanship God required of Noah in building the ark, as well as that of the Israelites in building the temple. Everything was precise. The temple was a masterpiece.

The question really has to do with assessment. The goal of assessment is to determine if you and your students have met the curriculum goals determined by your program of studies. As a teacher, using school or state/provincial guidelines, you determine the specific body of knowledge that you wish your students to attain. The teacher is then responsible to help students achieve this goal. Teachers are not in the game of outwitting their students. Knowing that not all students learn in the same way, various ways have to be provided for your students to indicate that they “know” the material. Ultimately, knowing means doing or acting on the information given.

The following suggestions may encourage students to do their personal best:

First, a small percentage will be able to show this knowledge via a test. Not all children are capable of memorizing or regurgitating facts and figures for a test. Many students have very good short-term memory and are able to retain the information

until the test is written, but not necessarily after the test. We often see this with young children when they study for a spelling test. They can achieve 100 per cent on each weekly spelling test, but are incapable of transferring that knowledge to their daily work. The same may occur when students are tested on memory work. The length of memory work or the spelling list may have to vary, depending on the individual student's ability. Decide together on the amount the student can handle. Gradually increase the amount to challenge the student when success is achieved.

Second, provide students with review questions or, in the case of older students, provide a number of questions indicating that at least one or two will be on the test. These may be questions over-arching the material studied, so that students can bring together their knowledge of much of the study in answering the question.

Third, consider “take-home” tests. Not all testing needs to take place in school.

Fourth, allow students to demonstrate their knowledge of the material studied by answering questions which give evidence that they can apply the knowledge to their daily lives. Although it appears this can readily be done in Bible, it can also be done in other subject areas, provided some thought is given in the way the question is presented.

Fifth, give notice to provide students with the date of the final project or test well in advance, so that they can adequately meet the requirements.

Sixth, give weight to completion of daily or weekly assignments so that undue significance is not given to “the test.”

Seventh, provide a rubric so that students know what is required in assignments.

Eighth, consider using portfolios which demonstrate a student's growth or achievement over time.

Ninth, use cooperative learning strategies in class.

I trust that the few suggestions I gave provide ways in which teachers can promote personal pride within students.

No time to read

Question # 2:

It seems that on my staff no one has time to do any professional reading, and that includes CEJ. The discouraging result is that even our “shop talk” seems to go around in circles with nothing new ever added. Do you have any suggestions to counteract this kind of teacher fatigue or apathy?



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Response:

Most often it is those in leadership who have to set the direction for personal professional development. Thankfully, many teachers have a desire to be life-long learners in order to benefit both themselves and their students. As an administrator, one must be current in the educational field in order to respond effectively and adequately to questions raised by staff. You may suggest reading a certain article or book in response to a question, followed by subsequent discussion after the teacher has read the article. It is incumbent on you as the administrator to do the follow-up.

Our province requires each teacher to put together a professional growth plan for the year. This must be discussed with the principal and approved by the principal. Included in this plan can be professional reading. At the end of the year, both the principal and the teacher revisit the plan to see the progress made. This leads to professional growth on the part of the teacher. It may also lead to teachers learning together about a specific practice as they look for a partner or groups of teachers interested in a specific topic. For example, our teachers wanted to pursue one approach to handwriting after attending a conference. By researching and discussing this approach, they decided on their direction of implementation.

Our teacher evaluation policy also has a component which deals with professional growth. One of the best ways that I believe we can grow is to establish a professional learning group. In the initial stages the administrator may have to set the tone and establish a time in which this can occur. Instead of having two staff meetings per month which deal with business, set one aside for professional growth. Provide a reading ahead of time which is pertinent or of interest to all staff members. If only one staff meeting is held per month, evaluate what agenda items can be given as information for the staff to read on their own. Devote the remainder of the time for the discussion of a curriculum topic or a professional development topic.

Eventually assign readings or topics of research and expand to another meeting time specifically devoted to learning. The most effective learning happens when teachers themselves choose the topics, research and find materials that support their questions.

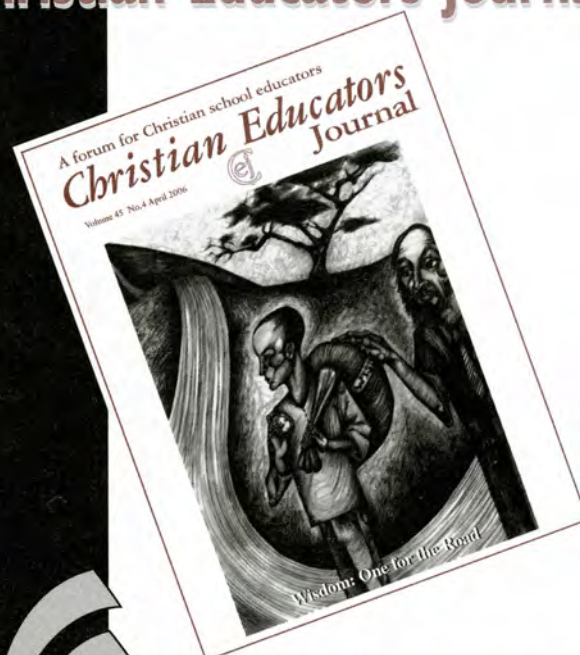
Another suggestion is to work toward common planning time. If your school is large enough, schedule release time for grade level planning and discussion. Include professional development sessions with your staff in the meetings prior to the beginning of the school year. So much depends on the tone which leadership establishes. Tread gently. Test the waters. All teachers want to do their best. You can encourage teachers by purchasing magazines and books using money budgeted for professional resources. Find out where educational videos can be borrowed or rented for a

nominal fee. Apprise the staff of workshops that would be helpful. Encourage them to step out of their comfort zone.

As a teacher, work patiently, sharing what you have learned through reading. If you and your colleagues are working with a student with a particular problem, find an article or video and share it to promote discussion. This may help to implement a similar way of approaching the student. If a staff discussion focuses on a particular problem, find a resource that may stimulate discussion for the whole staff.

God's word says, "Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needs not be ashamed..." (2 Tim. 2:15, KJV). Do we expect our students to learn if we do not have an excitement for learning? Teachers need to claim ownership of their learning and also be encouraged in their efforts. ☺

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Book Reviews

Hylke Speerstra, translated and abridged by Henry J. Baron, *Cruel Paradise: Life Stories of Dutch Emigrants*. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2005. 224 pages. \$15.00.

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

In his address to the Athenians, Paul observed that God “determined the times set for (mankind) and the exact places where they should live.” But history has demonstrated that not all people live out their lives where they were born. Already in the Old Testament, the children of Israel were uprooted when they fled Egypt under Moses’ leadership. Later, they were taken into captivity — and told to flourish in the land as if they were in their own country (Jeremiah 29). And over the centuries, owing to numerous causes — from conquest to escape, from natural disasters to depletion of land and resources, from slavery to entrepreneurship — people have left the land of their birth and migrated to other countries and continents.

World-wide emigration

World War II displaced millions of persons as well — some involuntarily — some voluntarily. The Netherlands witnessed a huge exodus of folks to other lands. Between 1947 and 1966, approximately 100,000 Dutch citizens left their homeland in search for better opportunities. A number of books and anthologies of letters from these immigrants, narrating their experience of immigration, have been published. Speerstra’s collection of these stories constitutes a significant addition to this body of material. In 1997 he travelled to the countries where the people had immigrated — North America, New Zealand, Australia, South Africa — and found people who were willing to tell their stories. He posed similar questions to these subjects, and from their answers he composed narrative essays in a journalistic style.

His stories are about Frisian immigrants, and his original collection of 34 stories, *It Wrede Paradys*, were written in Frisian. Because of their popularity, he produced a Dutch version, *Het Wede Paradijs: Het Levensverhaal Van De Emigrant* — 29 stories, several of which were new to the collection. In *Cruel Paradise*, Henry Baron, a Frisian scholar, retired professor of English from Calvin College and former editor of *Christian Educators Journal*, translated 20 of these stories. We are fortunate that Henry was able to do this for us all. Moreover, one of the stories is one about his own family. It is one of the most engaging in the book.

Stories of failure and success

Many accounts of immigrants’ experiences display optimism and gratitude for the new opportunities which became available after they left their homeland. That is less true of this collection — as the title suggests. There are stories of failure as well as of success, of disillusionment as well as fulfillment, of homesickness as well as gratitude for new opportunities, of premature deaths and even suicides, of children and grandchildren. Several of his

stories involve immigrants from the 1920s and 1930s, though most of them are based on post-war immigration.

It is difficult to do justice to all of the living that gets narrated in these stories. Some of them could well serve as a basis for a novel. We encounter all sorts of people, involved in all sorts of relationships, with all sorts of strengths and weaknesses, with every degree of confidence and security, with varying respect for the homeland which they were being pressured to leave.

Many stories tell about the leave-taking, about homesickness, about return visits, about tensions between the people who were to be left behind and those who were leaving. One father says to his son-in-law, after a recital of his own difficult life, “...now that we’re well off, you come here, you good-for-nothing, and tear my whole family apart. But I’m not going to let that happen.” (156)

Some folks, it is true, resolved from the start that immigration was “all or nothing” — and decided not to look back. They achieved a healthy balance between the home and culture they were leaving and their new setting. They even became homesick for their adopted land when they returned for a visit to the land of their birth. They took a few artifacts along to remind them of their homeland. Frits and Anne Neewland, from Ontario, say, “We got ahead here and are quite content. All we have to do is look at our beautiful garden and at how well the children are doing.” (69) But most experienced great tension upon leaving and had not only second but many thoughts about their decision.

In fact, 20 per cent eventually returned. Some resolved to take some of Friesland with them. They had semen flown in from stud horses to improve their breeds and took seed potatoes back with them after visits. They felt pulled in both directions — sometimes in odd ways. Nies’s widow tells how her husband felt estranged in his own village, as an orphan. But after he immigrated, he experienced great nostalgia and returned to visit his village eight times to alleviate his homesickness. (35)

Reasons for leaving

Why did people immigrate? For a variety of reasons, of course. After the war, older patterns of living returned, but new realities and pressures soon shattered these former ways. Hunger was an ever-present reality — a basic drive that fathers had to confront as they tried to feed their growing families. The days of “the dog cart with a thin margin of profit” were no longer viable. Father realized that to become a farm hand meant a life of not only working for someone else but of constant indebtedness to such a landlord.

A new bureaucracy imposed many regulations — strictures which throttled initiatives for aspiring entrepreneurs. Potato blight



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caused many bankruptcies. Some feared the threat of Communism. Others had a sense of adventure and challenge. They knew they had a future in their own village but preferred to take some risks as a challenge to themselves. Both the fishing and the farming industries were shrinking. Plots of land, and the minimum size of a herd of cows necessary to support a family, were difficult to come by.

Some supposed that a new land would offer a better climate — though they were not always right about that. One woman said, “Canada not only gave me severe winters but severe summers as well.” (109) Bad relationships between landlord and farm hand were common. Frits and Anne Newland, from Ontario Canada, left Holland, among other reasons, because of a personal vendetta the police were waging against him. Restricted opportunities for the children, unemployment, and economic depressions were realities that people could not escape. “A steady farm job means steady poverty,” as one man put it. Also, the landowner, often accused of causing pollution, was losing prestige as part of the elite class.

And all the while the government, as well as informal agencies, was promoting emigration. Interestingly, in some areas at least, the Catholics opposed immigration. They would ask, “Why an exit from the rich culture of Catholic living, why get swept up with the force of numbers the way the Protestants were doing en masse?” And Catholic publications inveighed against “the dominant illness known as emigration.” (189) Not all marketing of the possibilities could stand the test of truth-telling, but many people wished to believe what they saw of lovely farms, pleasant

beaches, and attractive homes. Single men for whom crossing to the other side of the street was as much as immigration as they had done, now often responded to some of these offers — and more often than not made the most of it. Henry Baron’s father took his family to the States for several reasons — one of the minor ones, perhaps, being summarily and unjustifiably dismissed when his band was awarded only third prize in an international competition.

Understandably, children get a lot of attention in these stories. Families could not have succeeded without the family putting all their earnings “in one pot.” Moreover, the arrival of children and grandchildren progressively anchored the family more firmly into the new land. “Our life was like a jacaranda, the tree that blooms so early and so abundantly,” says Jan Veenstra, from South Africa. (128) And Melis Van der Sluis, from New Zealand, records this poignant detail: Their children, born in the English Commonwealth, preferred a visit to London over a trip to Friesland — the place of their roots. Though that was painful, he observes, “They’ve grown roots in their own country, and that’s how it should be.” (183)

One of Speerstra’s subjects speaks disapprovingly of “the anonymous immigrant” — the family which tries to conceal its origins from everyone, including the children. These people are withholding information which could be useful to the children as they seek their identity. Speerstra’s book, and Henry’s translation of it, are designed to make such information available to our young people. The stories have universal import, and deserve a wide reading everywhere. ☺

Jack Fennema, *The Religious Nature and Biblical Nurture of God’s Children: A Guide for Parents and Teachers*. Sioux Center, Iowa: Dordt College Press. 2005. 288 pp. \$18.00 (US)
Reviewed by Sean Schat, teacher of English at King’s Christian Collegiate in Oakville, Ontario.

What is biblical nurture? One of the most important directives God gives to parents (and, by association, to teachers) is to shape, nurture and discipline their children. Appropriately, this command addresses one of the most challenging and demanding dimensions of both callings. Parents are called to raise up their children in the fear and knowledge of God and to follow in his ways. Teachers are challenged to classroom management and character education. Both groups are together called to train children in wisdom to serve obediently as members of God’s Kingdom community.

Christian educators (and schools) often struggle with this issue, particularly as they try to discern the paradox that lies between

two fundamental biblical principles. On the one hand, we must recognize and deal with “*total depravity*” (we are all sinners who make sinful, wrong, disobedient “choices” or “actions” or “behaviors”). On the other hand, we must also affirm and recognize “*unconditional grace*” (each sinner, though undeserving, is completely forgiven and restored to God through Christ). What complicates this attempt to discern is that all actions and choices stem from our hearts and are not only equally impacted by both sin and grace but are also inaccessible to others. Thankfully, God knows our hearts. Only he can ultimately judge them.

Nonetheless, observing children’s behavior and lovingly and

wisely connecting their actions and choices to both their hearts and minds is an almost impossible challenge for parents and teachers. This difficulty is powerfully attested to by the quantity and diversity of research and theory-based books, workshops, and videos on the topic of classroom management and school discipline. This task is even more complicated for *Christian* educators. Is there a distinctively Christian approach to discipline?

No quick fixes

In his book *The Religious Nature and Biblical Nurture of God's Children: A Guide for Parents and Teachers*, Fennema reminds

us that there *is* a biblical foundation for raising our children, a distinctively Christian framework for nurturing, admonishing and discipling. But it is, appropriately, complicated. Every human choice and behavior is nuanced by a myriad of factors, personal experiences, and motives. Parents and teachers are generally aware of the complexity. But, as Fennema points out, it is a mistake for teachers and parents *not* to address these issues.

It would also be a mistake to expect easy answers and practical strategies for child-rearing and classroom management. It is not that they aren't there — it is simply an inappropriate starting point. First of all, there are no simple, easy-to-apply strategies for classroom management and character development. Secondly, Fennema does not seek to provide us with practical advice. With an incredible depth of insight (personal, psychological, educational, theological), he methodically works through a number of complex and interrelated aspects of human behavior and God's Kingdom norms for his children. This takes time.

The book is long, and, at times, unwieldy. It is a hard read. The "practical" is solidly rooted in the biblical foundation that Fennema unpacks — you might be able to find some practical solutions steps, but you will not be able to apply them effectively without first working through the vision that undergirds his writing. We are given a high calling, that of raising up Kingdom citizens who will be active transformers of our Father's world (through the power of the Spirit). We don't just train productive and responsible citizens for a democratic society.

Big themes

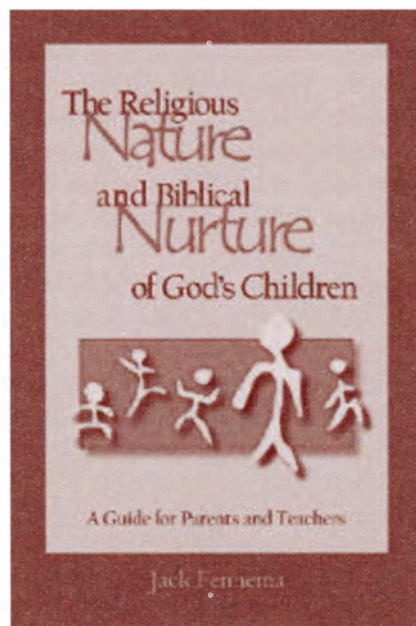
Fennema very carefully develops a biblical vision for discipline and discipling. The first section, "The Context for Nature and

Nurture: Kingdom and Covenant," establishes the twin foundations of the Kingdom and the Covenant. All subsequent insights are firmly grounded in this critical context. Section two, "The Religious Nature of God's Children" works through the nature of children, and their image-bearing positions at creation, after the fall, and after Christ's redemption and renewal. Here Fennema clearly demonstrates how all of God's children are called to image him, but powerfully hindered by the power of sin. Despite this, the fact that Christ has restored all of us to God *must* impact our vision and practice for discipling and discipling.

The third and final section, "The Biblical Nurture of God's Children" moves into the practical realm, but is still deeply grounded in complex theology and educational theory. Here Fennema explores the nature of spiritual development in children, the role of parents and the family, and the support-role played by teachers and Christian schools. He concludes with chapters on instructive nurture, corrective nurture, and restorative admonition, each of which is carefully defined and distinguished.

Difficult questions

Throughout the book, Fennema works through a number of specific terms and concepts which he carefully defines in order to ensure that his audience appreciates the true complexity of the topic. There *is* a distinctively Christian, God-ordained way for parents and teachers to shape the growth and character of the children God has entrusted



to them.

By concluding each chapter with a number of discussion questions, it is clear that Fennema intends his book to be an "irritant" that leads to reflective dialogue — an appropriate "digging in" to the topic. This book has the potential to be a very powerful tool for Christian parents and teachers in equipping the children gifted for Kingdom service. But Fennema has left the real work to parents and teachers, to work through the topic with intentional reflection and discernment: What does it mean for Christian parents and teachers to disciple our children in the fear and wisdom of the Lord? How can Christian schools (and school leaders) develop a distinctively Christian system of discipline and discipling that builds community and develops the Body and the Kingdom? ☺