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Encourage Creativity in the Classroom

WHY WE CREATE

by James Kamphuis

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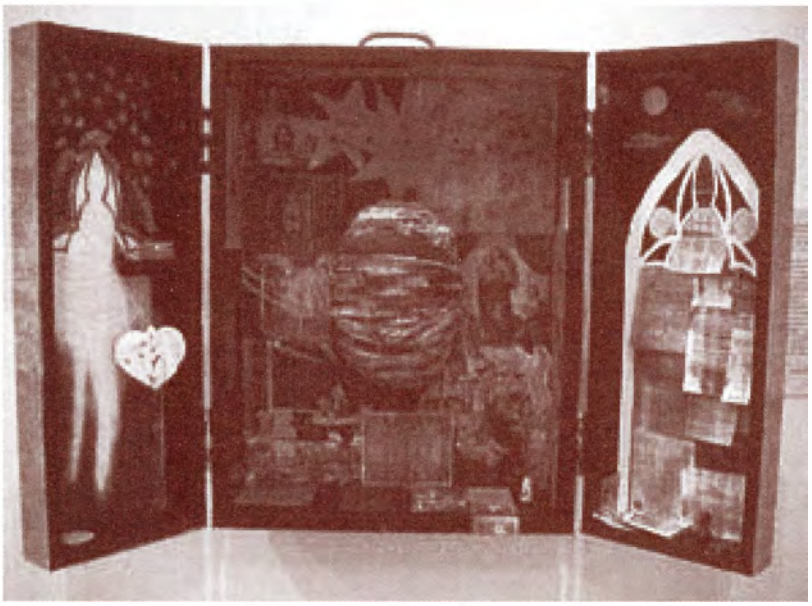
In my work with students I see creativity flowing from their fingertips and wonder, as I'm sure they do as well, "What is the source of all this activity?" Where does the drive toward *making* originate? We are God's creations, made in his image. He has the power to create something from nothing, to build towering mountains or cause the tiniest of hearts to beat with the mere sweep of his hand or sound of his voice; He is the Master Artist. While we cannot expect to accomplish the same, we are still image-bearers of God, and thus have the capacity, even the *need*, to create.



Jim Kamphuis collaborated with his students to produce a series of cabinets like this one to suggest that we put up a facade to others.

Surely this impulse is an echo of God's own creative urge. We don't make art because we *want* to; we make it because we *have* to. Art is not an optional part of life. If we are fully human, each of us is an artist in one way or another. We communicate by arranging or making what we conceive to be truth in some symbolic manner. It is something ingrained in our very being, even more deeply rooted than language. Whether it's with a paintbrush or a computer, human beings will *always* make images and develop ideas.

Need to communicate

Artists have spent a lot of time and energy trying to come up with a definition of what art is, what aesthetics is. It seems that people feel the need to first get a handle on the "true" nature of art in order to discuss it intelligently. They are compelled to package it neatly, give it a name, and paste a label on it in hopes that it will make the concept easier to grasp. For me, art has but one criterion: it must communicate. Whatever the object in question, be it a painting, sculpture, performance, or sound piece, in order to be considered a work of art, it must be saying something, to some audience, somewhere. Art brings a message, which might otherwise go unheard, to an audience, who might otherwise find themselves in the dark. C. S. Lewis explains: "A work of art can be either 'received' or 'used.' When we 'receive' it we exert our senses and imagination and various other powers according to a pattern invented by the artist. When we 'use' it we treat it as assistance for our own activities." It is this dialogue between the artist and the audience that is the true meaning of aesthetics, and, also the reason why art can never simply be self-expression: it needs to be received.

This process of communication doesn't end when the artist performs her piece or hangs it on a wall. She needs to be aware of the viewers' reactions to the work, to the feedback they provide, which can be useful in future creations. I have seen this process at work in my classroom throughout the years. Many of my students' most successful pieces have only come to completion after several critique sessions — useful feedback from instructors and fellow students — as well as numerous failed attempts.

A doer and teacher

The fact that I am a working artist as well as a teacher of the arts gives me the responsibility of performing two roles: those of creator and facilitator of creation. Not only must I be cognizant of the outside forces that inform my own work, but I also have to stay attuned to the way my students' work is influenced by those same forces, and many others. The way I respond to a student's piece can have a powerful effect on the way he chooses to express his ideas. I feel a calling to introduce art in a way that not only teaches concepts and principles but also practical ways for my students to apply that information to their everyday lives. As a teacher in a Christian school, my role expands to include teaching methods for visually communicating a Reformed perspective of the world.

I express to my students that creating

works of art is one of the greatest opportunities they have to disclose something of themselves to others. Through the arts, they are able to communicate to an audience their perceptions and opinions of the world around them. I also stress the idea that, as Christians, they have a responsibility to make art which is honest, indicative of their faith, and representative of their unique view of God's creation.

Our approach

In the art classes offered at Illiana Christian High School, students discuss the elements of art and principles of design, experience different theories and movements in art history, and work with a variety of media. They also learn techniques for applying that information to their work and mastering the use of those materials. With these newly-acquired skills, the students can then work on projects which reflect not only their understanding of the terms and processes taught in class, but also their own ideas and experiences.

That sterile-sounding course description could probably be applied to art classes at any school, but teaching art in a Christian school involves something more: revealing to students how their art can become a reflection of their experiences, beliefs, and emotions as servants of Jesus Christ. It allows them to show respect and love for God and all that He's created.

I am convinced that an important part of what I do in the classroom involves connecting with students who, without art, would have no other outlet for expressing themselves. I have kids in class who surprise me if they speak more than four words in a week, yet the messages they communicate through their artwork speak volumes.

Important roles

I love what I do. I love the experience of working within the caring community of a Christian school. But most of all, I love the fact that I come in contact with so many amazing young people each day, and that the things I teach them can help them grow as people, and as Christians. My role as facilitator of representing the created world in art is one I take very seriously; I am responsible for instructing young people who are about to enter the world, and they must be prepared.

Of equal importance is my role as creator of work. Just as I teach my students, I make art as a way to communicate with others. I haven't the necessary gifts for great writing or articulate speech, and I need to explore ways of expressing myself in a visual manner. Sometimes my paintings and sculptures reference my faith in subtle ways, but in other pieces the images are overtly Christian. I must be careful, however, not to impose a message on to my work, to justify it by making it "Christian." Art needs no such justification; it should be able to stand on its own without my having to infuse it with contrived themes and ideas. I begin creating each work with a particular audience in mind; then the form and content follow. If I am to hold fast to the theory that art's main function should be the communication of a message, then, every part of every piece I create must be to that end.

No separation

The greatest dilemma I've had to deal with in formulating my own aesthetic has been determining what my role should be as both an artist and a Christian. Many believe that the term "Christian artist" is an oxymoron, an absurd juxtaposition of terms that simply do not belong together by their very nature. Historically, this view is a result of two key philosophies: "iconoclasm" and "dualism." The former refers to the belief that the creation of images, more specifically religious icons, is idolatry and heresy; the latter points to a fundamental division between body and soul. According to these philosophies, there can be no such thing as a Christian performance artist or dancer, since the use of the body for such things is construed as sinful, and, thus, quite separate from the workings of the soul. This aesthetic separates the artist from the rest of the world, in order to keep him clean from sin. I would argue that the opposite is true: as Christians who create, my students and I need to be out there, setting an example for others to follow, and letting our work act as a witness for God. He has called us to be in the world, just not of the world. If we are called to keep ourselves from sin, keep ourselves clean, it means that we must understand what the world is.

Art is as vast as the sweep of human creativity. It has undergone a process of transformation that would have been impossible to predict. It is no more possible to determine the course of art than it is to predict the course of our species. Both are inextricably bound to the human "being," to our creation in the image of God, and to our processes of becoming. We may attempt to comment on art's "existence," on its physical manifestations, but art's transcendental process of becoming will always be beyond our grasp.

Art as Community

by Phil Schaafsma

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Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms. (1 Peter 4:10)

Chris Stoffel Overvoorde's book, *Passing the Colors: Engaging Visual Culture in the 21st Century,* presents a wonderful story of the evolution of an artist's life within our Christian community. It engages the many dimensions of a very encultured man: Dutch emigrant, student, graphic designer, artist, father, teacher, Reformed theologian and devout Christian. Nick Wolterstorff, in the introduction, poignantly summarizes the book: "The artist who here tells the story of his life in art is a committed and engaged Christian. The voice of the artist and the voice of the Christian are the same voice. The Christian spirituality expressed is that of an artist; the perspective on art expressed is that of a Christian."

Life story

Chris presents his life. He tells of his "Initial Journey" coming to America as a Dutch immigrant. He explores "The Calling and Task of the Artist." With the Word as a light to his path, he tells of his "Journey as an Artist." But his narrative ends with "The Artist and the Community," a theme that weaves its way throughout his art and his teaching. He emphasizes frequently that, "As a Christian community, we need to recognize that creativity is God's gift to us. Using our creativity is our gift back to God." It is art as community: each of us using our gifts to serve others and in so doing giving praise to God, the Creator and Redeemer of us all.

In 1957 Chris emigrated to the U.S. He studied graphic design at Kendall and then art at the University of Michigan. As a student he began to discern that "you soon realize that as a young Christian you are in the process of becoming, for there is still much to learn.... I began to realize that I was also in the process of becoming an artist."

Saul [and Samuel]: Obedience Rather Than Strength, 1986, woodcut by Overvoorde, 24.5" x 16"

Chris refers to the story of Bezalel, found in Exodus 31: 1-5, as an important biblical model within which he explored his call to be an artist: The LORD said to Moses, "See, I have called by name Bezalel, the son of Uri, son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah. And I have filled him with the Spirit of God, with ability and intelligence, with knowledge and all craftsmanship, to devise artistic designs, to work in gold, silver, and bronze, in cutting stones for setting, and in carving wood, for work in every craft."

Chris proclaims: "Here is an artist filled with the Spirit. He is not a priest, not a prophet, not a king, but an artist. Bezalel is one of the first people in the Old Testament who received the Spirit of God. Filled with the Spirit to do what? To make art! Bezalel was to build the tabernacle and all the objects in and around it."

Called to what?

Upon coming to teach art at Calvin College, Chris felt quite convinced that he was called to be an artist. That belief was called into question, however, one Sunday morning when Rev. Andy Kuyvenhoven preached a sermon at Grace Church, where Chris is a long time member. Rev. Kuyvenhoven said: "No, you are not called to this or that profession; you are called to be a Christian. You are called to the office of believer."

Before this sermon, Chris believed he was special because he was called to be an artist. As he says, "Now I learned that I was special, not because I was an artist, but rather because I was adopted. God the Father adopted me; he made me Christ's brother. When you are adopted by the Father, it means that Christ comes first, first in everything. For me it was that if Christ comes first in everything, then art will always be second."

Rev. Kuyvenhoven's sermon also led Chris to realize that, "when you are a Christian, you need to live in a way that lets you grow and mature as a Christian. God has made each of us unique, and that means that each of us has to figure out for ourselves how we are different. God has endowed each of us with special gifts.... Special gifts need to be tested, explored, and

developed. If we use our special gifts to serve others, the way God intended it to be, we will give glory to his name."

It was through this that Chris began to find clarity in his search: "I was called to be a Christian, and the best way I knew how to be a Christian is to be an artist. Each of us has to respond individually to God's calling to become a Christian. A true life of thankfulness is a life lived to its fullest potential, employing all the gifts with which God has endowed us, serving God and his people just as Bezalel did in the building of the tabernacle."

Different gifts

Chris explains that we talk about artists as if "they have received the gift, like the appointment of Bezalel in Exodus. However, when we do that we fail to recognize that each of us is different, uniquely created; all of us are endowed with gifts and talents. These gifts and talents set us apart from each other, for none of us has received identical gifts; being different from each other is not some grand mistake on God's part, it is part of his plan. He intended each of us to be different."

The apostle Paul emphasizes this in I Corinthians 12 where he observes that, "The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body. So it is with Christ." Chris responds, saying, "In Christ we are one, and we may recognize and rejoice in our differences as long as we use our differences to "serve others"; and when we do, we celebrate our oneness in Christ, we need each other; no one should stand apart or alone. We were made for each other; we are interdependent in Christ Jesus our Lord. It is God who gives us our gifts and the Lord Jesus who makes us one."

In order to continue to develop this sense of diverse community, Chris feels strongly that "The cultural dimension of our church today needs revival so that the arts can play a more vital role in the life of the congregation." He continues, saying, "the Christian artist and the Christian community need to find ways in which to respect and appreciate each other.

Communal task

We need to recognize that we need each other. The artists among us need the support of the Christian community, and the Christian community needs the contributions of the artists. In an age when we are surrounded by trivial images, we need the insights and sensibilities of real artists to regain our sense of judgment and learn again to discern what is good and noble."

Reflecting on his involvement within his own church, Chris says, "It is a great affirmation and delight when artist and church come together and make beautiful images and music together because we belong to God. We want to celebrate that simple, rich truth — that we belong. This very idea should define our culture, should motivate our responses, and should fill our existence."

Through his art, his teaching, his life, Chris works diligently, passing on the affirmation of Christ's love as the core value of our community. And in so doing he inspires us to see the full spectrum of colors available to us all if we live creatively in Christ.

(All quotes by Chris are from Passing the Colors: Engaging Visual Culture in the 21st Century. *Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002.*

Can Love of Poetry be Taught?

by Katie Hoogendam

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We read because we are eager to understand. We write because we long to communicate truth. We teach because there are infinite layers of meaning between the two poles of understanding and communicating. As an English teacher, I am in an occupation that allows me the opportunity to share my interests and experiences with the interests and experiences of my students. English, like life, is about storytelling. What stories do we tell about ourselves? What stories do we tell about our culture? About God? If English is storytelling, poems are the individual stories that we tell.

Human beings are often selfish. There is something within us that longs to have the experience of discovery — an all-consuming desire to map uncharted territory and to report our findings back to the rest of the unknowing world. Wendell Berry expresses a pessimistic view of discovery: "Praise ignorance, for what man/ has not encountered he has not destroyed" (*The Mad Farmer Liberation Front*).

Nothing left

I remember learning about Christopher Columbus in elementary school. We as a class were awed to hear about his dealings with the Queen of Spain, his arduous journey across unfamiliar waters, and his accidental discovery of America. It wasn't the history, however, that impressed me. It was the fact that a singular man (supported by a crew, a government, and great wealth, of course) discovered an entirely "unknown" country.

Despite the fact that the land had been "discovered" many years before by its native inhabitants and that historical accuracy is always a problem, Columbus's journey continues to retain its mystique for me. After all, the outcome of one man's personal experience hundreds of years ago affects my life today. For me, it was during that elementary school lesson that I began to notice a quiet urge prickling under my skin. Only later could I put words to this feeling: I wanted, more than anything, to discover something.

As I grew older, school taught me about the increasing globalization of our world. I learned about the "power" of the information superhighway and the "progress" made by anthropologists who encountered people-groups heretofore unknown. I poured over the spreads in *National Geographic*: young wives in Mongolia, Inuit children in Northern Canada, nomadic families in Australia. Rather than take joy at this new and novel information, I felt a tightness in my heart. I felt that, slowly but surely, the world was being explored on my behalf. I worried that by the time I grew up there would be nothing left to discover. Fortunately, I was wrong.

A brave new world

A good explorer does her research, but even the most meticulous study will not teach that person how to be passionate. Without passion, the journey itself lies impotent, like a seed planted but not cared for. According to Ralph Iron, "Experience teaches us in a millennium what passion teaches us in an hour" (*The story of an African Farm*).

"Passion," as a concept, is interesting. Is passion inherent or learned? What defines the lengths and breadths of passion? Much like the word "love," "passion" is often overused or misapplied. One can speak about one's "passion" for hockey or poetry, and in the next sentence, talk about one's "passion" for God. Are these two different things?

Hope College, my alma mater, spends a few days orienting its freshman students to their new surroundings; events are held, speeches are made. During my first week at Hope, the English Department held a reading at the Knickerbocker Theater in downtown Holland, Michigan. I went, not knowing what to expect. The theater was packed full of professors and students, all of whom were maneuvering their way to the front of the room, each vying for the best view of the stage.

I don't remember much about that evening, but what I do remember is embedded viscerally on my brain. Highlighted by a shiny jazz ensemble, Jack Ridl, Professor of English (poetry), recited one of his poems to the adoring crowd. The audience loved him, and I could see why. "Jack," as his students called him, wasn't just reciting words that he had written on some bygone day to fill his quota of publications for the year; rather, he was living, breathing, and gesticulating the story behind the carefully chosen letters and syllables. Jack wasn't simply reading a poem — he was *becoming* the poem — right before my very eyes! His passion for words overwhelmed me, and I felt that prickly itch well up inside of me. I knew that in some way, this experience was akin to discovery.

Exploring the mind

I went to the Registrar's office the very next day to switch into Jack's beginner's poetry course, but to no avail; it was booked, and there was an extensive waiting list. A semester or two later, I was finally admitted. I soon learned that Jack's classes are intentionally small, and no more than twelve or so people are allowed in a class at a time. Also, unlike the night at the

theater, Jack in the classroom was quiet, unassuming, and certainly not "on stage" in personality. Unlike my experiences in previous courses, this class was workshop-rather than lecture-based. As such, students were empowered to contribute, create, and take ownership in the class in a unique manner. It was in this class that I learned not "what" or even "how" to think, but, rather, I learned to think about "why" — why thought, and the shared expression of thought, matters. Jack practiced what Kahlil Gibran suggests: "If he [the teacher] is indeed wise he does not bid you enter the house of his wisdom, but rather leads you to the threshold of your mind" (*The Prophet*).

Jack remained a much sought-after professor not because he has a monopoly on wisdom, but because, both in and out of the classroom, he lives out his passion for poetry. In my first poetry course I learned that not only was there much left to discover in the world, but that it was not as out of reach as I had once suspected. I learned that not all journeys are literal, and that perhaps some of the best and most important journeys are figurative — the journey that a reader is taken on through the words of a poem. I also learned the importance of believing in the worth of my own experiences.

Mystical powers

Jack spoke of writing not as communication, but as communion. Communion in the context of the Church is a sacred and intimate act unlike any other. It is a recognition of God's holiness, his sacrifice, his love, and our need. In many ways, writing is also an act of recognition, a coming together of human and divine experiences, an affirmation of God's presence in all of Creation — from Andromeda to alliteration. When we write words that reflect the true nature of what it means to be human, and when those words resonate with another individual as truth, we are sharing in the experience of all humanity. In doing so, we celebrate our connectedness to one another and to God.

Above my desk in school hang the words: "The Personal is Universal, The Universal is Personal." I love teaching English because much (arguably all) of the curriculum is ensconced in storytelling. When I was in grade seven, my English teacher, Diane Dame, had one of those mass-produced, neon-colored posters hanging above her desk that read, "Knowledge is Power." While generic, it still rang true to me. Today I would argue that knowledge is also compassion, for it is much more difficult to be uncompassionate to another person if we know her story. When we recognize that another human shares our experience, our world is opened. As such, poetry can encourage social justice, as we learn how to walk in the shoes of the "other" through the words of the poet.

Wired for stories

Many can hark back to a time when their world was opened in this very same way through a classroom experience. It may have been through reading the *Diary of Anne Frank*, or *To Kill a Mockingbird*. It may have been through watching the movie, *A Beautiful Life*, or hearing a guest speaker talk about his war experience. Whatever subgenre one is most comfortable with, the truth remains: humans are wired to tell stories. Poetry is one way to do this. I like to suggest to my students that if a novel is the orange juice, a poem is the frozen concentrate. Poems are small, intensely focused, intentionally crafted windows into the life experience of another human being. Like the tesseract of Madeline L'Engle's *A Wrinkle in Time*, poems connect one person to another

I want...

by Rachel Groot

I want to be free.
I want to be thankful for all i have,
thankful for the fact i can pick the chocolate bits
out of mint chocolate chip ice cream.

I want to sleep peacefully
I want to stop waking up in the middle of the night

I want to stop craving new things
I want to stop crying in every discussion
I have with my parents
I want to love and be loved and feel this love

I want courage to just sometimes do things

I want free time every week to de-stress and calm down
I want to stop spazing about the little stuff

I want to be remembered, Not revered
I want to be thanked, not profusely, just once will do
I want to feel like prayer is natural

I want to be free to be me,
even though I'm not sure what that is yet

across the infinite void of time and space.

One of the most powerful ways to create this connection between one's words and one's readers is through the use of concrete imagery. Jack often encouraged his students to experiment with the use of concrete images in their writing. For example, because I do not know you, the poet, I may not understand what you mean when you use the word, "loss." However, I am familiar with the adrenaline rush that I felt when my wallet was stolen, and the heartache that clung to me as I buried my dog, Baxter. When we write about our experiences in a way that makes them tangible, we make them more accessible, and, thus, we make the connection between the personal and universal. This lesson is perhaps among the most important that I have ever learned, and one that I am still learning. It is one that manifested itself powerfully on the day when my classmates and I stood, tearful and shocked, watching the twin towers fall on September eleventh. Many poems were written that day.

Poems are created in an effort to translate the incomprehensible into written language. Words are borne from the death of a loved one, or the massacre of many. Words also tangle themselves around the warmth of new life — birth, love, a mother's kiss. Poems communicate the tensions of racism, sexism, poverty, and illness.

What better time to experience poetry than when, as in adolescence, one is naturally open to the ideas, questions, and experiences of all humanity? The commonly held notion that all teenagers are egotistical, selfish people, I believe, is wrong. Rather, these are people whose tendency towards the self-referential enables them to personalize the universal themes that thread themselves through all of humanity, themes like injustice, love, oppression, desire, and mortality. In this way, teenagers are the ideal readers of poetry.

Breaking through

I send a daily poem to my grade twelve students over e-mail, and we read it together at the beginning of class. My heart is made warm when a student expresses a connection to the words on the page. This year, several students have brought the particular poem, "Tuesday: 9 A.M." by Denver Butson, to our conversation. Months after first semester ended, a student from my former class mentioned the poem to me as one of his favorites. What is the poem about? Among other things, Butson's poem is about the universality of all human experience, and the invisible wall that keeps us from sharing these experiences with one another. In the poem, three people stand together at a bus stop, all with an individual problem that could easily be rectified by one of the others. Because of the culture of independence that our society propagates, these people do not speak to one another, and thus do not realize that help is so close at hand.

Beyond the reading of poems, students venture into the crafting of poems as well. This begins as early as grade nine at our school, and some classes focus more on this aspect of poetry than others. My favorite is the generosity of a poem written outside of class, and with no assignment in mind. One student wowed us every Friday with a reading of his newest "Emo" poem. Several others e-mailed their poems for me to read, and then let me use them as daily poems to be read aloud and discussed with the class. One student, Rachel Groot, allowed me to use her poem for our daily poem on the promise that it remain entirely anonymous (she has since given me permission to use her name). This poem, entitled "I want..." was one of the most widely received poems all year. Students jumped at the chance to explain why and how the poem resonated with them. Upon hearing her classmates' thoughts on the poem, the quiet poet remained stoic as her heart burst with affirmation. I couldn't have been happier for her — there is nothing like the very rare experience of bearing witness to the peals of appreciation for words that you wrote.

Can love of poetry be taught? I'm not sure. I don't love my keys or my car, but they are both tools that take me to whom I love: my family, my friends, my staff, my students. I would be a fool to believe that all of my students will leave the classroom in love with poetry. I do hope, however, that our shared reading, discussion, and analysis of poetry will have given them an opportunity to grow — to stretch their feelers out beyond the confines of their own personal understanding and touch the universal language of human experience.

Useful links for teachers:

Poetry 180: http://www.loc.gov/poetry/180/p180-more.html

Poets.org: http://www.poets.org/

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Christianity as Comedy

by John Franklin

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I have been thinking recently about tragedy and comedy. These two staples of the literary world are often spoken of but not always understood. I know I don't understand them very well, but I am prepared to venture a few remarks nonetheless. Earlier this spring I attended a conference in which one of the speakers made a passing comment about the tragic and the comic. He noted that the tragic in life tends to bring us to a place of self-absorption while the comic has the effect of taking us out of ourselves. And so it was suggested that while classical culture tends to be "tragic", Christianity is best understood as "comic."

Let us be clear; speaking of Christianity as comic should not lead us to think in terms of television sitcoms or the current fare in stand-up comedy. Rather, the comic is understood as life winning over death, as hope trumping despair, and joy taking precedence over sadness. Life is a mixture of darkness and light, of good and bad, of treacherous waters and calm seas. Our task is to negotiate our way through these contrasting realities and to discern whether to accept the account of the writer of Ecclesiastes or St. Paul. Is all vanity, or do we have grounds for hope and the promise of life to come?

Unexpected outcome

The fabric of life is woven with elements of both tragedy and comedy, and the line between them is often very thin. However, we should not think that if it is comedy it is not serious. Comedy is a signal of transcendence and can readily play together with the serious bits of life. With tragedy there is predictability whereas comedy involves the element of surprise. Humor is able to bypass the merely rational and predictable and lead us to discover some≤ thing new and unexpected. What has been called "deep comedy" serves to mark hope amidst the chaotic landscape of life. Traditionally the tragic calls for the heroic acceptance of the fact there is no way out. Comedy, on the other hand, brings unexpected resolution.

A couple of biblical stories illustrate this point. Abraham and Sarah are promised a child and they are laughing at this preposterous idea that as members of the geriatric set they will soon be proud parents of a new baby. Isaac, whose name means "laughter," is the fulfillment of that promise, and he launches the history of God's chosen people. In laughter there is hope.

The second story is of two disciples walking the seven miles or so along the road to Emmaus just after that fateful weekend of Jesus' death. This story is referred to by one author as the funniest incident in the Bible. Here are these two discouraged figures who "begin to pour out their sorrows while... Jesus nods and sympathizes," and then Jesus goes on to give them "a massive Bible study" on why the Messiah must die. Eventually they realize with whom they have been in conversation. He disappears, and they, dog-tired though they are, run all the way back to Jerusalem to tell their story, only to find that Jesus has already appeared to those in Jerusalem.

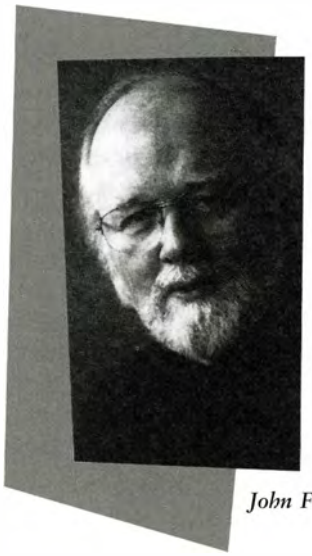
Laughing together

W.H. Auden has written of the depth of Christian society's comedy suggesting that

... while classical comedy believes that rascals should get the drubbing they deserve, Christian comedy believes we are forbidden to judge others and it is our duty to forgive each other. In classical comedy the characters are exposed and punished: when the curtain falls, the audience is laughing and those on stage are in tears. In Christian comedy the characters are exposed and forgiven: when the curtain falls, the audience and the characters are laughing together.

Artistry done out of the comedic vision of the gospel will see no need to avoid the serious but will recognize that side of our human journey. Even the tragic will not be ignored. It will be readily acknowledged, not as defining human existence, but as a thread in our journey which, though perhaps inevitable, is not definitive of our situation. It will be artistry that preserves and brings an element of surprise — of play and of laughter — and it is precisely there that we find a haven of hope which allows us to transcend the dark and tragic side of things.

Our calling is not merely to endure the world but to negotiate our way through it, confident that its very nature is comedic, that surprises will come, and that, when all is said and done, there will be laughter at the end of the play — laughter that will be shared by heaven and earth.



John Franklin

ROOM 219

Nancy Knol
Column Editor
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Freaks and Geeks

As a gift for taking care of her cats for ten days, my daughter gave me a DVD set of a television series that survived for only one season. It was made back in the '90s, but it centers around high school life in the 1980s. Why the show was cancelled is beyond me. It has excellent writing and perfect casting, and the plots are capable of making you laugh and cry simultaneously. Regardless of when you went to high school, this series manages to capture the high school experience. Apparently the combination of an Emmy and many protesting fans prompted the DVD production.

The interesting thing about the show is that it relegates what is frequently called "the popular crowd" to the status of background characters. Most of my students would probably assume that this group of people would, of course, be the *stars* of the show. Instead, the focus is on the "geeks" (nerds) and the "freaks" (hippies). Lindsay Weir is an outstanding student (geek) who decides she wants to experience a new persona, so she begins to hang out with the freaks. The depth and insight of the show is developed around this character's struggle with her choice. The geeks traditionally obey the rules and worry about the consequences of breaking them, while the freaks fairly easily color outside the lines and seem to have lost their moral compass.

Educational series

At the risk of sounding like a representative for the SHOUT production company, I urge all high school and middle school teachers and administrators and counselors to watch this series. I think it will make you better at what you do. Having said that, I would like to briefly examine the role of adults in this series. The parents are presented on a scale that ranges from being over-involved and too anxious to being dismissive and absent. The counselor tries too hard to be "hip" and a buddy (interestingly, he is most well-received by 9th graders.) And the teachers have very little to say to their students beyond addressing disciplinary issues and urging academic excellence. This stereotyping is, however, deliberate. Just as you, the viewer find yourself caught up in the desire to put people into neat and predictable categories, those "telling" the story are consciously allowing you to do so. The brilliance comes through when those stereotypes are broken, resulting in unlikely and yet realistic connections and insights.

One of my favorite scenes in the show involves a new 9th grader who moves to a Michigan high school from Florida. The first day she carries her tray into the cafeteria and looks around for some friendly faces who might invite her to join them. She finds this welcome at the "geek" table. They are astonished that she would join them because she is pretty and definitely popular crowd material. She spends a considerable amount of time with these new friends both in and outside of school until she is "discovered" by the popular crowd.

One day she walks into the cafeteria, once again carrying her lunch tray, and walks up to the trio of geeks waiting for her. She says: "If you guys don't mind, I'm going to join Vicki and her friends today." And none of the geeks are surprised at this. But as she turns, each one feels compelled to call out a message to her: "Just watch out for those jock guys — they only want one thing." And: "Vicki *seems* nice, but she'll talk behind your back." And the best admonition of all: "Don't believe everything they say about people who aren't their friends." And she laughs and says," "Good grief, I'm just sitting with them for lunch *today*." But they all know better.

There is so much more to school than academics and extracurricular activities. The dynamics of each student's day are beautifully and tragically complicated. I suspect we would all do well to take a moment to remember what it was like to open your locker in the morning and say a silent prayer that you make it through another day.

EVERYBODY GETS A PART

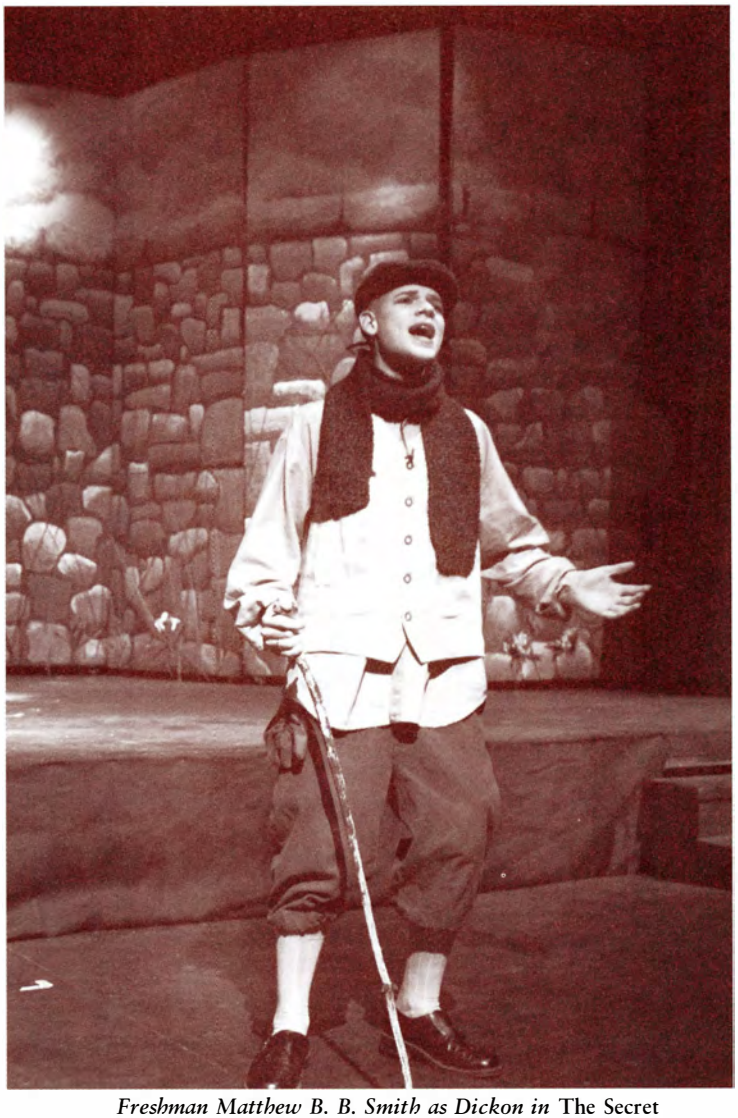
Why Every Christian School Ought to Have an Active Drama Program

by Bill Boerman-Cornnell

Bill Boerman-Cornell taught at Illiana Christian High School for almost ten years. During that time he was actively involved in their amazing drama program. He is now an assistant professor of education at Trinity Christian College and has become just another awe-struck audience member.

We in North America live in a society of churches, yet we too face a crisis that plays itself out in our schools. Disagreements within local churches, within denominations, between denominations, between practitioners of different religions, between Christians of differing political views, between North and South, East and West, Rock and Country, Urban and Rural, old and young, and almost anything else that is different threatens to break the church up into squabbling cliques. And what is happening with the adults is mirrored in schools of all stripes. So what can we do to recognize the ties we have instead of the things which divide?

The church in Corinth had fallen apart since Paul had been there. One of the biggest problems it faced was fragmentation. People, no doubt with the best intentions, had begun arguing with each other over petty matters. Paul wrote the first letter to the Corinthians as an initial response to that situation.



Freshman Matthew B. B. Smith as Dickon in The Secret Garden *(Spring 2006)*

Fighting fragmentation

Eugene Peterson offers this translation of the body analogy from I Corinthians 12: "But I also want you to think about how this keeps your significance from getting blown up into self-importance. For no matter how significant you are, it is only because of what you are a *part* of. An enormous eye or a gigantic hand wouldn't be a body, but a monster. What we have is one body with many parts, each its proper size and its proper place. No part is important on its own. Can you imagine Eye telling Hand, 'Get lost; I don't need you'? Or, Head telling Foot, 'You're fired; your job has been phased out'? As a matter of fact, in practice it works the other way — the 'lower' the part, the more basic and therefore necessary. You can live without an eye, for instance, but not without a stomach."

But how can we teach kids what it feels like to be part of such a body? We need an activity that incorporates many talents and that offers a place for everyone — an activity where each person is absolutely necessary for the overall product to happen. A good classroom can function in this way. A good athletic program can involve a huge percentage of the school population, but I would argue that one of the most far-reaching activities in terms of actively involving a huge variety of different talents is an active drama program. Let's think of it in terms of the Body of Christ:

The mind

The first year I directed plays in high school, I asked our amazing art teacher to help me design the sets for our musical "The Pirates of Penzance." The art teacher, in turn, suggested we give the job to three senior students. We gave them a couple of weeks to come up with a design. When they presented their ideas to us, we had a hard time believing they were really going to build a section of a pirate ship on stage, but we had to put our collective foot down when they suggested a

huge backdrop painting of ocean islands spanning the back of the stage. We were sorry, we said, but our drama program doesn't have the money to afford that. Did they have any idea what a muslin backdrop like that would cost? Plus, there wasn't time to order anything more; opening night was dangerously close.

Our students smiled wryly and explained that they had already talked to the owner of a billboard company who had agreed to donate the material and to help them transfer their ten-by-six-inch sketch onto the backdrop. We realized then that the best thing we could do was get out of the way. Drama can be a good reminder that it isn't always the director (or indeed any one person) who is the brains of the operation.

Educational theorists from Dewey to Vygotsky and, more recently, R. Keith Sawyer have argued that students learn best in a community when facing real world challenges. While I am not certain all would agree that the theater is the real world exactly, it is an excellent opportunity for students to put into practice what they learn in the classroom, whether they are designing sets using techniques from art class, using geometry to figure out what angle to bend conduit for Cinderella's pumpkin coach, or using their knowledge of history and literature to put the musical version of *Les Miserables* in context.

The hands

In the same show, Eric, a tough-guy senior who had never been in a show before, got a bit part in the chorus. He came to talk to the directors after rehearsal one night to ask if he could be a peg-leg pirate. He explained that he had an idea of how he could rig something up in wood and metal shop. We gave him the go ahead. His shop teacher later told me that it was the single project that Eric felt the most proud of, because it had been his idea start to finish. It was also a way in which Eric could use his imagination and building talents for something that would get a great deal more recognition than the typical shop project.

The eyes

One year we met Ian, a new student who had already undergone multiple operations on his legs and his kidneys. He was often sick and couldn't get around all that well, but he had a bright smile, a quick mind, and a good sense of humor. Several drama department faculty members ganged up on him and suggested he join the painting crew. Though our theater group as a whole tends to be pretty accepting, I remember being particularly impressed with the paint crew. I visited them one time and saw Ian on a scaffold painting a set. After spending some time with them, I realized that it was not so much that the art students had learned to accept Ian's limitations, but, rather, that in the context of painting sets, Ian didn't have any special limitations. He worked hard, he had a vision for what he was trying to do, and his fellow students accepted him on that basis. The students (and eventually their block-headed director) had learned to see Ian as a fellow artist, not as a handicapped child who walked strangely. Ian made several friendships including one that outlasted his high school experience.

Sophomore Lindsay Koedyker on the sets running crew for The Secret Garden

The many, many feet

A typical show at Illiana involves a cast of 20 to 50 students, four to seven teachers doing everything from ticket sales to costuming, from set design to organizing stage construction, painting crews of at least a dozen each, and a sets running crew that is frequently larger than the cast. The total number of people involved in a single show is often over a hundred — not counting parents who provide cookies for rehearsals, food for cast parties, and more bizarre props than you can imagine (many of which were provided by one teacher with a barn which apparently held more historical artifacts than the Smithsonian). In a school of about 600 students, one sixth of the students are involved directly. By the time we add art students making posters and designing t-shirts, friends helping students learn lines, and the audience (without whom no show can go on), there are few students who are not touched by the production.

The arms and legs

At the end of the show on closing night,

after acknowledging the hard work of seniors on the cast and crew, we could strike the set. This meant that set pieces, platforms, furniture, lights, and other materials, often weighing hundreds of pounds, would have to be taken apart, transported to storage, sometimes up two flights of stairs, and then organized and stored. Dressing rooms, ready rooms, the auditorium itself and the stage area needed to be cleaned and swept. Costumes and make-up had to be put away. Hundreds of folding chairs needed to be taken down, racked, and stored under the stage. Trash needed to be carted away. Within seconds of the closing of the curtain, students and faculty would begin working on their predeter-mined assignments

Sometimes, in order to lift a five-foot-high, fifteen by fifteen wheeled platform from the gym floor to the stage, we would all gather around and find out how easy it is to lift when thirty to forty people, sharing the same goal, work together. I remem-ber those nights not as a painful couple of hours of drudgery, not even as a bearable experience. Strike nights were a joyous few hours of cooperative exuberance. I often thought we should sell tickets to the strike as well as to the show.

The vocal chords

When we think of voices in the theater, we usually think of the actors — and to be sure, the actors work hard to memorize their parts, listen to the directors, and try to convey the message of the play to the audience.

But there are other voices, too. The stage manager and two assistant stage managers back stage and the tech director in the booth are all talking to each other via headset communicators. The stage manager's whispered, "Okay, go lights!" sets in motion a change from dark to light without which the play could not go on. It is not always the student in front with the lines who is the most important in a show. In fact, to speak of someone being the most important is really so absurd that it is not worth considering.

Titania (senior Elle Groen) and Bottom (sophomore Dan Harner) from the Fall 2005 production of A Midsummer Night's Dream.

The entire Body of Christ

Alright, so we don't have room in our gymnasium-auditorium to seat all of Christ's children at once. When the show opens, however, the body comes together. Not only the actors, crews, faculty sponsors, and others involved in the making of the show, but also the audience. Parents, grandparents, aunts and uncles come from their respective communities, sometimes crossing a continent to see the show. Supporters of the school who no longer know any current students come in response to bulletin announcements in their churches. People from the local community who have never been inside the doors of the school come in response to posters in local grocery stores.

Before the show starts, we open in prayer, and members of arguing churches and denominations, disagreeing families, feuding friends, republicans and democrats — children of Christ all — bow their heads together before enjoying the fruit of the work done by a hundred brothers and sisters and a message worthy of their consideration.

Still don't see the value in a drama program for your school? Reread I Corinthians 12. Then come see a show. You'll see what I mean.

Two heartbeats

by Martha Kauffman Coffman

A Mother's heartbeat

With my child's hand clasped tightly in mine
we walked slowly toward the approaching cautioning colored vehicle.
The red lights flashed; the transport stopped; his grip grew tighter by the second.
The door opened; the smiling driver welcomed us.
I boosted my young one up the steps half as high as he,
as he fearfully disconnected his hold on me.
I backed off as he faced thirty new faces.
He found a seat near the window; he barely raised his hand to return my wave. I turned.
His information highway and learning center loomed ahead
to lead the way to his new world — a world to impact his goals.
I turned toward the empty house.
Suddenly, I felt ALONE; alone with my thoughts, my worries, my concerns.
Ah! Dear Lord, send someone to befriend my child, protect and teach him. I, too, need
a friend and that friend is you, Oh help me. Amen.

A Teacher's heartbeat responds

I gently lead him by the hand to a seat with his decorated name label.
I show him the bouquet of multi-colored asters
on the window sill near his seat
where he can see the sky, the birds, the trees.
Near his seat other labels mark the chairs of:
Brian, Justin, Jenny, Katrina, who never before came to my class.
He can be their friend.
Together, we'll learn about things we see, hear, touch, smell, or taste.
The bell rings and 25 pairs of eyes (some tearful) size my techniques.
They sit with colorful arrays of new plaids, plains, and prints.
Behind the variation of fabrics, lie fears akin to my own.
Will they take me as I am — their teacher?
Oh! Lord! What a sea of new faces await my guidance for the next 180 days.
Before me may be future ministers, administrators, parents, teachers.
Take away my fears, their fears.
Make this a profitable year for everyone: parents, teachers, students.
Grant wisdom to discipline fairly and effectively
lead this group. Help me to honor you each day
with thanksgiving. Amen.

✦ ✦ ✦

Martha Weaver, who lives in Atglen, Pennsylvania, taught in Christian schools for 36 years and substituted in both Christian and public schools for 12 years.

The Picture of Dorian Winkle Or Le Morte de Art

by Jan Kaarsvlam

Jan Kaarsvlam is no longer teaching at Jonathan Edwards Christian School near Drywater, Nevada. After he purchased an emu ranch over a hundred miles to the south east of the school, Jan found he had to choose between his students and the care demanded by his herd. His attempt to combine these two parts of his life through a camp-out weekend resulted in six students and four emus being hospitalized. The remaining emus escaped. Happily, Jan has recently been offered a position as K-6 art teacher at Pella Christian, an offer he intends to accept. Anyone interested in buying an emu farm in Nevada (cheap!) should contact Jan through the editor: "editor@emu.net"

Last February, Bedlam Christian School art teacher Greg Mortis and his student council-appointed fine arts committee hosted a school wide celebration of the arts. After years of student exhibitions, Mr. Mortis thought it would be fun to take a look at the artistic talent within the Bedlam faculty. After principal Bentley VanderHaar sent a strongly worded note of encouragement in the same envelope as contract renewals, several faculty members were happy to share their explorations of poetry and the visual arts. Herewith I present a sampling of their work:

To an Unnamed Principal

(You Know Who You Are!)

Like eels, your words are slippery, alive
they leap and lurch and leave
me slimy and scared —
I don't trust them.

Like the CIA and FBI moles
who monitor my mail,
tap my telephone,
your words invade, infest —
I do not trust them.

You say words like *build, community, encourage, support* —
but then you ask to see my lesson plans,
want me to take a class,
suggest I might
improve
Hah!
When the wind is north, northwest
I know a hawk from a handsaw.

—Jon Kleinhut, Librarian

Pythagorean Piles

Here's a story problem for you:

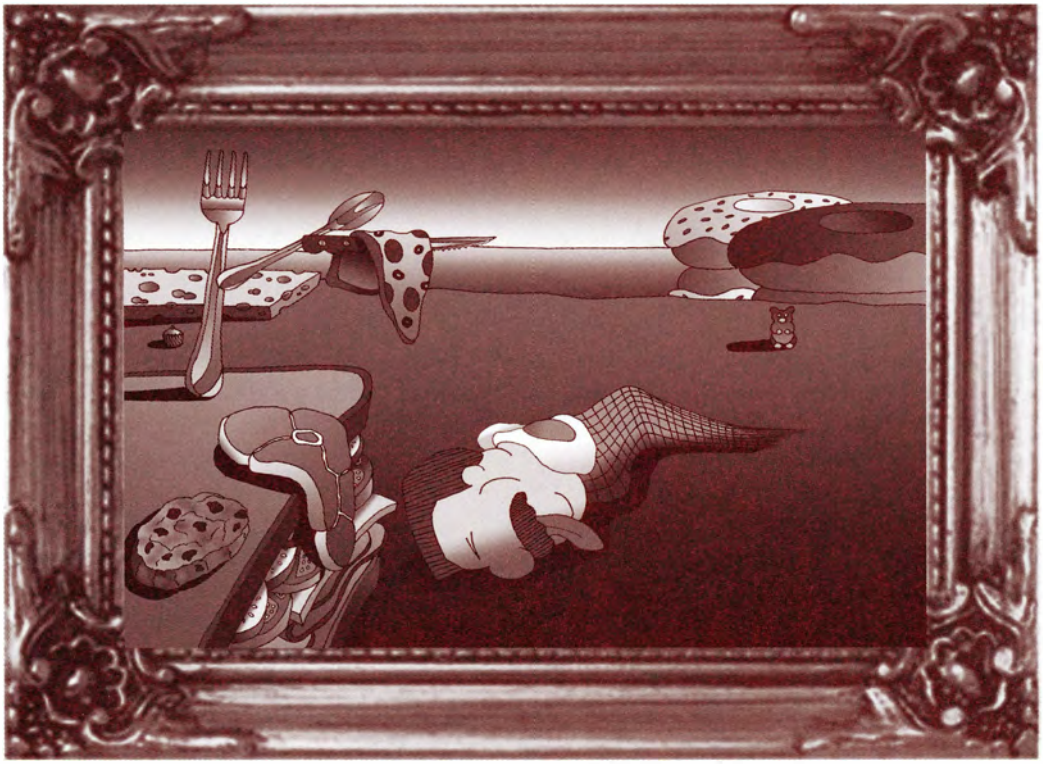
32 years of teaching,
2 semesters per year,
6 periods per semester,
27 students per period,
1 assignment per day,
5 days per week,
18 weeks per semester,
2 semesters per year,
32 years of teaching,
1 teacher =
1 gold-plated watch and 1 crabby old woman

—Jane VanderAsch, Math Teacher

In Remembrance

Shall Christian Day Schools pass away from life
And generations' work go down in vain?
We sense the torturer's impending knife.
It's poised above our body prone in pain.
We find ourselves divided from ourselves,
our sense of all community is lost,
And only those who drink from the top shelves
Can pay tuition's ever rising costs.
I fear that Bedlam's turning quite elitist,
a place that's too concerned with pedigree.
Or maybe not. We don't care quite what the breed is,
So long as he or she comes with money.
To serve our rich but not our poorer friends,
'Tis how the Christian Day School movement ends.

—Bentley VanderHaar, Principal



Gordon Winkle, The Persistence of Mayonnaise, *acrylic (and some grape jelly) on canvas, 2006, in homage to Salvador Dali's* The Persistence of Memory.

They smile, a harmless joke,
but I can see behind
the dismissive blue eyes,
the smiling white,
white teeth. . .

Even the beautiful rose
begins to doubt itself
in a field of
tulips.

— Christina Lopez, English teacher

Three Haikus

in the Style of the Master Haiku Writer and
Rap Musician Submaster Bummp

1. **Cheap shot jump shot**
In a world of steroids, trash talk, and
Multimillion dollar contracts, I tell my students
Just play ball!

1. **Materialist Mastication**
From the trash bin I pull
Six hohos, three candybars, twelve bags of chips and
Forty-seven peanut-butter sandwiches

1. **Lesson Planning**
Basketball or football
Weight-training or soccer. Hmmmmm.
I know… Juggling!

— Rex Kane, Physical Education Teacher

The Spanish Rose

Red chile *ristras* decorate my classroom door
their presence a statement as bold as their taste:
tortillas in a white bread world,
flan in the land of *olie bollen*.
I teach their language, the tongue of Shakespeare,
and my tongue, that of Cervantes,
they call the language
of landscapers.

Why I Teach (Still) or Surprising Grace

In my sixth year of teaching here
After a particularly rough day,
(broke up a fight, got an angry note from a parent)
I returned from a basketball game around 8:30
(I coached, we lost… again)
Then spent two hours trying to hang a cross from the ceiling
(for chapel the next day)
I checked my lesson plans and stepped out the door at last
(eleven at night).
It had snowed two inches and I had left my coat and gloves
on the bus.
The thought of having to scrape my car with my bare hands
In ten degree weather
Made me want to curse God.

Then I came round the corner and saw
That someone had cleared off my whole car for me
(I still don't know who).
That's why.
(see the title)

— Cal VanderMeer , History and Bible Teacher

Christ-Centered Curriculum
A Moving Target

by Adam Sterenberg
Adam Sterenberg (trainusa@yahoo.com) is a teacher at Kalamazoo Christian Middle School in Kalamazoo, Michigan.

Over a year ago, I began to seek the Lord's will regarding a topic for my master's thesis from Dordt College. Soon the Spirit began to unfold the question that has been burning in my mind for 10 years: "What makes this school Christian?" This question further evolved into this one: "What makes our curriculum at this school Christ-centered?" I then sought to bring this question before others to find out what people believe to be the essential elements in a Christ-centered curriculum (CCC).

What do you think?

Several months later I created a comprehensive online survey. Since the topic of CCC is very broad, I developed questions with multiple-choice answers to allow for statistical analysis. The 77 questions probed participants' beliefs regarding the purpose, content, and teaching methods of a CCC.

Praise God Almighty for the 500 people that responded! Now no fewer than 46 states, 5 Canadian provinces, and 15 countries are represented in the data. People of all ages, denominations, schools and homeschools sacrificed their time to further the dialogue of CCC by completing the survey.

With the large amount of data collected, I could only scratch the "statistical" surface. I analyzed only the percentage responses in each category and attempted to draw generalizations from there.

Participants were asked to rank 33 CCC purpose and perspective elements on a scale of 1 (not important) to 4 (very important). The following six elements ranked the highest: Imparting the Truth (86% responded with a 4), Live responsively for His glory (85%), Help students strengthen relationships with God, others, and creation (85%), Teacher role-modeling (84%), Worship God in all things (79%), Promote spiritual growth (78%).

In contrast, the lowest six elements ranged from 35% to 15% (none responded "very important.") In descending order, they are: development of creativity, academic rigor, teaching using the methods Jesus used, community service, physical development, and fix the "wrongs" in society.

Tension in the Air

There were 40 "tension" questions where participants were asked to choose which CCC element is more important. For example:

4. Which is more important in a CCC?

Mathematics				Community Service
O	O	O	O	O

As you can see, the two elements were not necessarily opposites. Educators make curricular decisions every minute. As many people know, decisions rarely are made based on two mutually exclusive choices.

All tension questions had five "degrees" to choose from. People could select an extreme or some middle degree. The following graph shows the results of the above question:

According to the graph, the majority of respondents (60%) did not want to choose between Mathematics and Community Service. But 80% of participants said that community service in a CCC was just as important as mathematics, or more so. If the importance of a CCC element were based on the number of hours engaged in an activity, would this be reflected in your present curriculum? Do students spend just as much time serving the community as they do adding fractions? What messages are we sending to our students? Are there other practices in our curricula that de-emphasize the Bible's teaching on community?

Cloning a good thing?

Many well-intentioned parents want their children to be just as good as every other kid. We want all our kids to have the skills necessary to be doctors, rocket scientists and the leader of our country. These desires could partially explain why 77% of participants said that achieving set standards was just as important as personal effort or growth, or more so. My question then is, "Why do 97% of respondents say that a CCC honors the unique gifts of each child as much as a standard set of gifts, or more so?" Can evaluation be based primarily on standards and still honor the unique gifts of each child?

Might makes right

Another interesting point arises regarding three different areas: choice of content, classroom rules, and methods of

evaluation. In all three cases, almost 75% of the participants indicated that the teacher is mostly responsible for making choices rather than the students. 72% said that the teacher is more of a guide than a commanding officer. If a guide is making all the decisions, then isn't she really a commanding officer? If the teacher chooses all the content, what happens to curiosity and exploration? If the teacher makes all the rules, how will students learn responsibility? If the teacher grades everything, how will the students learn discernment and self-evaluation?

Enlighten me!

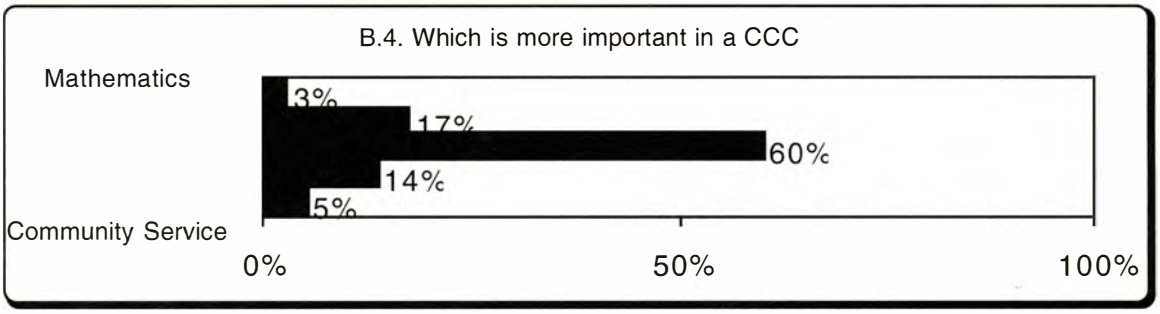
The survey indicated that 89% of respondents believe that a CCC should allow students to ***act*** on their faith just as much as ***think*** about their faith, or more so. Would this be true in your curriculum? More often than not, I see classroom time filled with great lectures and in-depth study. Can we assume from this that students will naturally act in a way pleasing to Christ? Do our curricula give students opportunity to respond to what is learned, or are they merely to ponder the material? I have seen many students who can talk the greatest theology in the world but have few actions to back their words. Is a curriculum truly Christ-centered if its main purpose is to create intellectuals?

So what's your point?

The data I gathered from the on-line survey seems to point to discrepancies between theory and practice. Furthermore, there could be biblical discrepancies in peoples' theories of CCC. But I believe there is something much deeper at stake here.

Frankly, there is little that is essential to a CCC. One should consider the impact of the six highest ranked elements. Beyond that, there is immense freedom in Christ, but also immense responsibility. As my work proceeded, this conclusion emerged: a CCC must be structured around the Truth of the ages, yet dynamic enough to accommodate the movement of the Holy Spirit. For this I refer to the Wisdom of King Solomon in Ecclesiastes 3, verses 1-8:

There is a time for everything,
a season for every activity under heaven.
A time to be born and a time to die.
A time to plant and a time to harvest.
A time to kill and a time to heal.
A time to tear down and a time to rebuild.
A time to cry and a time to laugh....



There is a time for everything in a CCC. There is a time for science and a time for social studies. A time for thinking and a time for doing. A time for math and a time for community service. A time to be emotional and a time to be intellectual. A time to focus on the community and a time to focus on the individual. A time to be relational and a time to be academic.

What an impossible task! It would be less complex if we had to merely balance the curriculum. But attaining a CCC is not about balance; it is about teaching the right thing at the right time. That is why those educators who develop and implement a curriculum must be in such deep communion with the Holy Spirit. It is essential to teach students good communication skills, yet we must be flexible enough to allow them to develop the gifts that the Spirit has given them. Whatever the curricular structure is, it must also be dynamic. Again, this does not mean equilibrium must be attained between two competing elements. It means that we are sensitive to the Spirit's leading when one is to be favored over the other.

Digging deeper

Let's not end the dialogue here! This is only the tip of the iceberg. If you are interested in the complete set of graphs, raw data, or the complete thesis, please visit my website at www.kcsa.org/~asterenberg. All information is free for anyone's use and further study. I pray that this information will help us all develop more Christ-centered curricula.

SEMPER REFORMATA: *ALWAYS REFORMING*

Take Possession of the Mediating Word

by Jack Fennema

Jack Fennema is professor of education emeritus at Covenant College. This is the second in a series of four articles that provide suggestions for reforming schools that desire renewal.

The first article in this series encouraged schools to institute a renewed focus on God. This second article enjoins schools to fully appropriate the mediating Word.

If the focus of Christian education is to be on God, the means to do this must be the living Word of God, for the Son is the only way to know the Father. The Word — the *Logos* of John 1 — provides both revelation and mediation between the Father and his creation. This Word of God has been manifested to us in three modes: the Word Incarnate, the Word Inscripturated, and the Word in creation. If students are to know God fully, they must take possession of the mediating Word. All three manifestations of the Word must be embraced.

The Word Incarnate

Christian schools are for education, not evangelism. Reformed Christian schools have often prided themselves on their understanding of a covenantal rationale for their existence. Their mission has been to nurture God's consecrated children in his word and world, not to "save souls." In education, the Cultural Mandate has always trumped the Great Commission. While there is much to be said for this emphasis, two aspects of knowing the Father through the Word Incarnate, Jesus the Christ, need to be cited.

First, even covenant children — the children of a believing parent — must be born again. To enter the kingdom, their hearts must be regenerated. Jesus said this directly to a covenant "child" — Nicodemus. Children in Christian schools are to be nurtured toward commitment to Christ. Although the Spirit moves as it pleases, I believe that ages 10-15 are developmentally particularly appropriate for this commitment.

But there is more to this. If we desire our children to have eyes that see, ears that hear, and minds that comprehend God's ways — really, the agenda of the Christian school — they must have the Spirit of Christ residing in their hearts. The Bible says so. Read 1 Corinthians 2:6-16. The only way for children of the covenant to appropriate the mind of Christ is through regenerated hearts.

Second, salvation is only a means to another end: lordship. For it's all about God, not about us. We are told in Scripture that every knee *should* bow. That is what it's all about. Many youth today, however, like the "easy believism" of "cheap grace," but not the "cost of discipleship." We need to nurture our children toward bending their knees in submission to their King, for he is Lord over every facet of their persons and every dimension of the world in which they live. They exist solely to glorify him.

The Word Inscripturated

One of the chief tenets of the Protestant Reformation was *Soli Scriptura* — Scripture alone — as the basis for faith and practice. The open Bible in the front of churches and the centrality of the preaching of the Inscripturated Word reflects a Reformed emphasis on the importance of holy writ. Reformed Christian schools have professed the same. Pictorial ads often place a stack of textbooks atop the Bible — the foundational book.

But I have a confession to make, and perhaps you do, too. Seldom did I open a Bible with my students outside of Bible classes. I now believe that this is counterproductive to effective Christian education. Yes, presumably we teach from a biblical worldview and don't always have to point to chapter and verse in every lesson. But we are missing a very important object lesson for our students: actually opening the Bible to find answers and direction for life. The danger, of course, is proof-texting, but a well-thought-out lesson plan should include several scriptural references that provide foundation and perspective on the topic of the day. Carrying one's Bible to class should be as normal as carrying one's textbooks, for it should be an oft-opened book within Christian school classrooms.

The Bible, then, is more than a devotional book with which to begin the school day. John Calvin described it as "spectacles" or "eyeglasses" through which to view and understand the world and life within it. It is "special" revelation that helps us to understand "general" revelation. We all have experienced the transformation that three-D glasses make. For Christian school students, the Word of God adds a fourth — transcendent — dimension. They can have eyes that truly see the world behind the world! But teachers must take the time in preparation of their lessons to personally explore what the light of the Word has to say about areas of study. Our students must be taught how to see by those of us who have greater insight. The Bible must be the evaluative tool for teaching discernment. All people and products studied are more-or-less faithful to the Word of God. Christian education equips students to determine how much is more and how much is less by using the criteria of the Word.

Biblical literacy

This next point may relate more to Reformed Christian colleges than to K-12 schools, but there appears to be a trend toward fewer biblical studies being required as core requirements for graduation. This should not be! Students in Christian schools must be thoroughly biblically literate if they are to make the Bible their

sole authority for faith and practice. They can't apply that which they do not know and understand. They can't make God-directed decisions if they do not know where to find his direction and answers. The spiral curriculum model of four times through the entire Bible in twelve years continues to have merit.

Equipping students with the offensive weapon of the sword of the Spirit allows them to "demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God" as well as "take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ" (2 Corinthians 10:5).

The Word in Creation

The Belgic Confession states that the "universe is before our eyes like a beautiful book." Indeed, we can learn much about God through a study of the works of his hands. We can "know" him cognitively through creation. But we cannot know God in our heart-of-hearts through a study of creation alone, for, again, the Bible tells us that the only way to the Father is through the Son — the mediating Word. If we are to know and glorify God through general revelation, it can only be through the Word and Spirit. To separate creation from the living Word is to risk worshipping the creation rather than the Creator.

With the first advent of Christ we were provided additional insight into creation. According to John 1, Jesus Christ as the Word of God — the divine *Logos* — mediated the creation into existence and presently upholds and sustains it. The Bible tells us (see John 1:1-3, Colossians 1:15-20, Hebrews 1:1-3) that creation was made for Christ. God spoke the Word and creation was. Today, Christ upholds creation by his word. Integral creation structure exists because of the providential sustaining presence of the lawful Word of God. Removal of the *Logos* from the world would result in immediate, hellish chaos. Christ has preeminence over all things. He is Lord; he is King. The creation is only a means to a higher end, that of knowing and glorifying the Father fully through the Word and Spirit. When we study created reality as expressed in nature, society, and culture, our ultimate focus is to be on the Triune God — on the Father through the Son in the power of the Spirit. Such study becomes a true act of worship.

Picture the light of the Word shining though the world as a light beams through a prism. Multiple shafts of light break forth, as myriad colors reflect the diversity of God's glory. Each aspect of creation describes God in a unique way, through differing lens. He is the God of beauty, of justice, of harmony, of love. Subjects in school, too, center on Jesus, the Light of the World, who points to the Father. Each discipline represents a sphere of reality that reflects the "eternal power and divine nature" of God in its own way. Thus, a full-orbed study by students produces a full-orbed perspective.

Psalm 19 tells us that creation speaks the Word of God. As we prepare lessons we need to ask ourselves what the Word may be saying though the area of created reality under study. Our interpretation must always align with Scripture, true, but God does indeed speak through — reveal himself through — his mediating Word in creation. We and our students are called to sensitize our seeing and hearing capabilities through appropriating the Word and Spirit of God in our classrooms.

Christian education is *partial* education if we focus on only one dimension of the Word to the exclusion of the others. But God desires to be known fully and to be glorified in all things. This requires full engagement with the Word Incarnate, the Word Inscripturated, and the Word in Creation — the focus of the next article.

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More room for the Arts

Al Boerema (ajb37@calvin.edu), associate professor of education at Calvin College, Grand Rapids, Mich., asked the panel the following question: "How do the arts get more emphasis and support in schools in a climate of high stakes testing?"

October 9, 2006


Tony Kamphuis

Outside of some literacy testing in grade 10, Christian high schools in Ontario aren't in a "high stakes" testing environment. Maybe that's why I have the luxury of saying, "Let's just refuse to play 'the man's' game!" We have an alternative take on education, and that requires a solid exploration of the arts. These aren't fluff programs; they form the stuff that makes us human! I think in many schools, though, the arts program is as strong as the appeal of the teachers in that area. Our local Christian school has an excellent theatre arts teacher, and, voila! parents and students see clearly how drama classes form an important part of Christian education. Now, they won't easily let go of that notion.

Tony Kamphuis

October 10, 2006


Tim Leugs

I think that many of us are in a similar situation to the one that Tony describes. Because few Christian schools receive financial support from the state (with the exception of those shared-time positions such as physical education, music, technology, and art, which receive additional assistance owing to numbers of students and not to test scores), I see few Christian schools electing to participate in the "high stakes" testing environment altogether. This is a tremendously liberating experience, allowing many Christian schools to offer curricular and extra-curricular arts programs to students with the limiting factors such as student interest and the school's general budgetary concerns (that is, financial concerns that are unrelated to test performance). Given the huge emphasis on school promotion in recent years, it seems that the costs of running such a program are far outweighed by the many benefits that the arts provide for the school. These benefits may include getting the school's name out through advertisements that a play, art show, or concert will take place at the school and simple positive regard for a school that is interested in building a whole individual, not just building a student.

Tim Leugs

October 10, 2006


Pam Adams

I agree with Tim and Tony in that Christian schools have more freedom in curricular decisions. I believe our love of the arts is fostered in part by the fact that we are a faith community and that the arts play a large role in worship. I realize that music is probably the main art that is used in worship services, but visual and dramatic arts are beginning to play a larger role in many churches. Since we value worship and want to prepare future leaders in these areas, we see them as essential curricular ingredients in our schools. This home-school-church connection shapes our schools in ways that are unique.

Pam Adams

October 11, 2006

Dear Pam: Thanks for mentioning the home-school-church connection. The arts (not just music) are now seen as part of our cultural mandate and our living out our Imago Dei. High stakes testing to me should not be a factor, when all of life is worship to God. We should certainly cherish the liberty we still have in our Christian Schools to live out our faith in all areas of life, to search out God's ways in all of creation, and to integrate our faith so that it interpenetrates and intertwines and flows out of our relationship to our triune God. The right balance in these areas is also important.

Johanna Campbell

Albert Boerema
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October 28, 2006

Johanna, when you say, "High stakes testing to me should not be a factor," are you suggesting standardized tests don't have a place in Christian schools? It is nice to see everyone affirm the arts and all, but it isn't just the school's responsibility to develop students in this area. Have we become too "artsy" and traded-off solid academic performance?

Tony Kamphuis

October 28, 2006

Agnes Fisher

Hi Tony: No way! At the exclusion of science and math, etc.? The emphasis in society is still on the sciences and math. The arts are neither appreciated nor understood by the general public and that includes the Christian community. However, there is increased recognition of the need for balance in our schools and in the Christian life, especially among its leaders and teachers. In my experience at Eastern Christian, standardized testing has not stood in the way of the arts at all even though the testing is done as it should be.

Agnes Fisher

October 28, 2006

Johanna Campbell

Agnes has already answered Tony's question about standardized testing not having a place in our schools. I also think those tests have a place, but, again, we should not be ruled by them. Perhaps an area that we need to focus more on as Christian teachers is to be very discerning and specific in the arts we do produce. We certainly do not want to come with trite Christian clichés, but we want to express God's glory in fresh, new ways, singing new (and old!) songs in all the arts. If all the languages in the world are not adequate to express God's glory, and if sin is ever present with us, we need to have a humble, joy-filled attitude, along with a looking to the Holy Spirit for guidance, as we express ourselves in the arts. A recent book (2005) which I have read on this topic is: "Christians and Kitsch: A P rofound Weakness" by Betty Spackman.

Johanna Campbell

October 28, 2006

Good Folks: Hailing from Gallup, New Mexico, I teach at Rehoboth Christian School. Though standardized tests are used, we do not feel hemmed in by a climate of high-stakes testing and "cherish the liberty" of including the arts as we believe them to be part of a well-rounded education. The arts are especially important to our area as the Navajo and Zuni native communities have great influence here. In fact, over half of our students at Rehoboth are of native descent. Both in the present and in the past, the arts have been very important to native communities. Before formal education, it was through chants and dance, music, weaving, and storytelling that messages were communicated and lessons were taught. So it is and should be a high priority of our area to incorporate the arts into our teaching.

Jolene Veldhuizen

Knowing that the public schools in the district are feeling the pressure of the high-stakes testing, I called a colleague who is a local public school elementary art teacher. He explained the situation in New Mexico. The *No Child Left Behind Act* has required testing here, and the public districts feel the strain. Our county, one of the poorest in the nation, is especially under pressure with many schools not meeting Annual Yearly Progress based on standardized test scores. However, there are competing interests. New Mexico's governor has been a great supporter of the arts in elementary education and has allocated over 20 million dollars for arts programs. In some public schools, this money has allowed for well-funded and extensive arts programs. But other schools are feeling the pressure of meeting Annual Yearly Progress. In those elementary schools art programs have been left out. Schools are opting to emphasize the tested subjects, which are reading and math. In these cases we mourn the loss of a well-rounded and enriched education for the students. "Testing has made people lose sight of the benefits of the arts," my colleague points out. He also told me about Lincoln Jackson Elementary School in Clovis, New Mexico. The superintendent of the district created an arts-integration school; all curriculum is taught using the arts, including dance, music, drama, and visual arts. Notably, this was the only school in their district to meet their Annual Yearly Progress.

I feel blessed to be in a Christian School where the people teaching the local children are able to make decisions about the arts at our local level. I pray that our students learn to value the arts and to use their education to worship and glorify our God.

Jolene Velthuizen

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 contact Tony VanderArk at tvanderark @hollandchristian.org. We would also encourage others who have websites to link to ours.

Editor

Note to Our Advertisers

Please make sure that all camera-ready ads are e-mailed as PDF files to the editor before the following due dates:

October Issue -August 15
December Issue - October 15
February Issue - December 15
April Issue - February 15

October 29, 2006

I found Jolene's comments about Rehoboth to be very interesting. If we strip our students of their cultural moorings we do a real disservice to them. I grew up as a Roman Catholic, and the visual arts were very important to me in my formative years. Creating and valuing art is one expression of the imagination and abilities God has given us. Woe to us if we stifle it in the name of standardized tests! Many of us come from schools where Annual Yearly Progress is not a factor so we do need to realize that we are somewhat privileged and have many opportunities that other schools don't have. Sometimes literacy and numeracy do need to have center stage. I wonder if we can do this in a way that does not lead to a curriculum void of the arts.

Pam Adams

The panel consists of:

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

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

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

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

Tim Leugs (tleugs@cutlervillecs.org) a fifth-grade teacher at Cutlerville Christian School, Grand Rapids, Michigan.

Jolene Velthuizen (jvelthuizen@rcsnm.org) a second-grade teacher at Rehoboth Christian School in Northwest New Mexico.

One Hundred Percent American

by Ralph Linton
(From: The Study of Man, *1936)*

Our solid American citizen awakens in a bed built on a pattern which originated in the Near East but which was modified in Northern Europe before it was transmitted to America. He throws back covers made from cotton, domesticated in India, or linen, domesticated in the Near East, or wool from sheep, also domesticated in the near East, or silk the use of which was discovered in China. All of these materials have been spun and woven by processes invented in the Near East. He slips into his moccasins, invented by the Indians of the Eastern woodlands, and goes to the bathroom, whose fixtures are a mixture of European and American invention, both of a recent date. He takes off his pajamas, a garment invented in India, and washes with soap invented by the ancient Gauls. He then shaves, a masochistic rite which seems to have been derived from either Sumer or ancient Egypt.

Returning to the bedroom, he removes his clothes from a chair of southern European type and proceeds to dress. He puts on garments whose form originally derived from the skin clothing of the nomads of the Asiatic steppes, puts on shoes made from skins tanned by a process invented in ancient Egypt and cut to a pattern derived from the classical civilizations of the Mediterranean, and ties around his neck a strip of bright-colored cloth which is a vestigial survival of the shoulder shawls worn by the seventeenth-century Croatians. Before going out for breakfast he glances through the window, made of glass invented in Egypt, and if it is raining puts on overshoes made of rubber discovered by the Central American Indians and takes an umbrella, invented in southeastern Asia. Upon his head he puts a hat made of felt, a material invented in the Asiatic steppes.

On his way to breakfast he stops to buy a paper, paying for it with coins, an ancient Lydian invention. At the restaurant a whole new series of borrowed elements confronts him. His plate is made of a form of pottery invented in China. His knife is steel, an alloy first made in southern India, his fork, a medieval Italian invention, and his spoon a derivative of a Roman original. He begins breakfast with an orange, from the eastern Mediterranean, a cantaloupe from Persia, or a piece of African watermelon. With this he has coffee, an Abyssinian plant, with cream and sugar. Both the domestication of cows and the idea of milking them originated in the Near East, while sugar was first made in India. After his fruit and first coffee he goes on to waffles, cakes made by a Scandinavian technique from wheat domesticated in Asia Minor. Over these he pours maple syrup, invented by the Indians of the Eastern woodlands. As a side dish he may have an egg of a species of bird domesticated in Indo-China, or thin strips of the flesh of an animal domesticated in Eastern Asia, which have been salted and smoked by a process developed in northern Europe.

When our friend has finished eating he settles back to smoke, an American Indian habit, consuming a plant domesticated in Brazil in either a pipe, derived from the Indians of Virginia or a cigarette, derived from Mexico. If he is hardy enough he may even attempt a cigar, transmitted to us from the Antilles by way of Spain. While smoking, he reads the news of the day, imprinted in characters invented by the ancient Semites upon a material invented in China by a process invented in Germany. As he absorbs the accounts of foreign troubles, he will, if he is a good conservative citizen, thank a Hebrew deity in an Indo-European language that he is 100 percent American.

Query

Structure Classrooms for Grace, Not for Sin

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 email her at tvalstar@telus.net.

Teacher versus parent

Question #1:

Classroom management is one of the hardest things to learn as a teacher. How do you discipline a child for doing something wrong in the classroom when the parents do not teach the child the behavior is wrong at home?

Response:

This is a tough situation that you face. In Christian schools we often speak of the working together of the home, church and school. That is our desire. We also have to realize that we as teachers do not replace parents. Parents have the primary responsibility to nurture the children. Depending on your school's enrollment policy, the values of the home may be different from those of the school. The mission statement of your school and the objectives that flow from the school's mission statement should be the guiding principles for you.

In a Christian school these will be biblical guidelines. If, for example, one objective states that the students will grow in Christ-like character, staff members and parents will have to put substance to this statement. What does that look like? What does that sound like? What actions should we expect of our students? When the parents enroll their child in your school, they are agreeing that the teaching staff will follow the mission statement of the school while the child is in the care of the school, from arrival to dismissal time. That may mean that the expectations for the child at school are different from those at home. We do not wish to confuse the child, but at the same time we are obligated to follow the Christian principles which are the basis for the school.

Creating diversity

Question #2:

Many schools today emphasize diversity. In the Christian school setting, diversity in the religious sense is either not present or not talked about. How can Christian educators approach issues or religious diversity in their classroom?

Response:

In many Christian schools the student and parent body is made up of members who attend Christian churches from various denominations. Although the universal body of Christ is one, we know that the expression of worship and doctrinal differences have created diversity within that body. The body of Christ is made up of many parts, and each part is essential to the whole body. I believe Jesus also spoke of this when he said, "I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd" (John 10:16).

It is important to allow for the expression of religious diversity within the school body. One of the most obvious ways is the expression of worship styles. Some raise hands and use movement to express themselves, whereas others take a much more contemplative approach. There needs to be an acceptance of one another's different ways of expressing faith. This could begin in school assemblies or chapel, where speakers or groups from different denominational backgrounds share the Word. There are many interdenominational youth ministries which welcome opportunities to exchange views about practices and have a special approach to engage young people.

Having teachers from various denominational backgrounds also broadens the diversity spectrum. Although the Christian school board hires teachers who believe that the Bible is the infallible word of God, teachers may hold different theological positions on such matters as baptism, the working of the Holy Spirit or end times. For the sake of the unity of the body and because, in my opinion, these are not "salvation issues," these topics can be discussed. Remembering that there are differing opinions which have resulted in diversity within the body of Christ, teachers should encourage students to also discuss these topics with their parents. I do not believe teachers should indoctrinate from their own particular denominational stance if the school is an interdenominational school.

There is also a place for the study of world religions so that the school can equip students with the information needed to witness. We must not allow our students to be ignorant; rather, we must give them the knowledge necessary to stand up for their faith in a world which says that there are many ways to God. Jesus clearly stated, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6).

Cooperative learning activities would serve as an excellent teaching and learning strategy to engage students in a discussion

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of other denominational beliefs or world religions. In our multicultural society it is crucial to equip ourselves and our students for intelligent debates with others on these topics. Every person operates from a particular worldview which, acknowledged or not, is based on a religious belief. May educators always be guided by Scripture passages such as, "But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect" (1 Peter 3:15).

Approach with Trust

Question #3:

How do you know you are being too strict with your students?

Response:

I am struggling with this question because I am not sure we are asking the right question. The question in some sense gives the impression that teachers have all the power and that they are anticipating that students are going to do something wrong. I realize we are all sinful and fall short of the glory of God, but we are justified freely by his grace that came through the redemption by Christ Jesus (Roman 3:23). Maybe, as Van Dyk (2000) says, we have to structure our classrooms for grace rather than for sin. That means we have to approach students with high expectations and trust, rather than always expecting them to be their worst (p. 242).

What do high expectations of your students look like? I am sure you have some ideas, but your students will also have some ideas. When students have a say in the expectations of the classroom, you are more likely to have a cooperative spirit in the classroom. My experience indicates that students' expectations are often as high as, if not higher, than those of the teacher. Often when students play a part in setting classroom expectations, they also cooperate in managing and maintaining those expectations. Discipline has more to do with "guiding our kids to stay on the right road" than it has to do with punishment (p. 239). When we set up our classrooms so that all students can be fully engaged in their learning, have opportunities to monitor themselves and their learning progress, we will find that they will take responsibility for their actions. Then the teacher can guide them rather than be the "strict disciplinarian."

Sometimes we lack confidence when we begin our teaching career, but guided by the Holy Spirit we can echo Paul's words to Timothy: "For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline" (2 Timothy 1:7). As we listen to God's Word, we will be guided by love and self-discipline to know what actions we are to take in our classroom — actions which not only honor but also respect our students.

Reference:

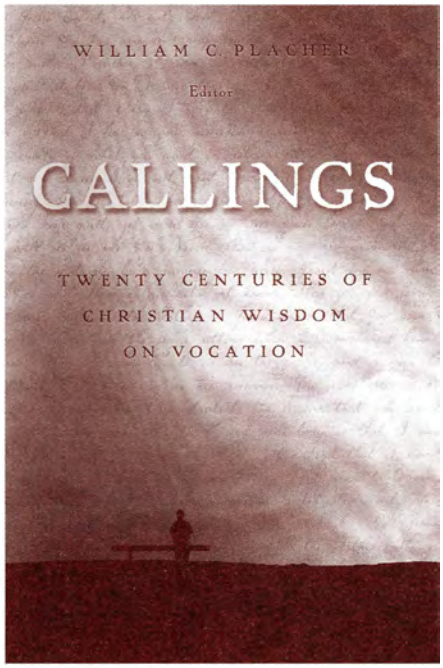
Van Dyk, J. (2000), *The Craft of Christian Teaching*. Sioux Center, Iowa: Dordt Press.

Book Reviews

William C. Placher, editor, *Callings: Twenty Centuries of Christian Wisdom on Vocation*. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2006. 452 pages.
Mark R. Schwehn and Dorothy C. Bass, editors, *Leading Lives that Matter: What We Should Do and Who We Should Be*. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2006. 545 pages.
Reviewed by Steve J. Van Der Weele, Calvin College (Retired)

Among many charitable organizations making a difference in our world is the Lilly Endowment Fund, a private family foundation in Indianapolis. This foundation sponsors a number of initiatives which are enhancing the work of academia and churches. The founders became aware of a need for some reflection in higher education about the nature of vocation, of calling, of how a young person should direct his thoughts as he goes about choosing his or her life's work. In response to this initiative, several colleges are offering programs, conferences, and seminars to study the issue of vocation. And this initiative has generated these two splendid anthologies — collections of readings to foster discussion about vocation. The books are joined at the hip. *Callings*, as the title indicates, mines the rich body of writings about calling by Christian thinkers over the centuries.

Leading Lives consists of literary works and opens matters up a bit more to secular writers — though not exclusively. The books were planned jointly; the two editors of the second book also served on the board of *Callings*. The books, singly and jointly, constitute a treasure-trove of many of the world's influential writers who, among other writings, addressed the topic of vocations. And how many topics are more worthy of such reflection?



No ranking

Callings and vocations determine who we are and how we occupy our space in the world. They determine our role and influence not only during our temporal lives, but, as Christians understand it, our ultimate destiny as well. These anthologies remind us that, although at one time vocational options were limited — the pre-Reformation era, for example, established a strict division between sacred callings and secular vocations — matters have become far more complex.

The Reformation brought about an enormous social upheaval, when Luther, Calvin, the English Puritans, and others declared that all callings are lawful, that we must no longer think that those living in monasteries and convents have a higher calling than the plowman or the housekeeper. Other dramatic developments, such as the Industrial Revolution, have altered the landscape of vocational choices, and the postmodern world has its own set of baffling considerations. How is a Christian college graduate going to navigate this highly complex, technologically-driven world and fulfill his commitment to God and his Kingdom?

These anthologies should be immensely helpful — not only the readings, but the thoughtful introductions to the various sections and the penetrating questions which follow them. *Callings* is arranged chronologically, in these time units: 1. "Callings to a Christian Life: Vocations in the Early Church, 100-500"; 2. "Called to Religious Life: Vocations in the Middle Ages, 500-1500"; 3. "Every Work a Calling: Vocations after the Reformation, 1500-1800"; 4. "Christian Callings in a Post-Christian World, 1800-Present." The very titles remind us that in the early church it was a calling simply to be a Christian — not a bad formula still. (Later writers — Bonhoeffer, for example — remind us that contemporary believers are also vulnerable to persecution and risk martyrdom.) The Church Fathers are well represented. Tertullian and others advise people to make right decisions for the right reasons and have no problems with possessions so long as they are placed at the disposal of the larger community.

Some more useful

Aquinas, in his highly structured way, carefully defines the conditions under which men and women should take monastic vows. Matters changed dramatically after Luther and Calvin, among others, when Luther, for example, preached a sermon on the shepherds' return to their flocks after their visit to the manger. Over the decades, some have questioned whether Luther pushed his point too far. Richard Baxter tells us, as does Cardinal Newman, that though a person may not necessarily be called to a life of Christian ministry, he ought to establish priorities and recognize that some callings are, indeed, more useful than others to advance God's cause.

Two Books on Choosing a Career

Steve J. Van Der Weele
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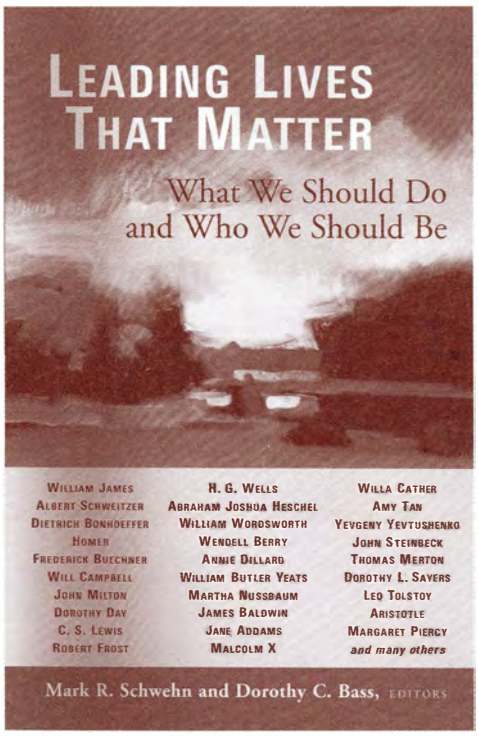
Karl Barth says as much. To be sure, monasticism needed to be redressed, but something may have been lost in Luther's peremptory dismissal of this option.

The final section includes such writers as Kierkegaard, who sought to rouse Christians from complacency and summoned them to a more demanding degree of obedience. Dorothy Sayers views work — rightly so — as part of the creation program, however the world's brokenness has compelled us to face realities of survival and other utilitarian goals. In this she is in agreement with the editors and at odds with such contemporary thinkers as Jacques Ellul, James Holloway, Stanley Hauerwas, and Miroslav Volf, who relegate work to the level of economic necessity and survival, however we may, at our best, transcend these realities.



I have lived with these anthologies for several weeks, and find it difficult to do justice to the rich fare they offer. Serendipitous learning abounds, through the contexts the introductions provide to the authors and the selections. This is true as well for *Leading Lives that Matter.* The Prologue consists of incisive and thought-provoking essays by William James and Albert Schweitzer, who define their view of the significant life. Part I, entitled "Vocabularies," provides some semantic help and introductions to the concept of vocation by such writers as Aristotle, Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Frederick Buechner. Part II addresses such questions as what constitutes a significant life, how to organize one's life to achieve a balance between work and other endeavors, the importance one should assign to his talents, and the realistic question, given the state of the world, of how much choice an individual really has. The Epilogue is given over to the very provocative short story by Leo Tolstoy, "The Death of Ivan Ilych."

Beyond the self

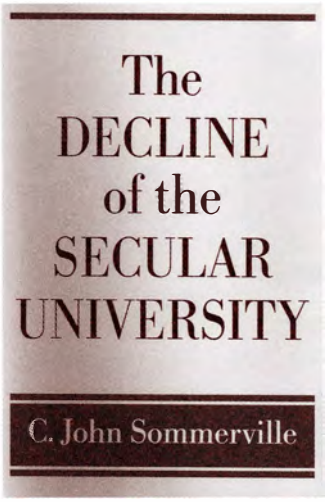
Leading Lives that Matter is based on the defensible assumption that other people's stories and experiences can be very helpful as one tries to find his way through the opportunities as well as the pitfalls and turbulence of which life consists. They have chosen their selections well. Several emphases come to light during the course of the selections and commentary. For example, when considering one's calling, or vocation, one needs to go beyond such formulas as "Choose work which will let you be all you can be"; or, "Try to have it all, with self-fulfillment as the goal"; or, "Find work which will offer rapid advancement." Work needs to have value beyond the individual's self-satisfaction. The theologians Bonhoeffer, Barth, Newman, and Kierkegaard (among the most helpful) speak pointedly about the crucial role of obedience and self-denial, and hold in disdain any choice which does not prompt us "to stretch every nerve" in response to our Master's challenge.

What comes through as well is an objection to the notion that "God has a plan for your life," and that one needs to find a way to ascertain that plan. The editors and the writers they select emphasize the role of freedom, and contend that calling and vocation exhibit many nuances. Ignatius Loyola reminds us that in our choice of vocations "(we) must look only to the end for which (we are) created, that is, for the praise of God our Lord and for the salvation of (our) soul." (*Callings*, p. 239.) The editors also nudge one to agree that his or her identity and significance are not necessarily exhausted in one's job. And several selections — Annie Dillard's, for example, and Abigail Zuger's "Defining a Doctor" — urge robust commitment to whatever work one undertakes. And, yes, it is possible to fulfill one's calling in his work; the editor, disagreeing with the writers already mentioned in this connection, finds deep satisfaction in her role as college teacher.

And the Vatican Council demonstrated in 1965 how far the Catholic Church has moved from its emphasis on sacred callings by declaring that "in even the most ordinary activities" people can "justly consider that by their labor they are unfolding the Creator's work, consulting the advantages of their brother men, and contributing by their personal industry to the realization in history of the divine plan...." (*Callings*, p. 332). One may conclude that anyone who responds obediently to the opportunities, to the demands of the time, one's gifts — all shaped by circumstances of time and place — can lead a full and significant life and receive the commendation of our Lord, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant."

C. John Sommerville, The Decline of the Secular University. Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press. 2006. 147 pages.
Reviewed by Steve J. Van Der Weele, Calvin College (Emeritus)

When one takes into account the enormous funds budgeted for higher education, the bulging enrollments, the commitment of human and financial resources, the amount of energy devoted to teaching and learning, the question arises, How can universities be in decline? Sommerville informs us that it has taken a century for the symptoms to become apparent and for the decline to reach the stage at which it can no longer be ignored. Decisions taken a century ago, and which seemed appropriate at the time, have altered the character of academia these past decades with rather disconcerting results. His book diagnoses this pathology.



Why is the secular university in decline? Because it has relegated religion to the periphery of academic concern. Naturalism has become the dominant academic environment. Religion is thought to have no intellectual merit or dimension. It can clutter the learning process. The scientific model reigns supreme — even though science accounts for only a minor part of all knowledge and was intended to be a servant, not a master. Since religion is a matter of a priori belief, it cannot really ask for a place at the academic table. For that matter — this seems the unspoken assumption — religion is a set of habits and information that people ought to have discarded by the time they enter college. Questions implying religious issues are often met with sly remarks and amused glances.

No Worldview

The secular university is in decline because, for one thing, it is at odds with the critical mass of what American citizens believe (even more so, perhaps, of immigrants, who often bring a lively religious sense to their new land). Most Americans do not adopt naturalism as a satisfactory explanation for the workings of the world and refuse to surrender values which naturalism cannot account for — compassion, respect, forgiveness, humility, altruism. What the university does do, it does well enough — teaching skills and competence negotiable in the world of economics. What it cannot do, for having abandoned more traditional methods of inquiry, is engage in questions that involve transcendence and offer criteria for spiritual development and authentic maturity. What the secular university cannot do is offer a worldview, a comprehensive examination of all reality where the individual can envisage himself occupying a worthy niche and is challenged to lead a significant life.

The secular university is in decline because, by default, citizens go elsewhere to derive wisdom for their daily lives. Whether wisely or not, they look to the stories manufactured for them daily in television and other media — entertainment, talk shows, chat rooms, and network blogs. They feel disconnected from the world of academia. It does not appear relevant to their lives.

The secular university is in decline because it cannot accept the truth about religion and faith — that these are mindsets which have their own logic, which cannot be proved by empirical methods — though, as Sommerville points out, no one can function without a foundational belief, whether held consciously or unconsciously. The university cannot account for the inescapable desire and longing for the transcendent found in every person, for the deep hunger that is part of our human legacy and that nothing on earth can satisfy. By its persistent and aggressive search to explain the human being in terms of physics and chemistry, it eliminates the mystery of what it means to be human and fails to account for personality. Moreover, by their methods — concentrating on human kinship with non-human organisms — secular scholars are hard put to distinguish the human from anything less than human. Nor can they explain the phenomenon of personality.

Nor can the secular university explain why the world seems so exquisitely designed to accommodate human life. Thirty or more critical conditions — "anthropic coincidences" — exist on which the world depends for its survival. It seems that that world was so constructed as to anticipate life and meaning. The secular university does not address such issues. To be sure, not all instructors, and not all classrooms, are wholly dehumanized in this sense, but by and large one will not go to a secular university to derive a comprehensive view of life — or, as one writer put it, how to spend money as well as acquire it.

Sommerville devotes the last three chapters to offering advice to university administrators and teachers, as well as to students who may wish to challenge their instructors about the pervasive naturalism in their classrooms. Such students must learn to debate with finesse and tact; they must develop dialogical skills. Head-on assaults will do little to win hearts and minds. They should learn from the rabbis, from Socrates, from Jesus, how to ask questions, how to proceed step by step to where the opponent is forced to concede the validity of an alternative point of view.

Sommerville's argument must become widely known. Every course, every subject, comes laden with religious implications that, if not acknowledged, will trivialize the educational process and render it at best, incomplete, at worst, incoherent.