

A forum for Christian school educators

# *Christian Educators* Journal

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## The Christian School and Climate Change



## What Is Our Mandate For the Environment?



Bert Witvoet

The years 2005 and 2006 were significant years in terms of our awareness of the environment. In 2005 major storms brewed in the Atlantic Ocean and hit land, the most infamous of which is probably Katrina. In 2006, weather patterns became irregular. Winter just did not seem to want to come to southern Ontario, where I live, until well into January. Scientists told us that the ice cap in the Arctic is melting. These are just a few indicators that global warming is not a figment of the imagination of a few far-out wild-eyed scientists.

In Canada, in a matter of months, the environment has become the number one issue in politics, replacing healthcare. Political parties are crawling over each other in an attempt to prove themselves greener than the others. The front page of Canada's *National Post* of February 10, which shows a picture of Al Gore with a halo, carries a headline that asks: "Is Environmentalism the New Religion?" Environmentalism seems to have all the trappings of religion, if you believe *National Post* writer Joseph Brean. It features rituals — separating the garbage; tithing or indulgences — a carbon tax to offset your airplane travel; saints — David Suzuki (a Canadian environmentalist); iconography — polar bears declared an endangered species by President Bush; scripture — a report by Sir Nicholas Stern (author of a British government report on climate change); heretics — George Bush, who doesn't really get it; and prophets — Al Gore, who, according to Canadian columnist Rex Murphy, can be called the "Jeremiah of a planet whose thermostat has gone wacko."

### Our response

How do we Christians educators respond to this sudden conversion to climate change awareness? What do we say when the new "righteousness" may well hinge on whether you drive a fuel-efficient car and avoid traveling by plane merely for pleasure?

First of all, take a deep breath and remember that God is in control and that the kingdom of Jesus Christ is inexorably moving towards its fullness. Nothing can separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus, our Lord. We should not panic. Secondly, take serious the warnings of global warming. This is not a hoax that is being played on us by alarmist thinkers. There is almost unanimous agreement among scientists of all political stripes that we are doing immense harm to our planet and that we need to take drastic measures to rescue what we can rescue. Thirdly, don't give up hope. A concerted international effort has in the past decade closed up much of the ozone hole that allowed in harmful radiation from the sun. Fourthly, examine the motives that propel us and our students towards a greater awareness of climate change. Don't allow reliance on technology to carry the day. Technology will not save us.

I was wonderfully inspired by a sermon that Rev. John Bouwers of Meadowland Fellowship CRC of Ancaster preached a few Sundays ago on Psalm 104. He pointed out that the psalmist sees himself as part of the broader economy of blessing and joy that the whole creation enjoys. We are not to think of ourselves as being separate entities from the rest of creation. God calls us to involve ourselves passionately in the creation. Pastor Bouwers referred several times to the film *An Inconvenient Truth* and echoed Al Gore's belief that we can and do have an impact, for good or bad, on this planet. He quoted Romans 1 to point out that God's wrath is being revealed against those who suppress the truth, which is almost always inconvenient for those who indulge in irresponsible living.

But there is one thing pastor Bouwers found lacking in the movie. Al Gore calls irresponsible consumption and pollution a moral and ethical problem. It is that, said Bouwers, but where is the acknowledgement that it is first of all a *spiritual problem*?

### A helpful documentary

I watched *An Inconvenient Truth* several times at home. I found it to be a convincing and disturbing presentation of facts about what is happening to our planet. I have never seen a clearer explanation of global warming. It is true that glaciers all over the world are shrinking. I have seen that the Columbian Icefield in Alberta has shrunk over the years. Through the movie I understood why we can experience floods in one area and drought in another for the same reasons: global warming. Al Gore mentioned three factors that influence the planet: a collision between population and planet, the technological revolution, and our way of thinking that prevents us from quickly connecting the dots. He explained that old habits and old technology have predictable results. But old habits and new technology dramatically alter the consequences. We have to change our habit patterns.

When I watched the movie with a group of friends, we noticed the same spiritual distortion in the documentary that Rev. Bouwers had noticed. One of us asked, "What if excessive consumption and pollution did not really do any harm to the planet, would it still be wrong? Shouldn't we always take good care of the environment we live in for the simple reason that this is our Father's world? Isn't it his masterpiece for which we want to show immense respect?"

Our friend made an excellent point. A lot of the warning sounds we hear about the environment focus on the survival of various species, including our own. And that is legitimate, and certainly understandable. But I disagree with a letter writer to the editor who thought that publishing a newspaper article that warns against environmentalism as the new religion is like fiddling while Rome

is burning. He wanted action rather than a warning against a possibly false religion.

## A new order

We have an obligation as Christian educators to surrender to all truth, however inconvenient. The truth is that God gave us a mandate to take good care of the earth. We have obviously failed there. And we need to repent. God also commanded us to avoid all kinds of idols — not to worship the creation but only the Creator.

I am reading a book by N.T. Wright called *The Challenge of Jesus: Rediscovering Who Jesus Was and Is*. Jesus challenged all those whose dreams and visions drove them into trying to establish their own version of a better world. Instead, Jesus announced a new context for kingdom building. He urged his hearers to become citizens of a new world order, “a way of life, a way of forgiveness and prayer, a way of Jubilee, which they could practice in their own villages, right where they were.”

Why should our task to take care of the earth differ from that approach? Christians should be in the forefront of environmental renewal. There is precious little in the Bible that directly urges us to take care of the environment. And for very good reasons. Up until the industrial revolution, humanity made little impact on the environment. This has changed drastically in ways that the Bible did not foresee. But the main principles of responsible living are in the Bible. God’s Word urges contentment, moderation, gentleness, responsibility, accountability, concern, a willingness to count the cost of being a disciple of Jesus — all qualities that promote a healthier environment because it means that we tread on this earth with a lighter footprint. Only fools rush in where angels fear to tread. How often haven’t we rushed in as a society to implement a new discovery, to explore and

exploit unknown terrain, only to have it turn sour on us?

## Count the cost

When we met as friends to view Al Gore’s film, we came to the conclusion that we could not as a society turn things around without paying a price. A painless extraction from our consumerist way of life just isn’t possible anymore. We have to question what criteria we use when we buy a car. North American consumers tend to place fuel efficiency way down the list, after having considered such “important” considerations as comfort, power, color and cost. Why does public transportation not become the prime mode of moving from place to place? Why do we live so far from our jobs? Why don’t we buy local products, products that were harvested or made within a hundred-mile radius? Why don’t we avoid plastic shopping bags? The reason why the truth about the environment is inconvenient lies in the fact that living responsibly can become very inconvenient, indeed. Yet, wouldn’t Christ include this as the cost of seeking first the Kingdom of Heaven?

Somehow we have to incorporate this kingdom way of living into the way we run schools, the way we plan our curricula, the way we set ourselves over against the worldviews of our time — both those who put profit and comfort over justice and righteousness, and those who preach a new humanity- and nature-centered righteousness. As N.T. Wright points out: Jesus “was announcing the kingdom of God — not the simple revolutionary message of the hard-liners [read environmentalists], but the doubly revolutionary message of a kingdom that would overturn all other agendas.” If Christian schools are to be serious about their academic mandate to be a salting salt and a light set on a hill, they have to build on the foundation laid by Jesus Christ.

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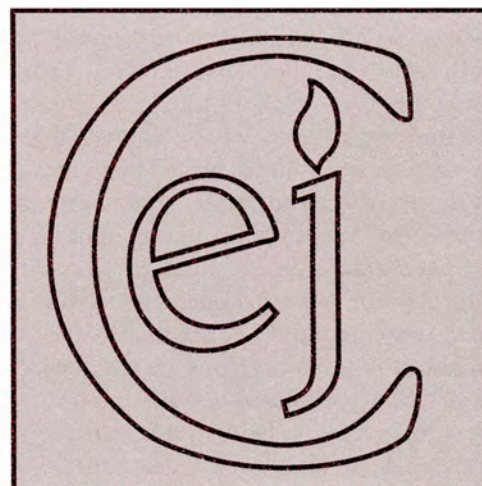
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# Christians As Stewards of Creation

by Edward Berkelaar (eberkel@redeemer.ca)

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The world we all live in is greatly affected by how we treat the environment. We see evidence of this in endangered species, poor air quality, and water too contaminated for swimming — all signs of significant environmental problems. We also see evidence in an increasing number of hurricanes and floods, caused in part by alterations in the environment. In such a world Christians are called to show Christ's love. And they *do* in a number of different ways: by caring for refugees and the homeless; by helping those affected by disasters to rebuild; and by supporting agricultural and economic development in less developed countries. Yet, while significant environmental problems exist, too many Christians do not seriously heed our calling to be caretakers of God's world. This is striking, since the manner in which we each consume resources and dispose of wastes has a direct impact on the state of God's world, and on the health of the neighbors we have been called to love as ourselves.

In his book *Earth Keeping: Christian Stewardship of Natural Resources* (1980), Loren Wilkenson argues that ambivalence toward natural things originated with the Greeks and was combined with Christianity in the Middle Ages. A famous critique of Christianity was written by Lynn White, Jr., and published in the well-known scientific journal *Science* in 1967. In the article titled "The Historical Roots of our Ecologic Crisis," White states: "Christianity, in absolute contrast to ancient paganism and Asia's religions (except, perhaps, Zoroastrianism), not only established a dualism of man and nature, but also insisted that it is God's will that man over-

exploit<sup>1</sup> nature for his proper ends." While Christianity itself is not the problem, I do think that many Christians' interpretation of certain passages of Scripture and the fusion of Christian and Greek thought has led to a lack of concern (or even an over-exploitative view) of creation. Perhaps related to this is the fusion of science, technology and capitalism, a process which is many people's (Christian and non-Christian alike) definition of progress.

In this article I aim to outline what the Bible has to say about our role as stewards of God's creation, briefly discuss the significant environmental issues we face today, and suggest ways in which we can live more lightly on the earth.

## Your view of creation

How did creation come to be? What is the purpose of the physical creation, and what is humankind's place in God's world? What is the ultimate fate of the physical creation? How one answers these questions greatly influences how he views the physical world around us and how he interacts with it.

For example, some people believe that their god or gods are in, or are part of, the creation — deities live in the streams, the trees, or the animals. While this is not a biblical view, it does result in a lifestyle that shows great care for the physical creation. Ghilleen Prance relates how, on an expedition to the rainforests of Suriname in 1963, an indigenous member of the party refused to cut down a tree until time was spent appeasing his deity, who lived in the forest (Prance, 1990). People who hold this view do not abuse creation for fear of angering the gods that reside there.

A very prevalent view in the western world — a view held by many Christians — is the assumption that the physical world exists to serve us. Resources exist for the

sole purpose of making our lives more comfortable, or for making us wealthier. This view is perhaps most extreme in North America. When settled by Europeans, this continent appeared to have limitless space and endless amounts of resources; there seemed to be no reason to conserve resources or to live lightly. There were always more trees, more farmland, more fish, and so on. Now, as then, with respect to resource use, many Christians live in ways that do not differ from those of non-Christians.

## A Reformed view

As creator of the universe, God speaks to us through his creation as it proclaims his majesty and faithfulness. In addition, God also has much to say about the physical creation in his Word. So what does the Bible say about the physical creation? "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth." (Genesis 1:1)<sup>2</sup> God created the world in which we live: the water, soil and air; the living creatures including humans; and the laws that govern creation. God loved his creation: several times in the first chapter of Genesis, God declared his creation "good" or "very good." God created humans and gave them a unique place in his creation. On the one hand, they were made in the image of God and were given a special responsibility by God to care for his creation. "The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and till it." (Genesis 2:15) On the other hand, they were very much a part of creation. We humans are subject to the same laws (e.g. gravity) as the rest of creation. As I teach "Introduction to Environmental Science" at Redeemer University College, I have noticed that many students know and are able to express that we are made in God's image, but fewer seem to remember that we are part of, and connected to, the rest of God's creation.

In his book *Caring for Creation: Responsible Stewardship of God's Handiwork*, Calvin DeWitt writes "... Adam and his descendants are expected to *serve* and *keep* the garden. The word *keep* is a translation of the Hebrew word *shamar*, which is also used in the Aaronic blessing given in Numbers 6:24 "The Lord bless you and *keep* [emphasis DeWitt's] you,' a blessing very widely used in Jewish and Christian congregations to this day." (DeWitt, 1998, p. 44) John Calvin commented on Genesis 2:15, saying "The custody of the garden was given in charge to Adam, to show that we possess the things which God has committed to our hands, on the condition, that being content with the frugal and moderate use of them, we should take care of what shall remain. Let him who possesses a field, so partake of its yearly fruits, that he may not suffer the ground to be injured by his negligence; but let him endeavor to hand it down to posterity as he received it, or even better cultivated." (DeWitt, 1998, p. 31)<sup>3</sup>

Genesis 1:28 says, "God blessed them [Adam and Eve] and said to them, 'Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground.'" This verse has sometimes been interpreted as a sort of free-for-all, allowing Christians to do whatever they desire with creation. But it is essential to remember that all of creation belongs to God, and that we have been commanded to be stewards (caretakers) of it. We are to care for and unfold it on behalf of our Lord. Note that in Genesis 1: 22, God commands sea creatures and birds to "Be fruitful and increase in number..." as well. We need to find ways to fulfill our mandate that also allow God's other creatures to fulfill theirs.

## The Fall

Genesis 3 records the fall of man and the entrance of sin into the world. The fall affected relationships: humankind's relationship with God, with other humans, and with creation. The fall has also directly affected creation itself. Because of sin, the creation that we live in and that scientists study is not the same as it was when God first created it. As a punishment to Adam and his descendants, God cursed the ground. Genesis 3:18 -19 records: "It [the ground] will produce thorns and thistles for you, and you will eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground...." Humans are no longer in harmony with God, with each other or with creation. We humans (willfully or in ignorance) pollute and over-exploit creation, and in turn we can harm both ourselves and others. As sinful humans we do not love and serve God as we should. We are not the stewards of creation that God intended us to be, but rather have a tendency to use creation to serve ourselves instead. Decisions concerning the environment are typically made more with the goal of furthering our own ends ("How will this best benefit me?" or "What is the cheapest way to build this house, or harvest these trees?") rather than in supporting our role as stewards of creation ("How can these trees be harvested in a sustainable way, even if it is more expensive?" or "How can we build this church in a way that minimizes the amount of energy needed to heat and cool it?"). Francis Schaeffer has suggested that haste and greed lie at the root of our en-



vironmental problems. (Schaeffer, 1970)

Despite the fall, God clearly still cares for and upholds his creation. After the flood, God made a covenant not only with Noah, but with other creatures as well. In Genesis 9:9-10, God states: "I now establish my covenant with you and with your descendants after you *and with every living creature that was with you* — the birds, the livestock and all the wild animals, all those that came

out of the ark with you — every living creature on earth." (emphasis mine)

## Clear instructions

It is clear throughout the Bible that God upholds and provides for his creation. For example, Psalm 104:10-11 says "He makes springs pour water into the ravines; it flows between the mountains. They give water to all the beasts of the field; the wild donkeys quench their thirst." Luke 12:24 states: "Consider the ravens: They do not sow and reap, they have no store-room or barn; yet God feeds them. And how much more valuable you are than birds!" It is also clear that God uses humankind to care for his creation, through what is commonly called the Sabbath Principle. Leviticus 25:1-5 is a command not to overwork or over-exploit the land: When Moses stood on Mount Sinai, God said, "Speak to the Israelites and say to them: 'When you enter the land I am going to give you, the land itself must observe a Sabbath to the Lord. For six years sow your fields, and for six years prune your vineyards and gather their crops. But in the seventh year the land is to have a Sabbath of rest, a Sabbath to the Lord.





Do not sow your fields or prune your vineyards. Do not reap what grows of itself or harvest the grapes of your untended vines. The land is to have a year of rest.” We are still called to obey the intent of this command, by not farming or harvesting resources in ways that rob the land of its long-term productivity.

### Restoration

God loves his fallen creation so much that he will eventually cleanse it of the effects of the fall and restore it. This is clearly stated in John 3:16-17 where it says, “For God so loved the world [*cosmos*] that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.” Christ came to save sinners, but also to save the rest of creation from sin. About this verse, Kuyper wrote: “And herein roots the love of God, that he will repair and renew this world, his own creation, his own work of wisdom, his own work of art, which we have upset and broken, and polish it to a new luster. And it *shall* come to this. God’s plan does not miscarry, and with divine certainty he carries out the council of his thoughts. Once that world in a new earth and a new heaven shall stand before God in full glory.” (DeWitt, 1998, p. 38)<sup>4</sup> The victory over sin was won on the cross, and will be completely fulfilled when Christ returns to judge humankind.

Much is unclear about the events surrounding Christ’s return and final judgement. Some believe the earth will ultimately be destroyed. This view often leads to the belief that there is little point investing in creation care. However, Reformed Christians believe that at the final judgement, creation will be restored, sin and evil will be removed, and that which is good and pure will be left. Paragraph 58 of “Our World Belongs to God” (1988) beautifully

begins: “With the whole creation we wait for the purifying fire of judgement.” Whatever your view, in the Bible God is crystal clear on our responsibility to care for his creation. Revelation 11:18 states “The nations were angry; and your wrath has come. The time has come for judging the dead, and for rewarding your servants the prophets and your saints and those who reverence your name, both small and great— *and for destroying those who destroy the earth.*”(emphasis mine)

### Love and respect

We are called to further God’s kingdom in all areas. With respect to the environment, this means loving and respecting God’s creation because we love him and it belongs to him, not to us. Calvin DeWitt has described the paradoxical attitude of Christians who proclaim their love of God but who also disregard creation as those who “Honor the Great Master” but who “... despise his great masterpieces” (DeWitt, 1998).

God’s creation is incredibly interconnected. Besides caring for creation because God commands it or because we love his masterpiece, caring for creation is also a way we can show love to our neighbors. The damage we are causing the environment harms and even kills people. When we contaminate air water and soil with potentially toxic compounds, people become sick. Health Canada estimates that air pollution alone kills 5900 people per year in Canada (CBC News, 2005). Global climate change is likely, at least initially, to cause greater harm to those living in poorer countries of the world than in the wealthier countries.

Today, major global environmental problems include deforestation, degradation of farmland, species extinction, contamination of water, air and soil by hazardous chemicals, stratospheric ozone depletion, and cli-

mate change. These problems are magnified by our high global population and, especially in developed countries, our wealth and our consumerist lifestyles. (N.B. for a detailed account of these major global

*environmental problems and for references used by the author, please go to our CEJ website: [cejonline.com](http://cejonline.com)).*

### A Christian response

How should Christians respond to these problems? How can Christians live in ways that show their love of Christ and of their neighbors as they live and consume the earth’s resources? First of all, I believe it is important to simply interact with the physical creation. Read the book of God’s creation! Go for walks, or garden, and simply enjoy the beauty and majesty of creation. Praise God for creating and upholding it. Send your children outside to play, and teach them about the wonders in creation.

Second, begin thinking more carefully about the resources you consume. Where did your food come from, and how was it grown? Is it possible to eat food that was grown and processed in ways that put less strain on God’s good creation? Much of the food that is available in supermarkets is grown far from where it is sold (even food that can be grown locally), and is highly processed and wrapped in excessive amounts of packaging. Shipping, processing, and packaging food requires a lot of resources, especially energy. When possible, consider purchasing food that is grown more locally. Besides the environmental benefits, by purchasing locally-grown food you will support local farms. In the summer, our family receives a box of organically grown vegetables from a nearby CSA (Community Supported Agriculture) farm each week. We pay a “subscription fee” for the summer and receive

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# Taking Stewardship Seriously

by Harlan Kredit (hkredit@lynchs.org)

*Harlan Kredit is an award-winning science teacher at Lynden Christian High School in Lynden, Washington.*

Stewardship has been a passion of mine for many years. God has let me live out my dream by teaching high school science for 45 years in two different Christian schools, where I have consistently tried to teach from a stewardship perspective. It is never easy to be consistent with anything, but especially when it involves issues such as energy use, natural resources and life styles. The question I often ask my students is, "If at the end of your life, all of the materials you have used and discarded are placed in a line behind you, would your line be shorter or longer than most, and how would it compare to the non-Christians who have lived along side of you? It seems obvious that Christians and our Christian schools have not made stewardship the priority that I believe God's Word demands of us. I also believe that teachers have an awesome responsibility to demonstrate to their students why and how good stewardship can be worked out in our daily living. That, to me, is the challenge of Christian teaching and a challenge that we should all eagerly accept.

When I moved back to my home town of Lynden, Washington, after teaching in Michigan for eleven years, I wanted to develop some hands-on programs for my science classes that were practical, useful, exciting, and beneficial to the community. I wanted them to be based on sound Christian stewardship principles, such as fulfilling the biblical command to "tend the garden." It has taken my students and me into areas that I would never have predicted. I have found that when students understand why they are doing something, they will approach any project with a large amount of excitement and enthusiasm. The key is



*Inspecting the fish in the salmon egg incubation trays*

to have them so heavily involved in the project that they will "own" it. Following are some of the activities and projects we have been involved in Lynden Christian School and that might be modified for use in other Christian schools.

1. We first **completed a detailed stream survey** (180 pages) of eight miles of the Fishtrap Creek, collecting information on spawning gravel, erosion concerns, and stream obstructions.

2. We **constructed a salmon hatchery** (in stages) on the Fishtrap Creek, primarily with student labor, where we raise and release approximately 100,000 coho salmon each year — we have released approximately 2 ° million salmon fry so far.

3. Students have **planted over 18,000 trees, shrubs**, and other native vegetation along the riparian zone of the stream at many different sites — approximately 1000 plants per year.

4. We planned and constructed an over-

**wintering channel** for young salmon smolts as the result of a request from the Department of Ecology and the Department of Fish and Wildlife. This is a critical missing piece of habitat (farmers had drained most of these areas in the past), necessary for salmon survival. We carefully monitor this channel on a regular basis.

5. Students **designed and distributed four different streamside brochures** (7000) to our local community and elementary school classrooms.

6. We **conducted annual aquatic insect surveys** on our local streams, the Fishtrap Creek and Nooksack River.

7. We **adopted four miles of a major road** in the watershed for frequent clean-ups (16 years) as part of the Washington State "Adopt-A-Highway" program.

8. The students **installed over 1400 warning signs** on the storm drains within our city, reminding citizens not to dump wastes into our streams.



9. My advanced senior biology class **perfected a technique of incubating salmon eggs** in one-meter-long black plastic drain tile with 500 eggs per tube and sandwiched in between layers of coarse gravel with the ends covered with vexar screens.

10. We placed signs **"THIS STREAM IS IN YOUR HANDS"** at every bridge crossing in our community.

11. Presently, we are involved in a **major project to remove exotic vegetation** (Japanese Knotweed) from the riparian zone along the stream. This will continue to be a significant project in the future.

12. We worked closely with our City Parks Dept. to **revegetate the riparian zone** along a newly constructed city trail that follows the stream. This will also be a major project in the future.

13. In cooperation with a local golf course owner, we **developed a wildlife friendly area** on a golf course, which is adjacent to our stream.

14. At the request of the city of Lynden, our students **completed a tree survey** of the city-owned trees along our main street.

15. In order for my students to understand where our water originates and where it goes, we take an annual trip to the area above the timberline to the **headwaters of the tributary stream**, examining such things as good and bad logging practices.

16. Since the water from our stream enters the Pacific Ocean, we **take a three-day trip to the Olympic Peninsula** to study the plants and animals of the shoreline. We study coastal erosion.

**Who pays?**

A fair question at this point would be: Where do the funds come from to work on these projects, considering that most Christian schools do not have many discretionary funds? Actually, our school has

**Club** has provided ongoing support for the operation of our fish hatchery for over 20 years — approximately \$500 per year.

2. The **Washington State Department of Fisheries** has provided the Coho salmon eggs each year and significant technical assistance on hatchery techniques and water chemistry issues.

3. The **Washington State Department of Ecology** has provided \$8000 to help with the construction of the salmon smolt overwintering channel. Much of the work was volunteered, but it did involve considerable use of heavy excavating equipment.

4. The **Rotary Club of Lynden, Washington**, has provided \$4000 for the purchase of plant materials and other hatchery improvements.

5. Two **Toyota TAPESTRY grants** totaling \$18000 have purchased some of the hatchery equipment, including pumps, dechlorination equipment, plants, exotic weed spraying equipment, shovels, water test kits, salmon electrophoresis equipment, and other miscellaneous items.

6. Several **local contractors** have provided tractors and other machines on ei-



*Salmon release day — netting the young fish*

contributed almost no funds towards any of our projects. It has been my experience that many community groups are looking to support student projects that are purposeful, well planned, and involve large numbers of students. Getting the funds for these projects has never been difficult. However, it is extremely important that the school administration, school board, and parents support and understand exactly what are the purpose and goals of the projects. Following is where some of our support has come from in recent years:

1. The **Lynden Morning Kiwanis**



*Harlan Kredit oversees the release of young fish into the stream*



ther a volunteer basis or at a greatly discounted cost.

7. Local **hardware dealers** in our town have given us plumbing supplies, shovels, and sprayers at heavily discounted prices.

8. A local **salmon enhancement group** has provided technical assistance and has been a major supplier of the planting materials on some projects.

9. Our **County Conservation District** has provided us with maps and detailed soil profiles of our watershed, plus elevation plans for various projects.

They have also served as the interface between our projects and the Army Corps of Engineers.

10. Many **graduates have volunteered their time** for engineering and design work.

### Valuable experiences

Is it worth all of the time and energy? That depends on how seriously we believe that God commands us to take care of his world. Not only do students grasp the concept of stewardship, but it also fosters community connections. I strongly believe that it is important to “hook” kids to the community by involving them in significant projects that they can take pride in and that will ultimately encourage them to become involved in community work wherever they choose to live. This long-term project has become the catalyst for a strong interest in science programs at our school.

I teach two classes of sophomore biology and one class each of earth science and advanced senior biology. All of the classes are involved in our watershed restoration

program. I deliberately select a new and different project each year so that each group of students can take ownership of some part of the larger project. My senior biology students run the salmon hatchery



*Students plant a riparian zone*

on a daily basis, feeding the fish five times per day, and have developed a strong sense of responsibility that goes along with their duties. My sophomore classes are involved in doing yearly aquatic studies and replanting the riparian zones of our stream. The earth science class concentrates on heavier work such as putting stumps in the overwintering channel to provide cover for the young fish. They are experts at planting shrubs, spreading bark, and using mechanized equipment.

As of 2006, approximately 2,500 students have been directly involved in some aspect of the watershed restoration. I strongly believe that for students to be positively impacted they need to be directly involved — blisters are okay! They enjoy the hard work and feel empowered by the results.

### Community based

The community response to this project has been overwhelming. Since so many service clubs, local organizations, and in-

dividuals have been involved, there is a strong sense of ownership. I am constantly receiving calls from individuals in the community who see something that is happening in the watershed and have questions. Last spring, someone called and said they told the offending person (who had dumped grass clippings in the stream), that if they did not quit doing so, they were going to call me! We have deliberately tried not to point fingers at groups like farmers, loggers, fisherman, Native American tribes, but have decided to work with them by volunteering our time to help them address issues such as eroding banks and lack of stream cover. We have used an educational approach in the design of our brochures to help the community understand the issues and their responsibilities in the watershed. Several of my former students are now in strong leadership positions in our community and are making a significant impact on watershed issues. Others are marine biologists working on salmon recovery issues. Receiving letters of appreciation from our elected officials is gratifying for both my students and me. Many of my former students now have children in my classes and are helping to continue the work they themselves started twenty five years ago.

A reading of Psalm 104 cannot but awaken a sense of awe of the intricacies and complexities of God's design for the universe. I believe that one day God will ask each of us what we have done to tend his garden. What an exciting and enormous challenge and blessing to be able to work with our students in God's vineyard, helping to restore a fallen world. ☪

# Responding to Global Climate Change

## A Review of Al Gore's *An Inconvenient Truth*



by Clarence W. Joldersma (cjolders@calvin.edu)

Clarence Joldersma is a professor of Education at Calvin College, Grand Rapids, Michigan

A senior faculty member in the sciences at the college where I work periodically posts two related messages on our faculty listserve. His one message, often prompted by a news item, is that the world is reaching (or has already done so) “peak oil” production, which means that total world production has reached a maximum rate and will begin to decrease so that perhaps by 2050 we will be back to 1950 production levels. Meanwhile, the world’s demand for oil is only increasing. His other message is like it: global human carbon gas emissions are causing noticeable and real climate change, detrimental to the health of human and other life on this planet. His conclusion from these two problems is clear: our way of living is unsustainable, and our collective actions are already beginning to undermine our way of living (if not life itself).

What is interesting about this is that, unlike other postings, there is very little chatter on the faculty listserve in response. What little response there is often takes the form of “So what can we do?” and “I can’t afford to insulate my house,” and “I live too far from campus to ride a bicycle.” It is evident from those reactions, as well as from the silence of the rest, that the truth he speaks is very inconvenient. Al Gore’s movie, *An Inconvenient Truth*, speaks that same message. In it he presents his case that global climate change is real and that a significant part is caused by human action.

### Unlikely outcome

It is a most improbable movie. First of all, Gore did not set out to make a movie. He was merely crisscrossing the globe de-

livering a lecture on global warming. Others suggested that this message was too important to limit it to live audiences. Reluctantly, he agreed to make a movie of these lectures.

Second, what is amazing is that it has been a success at the box office, shown in movie theaters across North America and even Europe as an option for weekend leisure. It breaks many of the protocols for successful movies. The main character is a non-actor who plays himself. The main role that he plays is giving lectures, heavily aided by a PowerPoint presentation. And third,

“We must change our ways before it is too late.”

anyone who remembers Gore from the campaign trail in the American presidential race remembers a stiff, slightly wooden and geeky person who just did not have charisma. Yet, despite the improbable lead actor and the less than scintillating plot, the movie works amazingly well. It keeps audience interest, and Gore is engaging and even humorous.

The movie is a documentary at two levels. At the most obvious level, it is a documentary tracing Al Gore’s travels in the United States and around the world delivering the same lecture, aided by the same PowerPoint, over and over again. Interspersed are vignettes about Gore’s personal life — ranging from his boyhood to his present family. This level forms the framework for the actual message, which constitutes the second level — namely, the message that global climate change is real and that we’re a significant part of its

cause.

Gore is a master teacher. His lecture style is warm and disarming. The slides are clear, informative and persuasive. The scientific information is well organized and accessible. He effectively uses charts and graphs, animation and pictorial evidence. And it is clear Gore has done his homework: the information is supported by a large body of scientific research.

### No easy message

The movie clearly presents an inconvenient truth. The case Gore makes for global climate change and our role in it does not allow his audience to remain unaffected. Instead, the viewer will more often than not squirm uncomfortably, for the implications of these truths are clear: we must change our ways before it is too late, before the climate around the globe changes so dramatically that our very living will be undermined. That this truth is inconvenient is an understatement. Inconvenience is having a dead battery, making you late for work. But Gore’s message is inconvenient like the news of Hurricane Katrina bearing down on New Orleans was inconvenient for those residents who had no way out of the city.

Similar to my colleagues’ responses to the science professor’s postings have been the general, predictable efforts to try to undermine the movie’s message. Because of Gore’s political involvement, including a (possibly) failed presidential race, one might expect the movie to be highly political in character, say, like Michael Moore’s overtly partisan *Fahrenheit 9/11*. But, aside from a self-deprecating joke and a few unnecessary clips of the 2000 presidential election and its aftermath, the movie is decidedly non-political, at least in the popular sense. It is a straightforward presentation of the facts of global climate change, which does not advocate particular policy



change nor blame, say, the Bush administration for this problem. Instead, it more generally urges politicians to act before it is too late.

Another possible way to dismiss the movie is to suggest that Gore is just being alarmist. But an alarmist approach would require a different movie, one that used a much more charismatic character to present the message, and a message packaged to work primarily on the emotional level. However, for the most part, Gore's careful and measured tone and the movie's style of a lecturer talking to live audiences, is meant to address the intellect. Any emotional reaction is to the truth of the scientific information which he presents. Although the information may be alarming, the movie is not itself alarmist.

### Sound research

And, so, there is a possible third reaction — contesting the truth of the message. Some might want to argue that Gore's message is one-sided. Someone might rightly hold that scientific research, especially in this area, isn't as clear-cut as the presentation seems to indicate, or that there are other scientific facts that Gore ignores. Or someone might legitimately complain that his example of Hurricane Katrina blurs the difference between a specific weather event and the statistically-generated patterns of global climate. However, Gore is not doing science but education, where these simplifications don't undermine the legitimacy of his message. And, in general, Gore backs up his claims with solid scientific research. Thus, he cites a study of 1000 peer-reviewed articles on global warming, which showed an overwhelming consensus that global climate change is real and that human practices are a significant factor in its cause.

We cannot so easily dismiss Gore's message as scientifically invalid or one-sided.

Recent news items bear this out. *Bloomberg.com* reported on February 1<sup>st</sup> that Al Gore was nominated for a Nobel peace prize, based on his work on global warming, including this movie. This signals added legitimacy to his claims. Furthermore, the February 2<sup>nd</sup> (2007) edition of the *New York Times* ran a story on the recently-released report from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change of the United Nations. According to the *Times*, the study indicated that "the world is already committed to centuries of warming,



shifting weather patterns and rising seas, resulting from the buildup of gases in the atmosphere that trap heat." These stories and others suggest that Gore's message about global climate change is difficult to dismiss.

### Our response

So, what should Christians think and do? And more specifically, what stance should Christian educators take on global warming in general and on Gore's film in par-

ticular? Should we urge our students, colleagues, parents and ministers to see this movie? Should we show it in class or in school assemblies?

The January 25<sup>th</sup> (2007) edition of the *Washington Post* reported a story of an evangelical Christian in Seattle who stopped his daughter's science teacher from showing the movie in his class. The *Post* reported that this parent sent an email to the school in which he argued "that a warming planet is "one of the signs" of Jesus Christ's imminent return for Judgment Day" and thought it wrong to interfere with God's plan for the earth. However, among evangelicals there is also emerging a recognition that human-induced global climate change is real and needs our attention. Thus, the Evangelical Environmental Network (EEN) posts supportively on their website Sir John Houghton's testimony before the U.S. Senate's Energy and Natural Resources Committee. There Houghton states that the scientific community is reaching a consensus on global climate change. In response, the EEN has organized a group called the Evangelical Climate Initiative (ECI), which developed a document called "Climate Change: An Evangelical call to action." This document has been signed by a wide variety of leaders in the North American evangelical community, including, among others, the President of the college where I work and the Executive Director of the denomination with which my college is affiliated. The ECI statement contains four claims: that human induced climate change is real; that climate change will be significant and hit the poor the hardest; that Christian moral convictions demand a response to climate change; and that the need to act now (by governments, churches, businesses and individuals) is urgent. This is an indication that evangelicals in North America are beginning to align with Gore's inconvenient truth

has stated that Christian schools ought to be in the business of listening to the creation, investigating the way that God's revelation manifests itself there. He implies that Christian schools ought to have a high view of creation, taking the stance that the world belongs to God. But recent investigations of that creation suggest that it is groaning, precisely because of human action. Gore's movie would be a good way of helping our students understand the truth with respect to the current suffering of the creation.

But knowing the truth here does not simply mean intellectually understanding the facts of the matter. Instead, as the Evangelical Climate Initiative suggests, it requires a response of what can be called "creation care." The inconvenience of the truth about global climate change is that the response will have to be personal, communal, and institutional as well as national and global. We simply cannot continue to

live and organize our society in unsustainable ways. We need to change personal and institutional practices, as well as urge national leaders to attend to our unsustainable patterns of living.

I believe that students and colleagues in Christian education will rise to the challenge.

### We are ready

Twenty-five years ago, when I was an idealistic young teacher in a small Christian high school in the hub of the Niagara Peninsula, I set out to start a recycling program in the school before the advent of blue boxes. What was heartening was that, although it was met with some initial skepticism, especially among the students, my colleagues and principal were supportive. Four years later, the program was institutionalized and became a normal feature of daily life of our high school. This experience and others are encouraging, leading

me to believe that Christian education is ready to address global climate change, and, more generally, the issue of sustainability, perhaps making it one of the centerpieces of our missions, including our curriculum.

Showing Al Gore's *An Inconvenient Truth* might a place to start this initiative. The on-line version of *CBC News* reported on February 2<sup>nd</sup> that "The British government will send a copy of Al Gore's film about global warming, *An Inconvenient Truth*, to every secondary school in the country." Every British teen will see this film. Wouldn't it be something if the CBC and the *New York Times* could soon report that all the schools under the CSI umbrella had also decided to show their middle-school and high-school age students Gore's movie, as an introduction to a more systematic and comprehensive initiative responding to global climate change? ☺

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# Keep On Learning

by Lois De Vries

*Lois De Vries (ldevries@iserv.net) was a teacher of English at Grand Rapids Christian High School in Grand Rapids, Michigan. She gave this chapel talk at her school during the last year of her teaching career. Lois has also served on the board of this journal for several years.*

Thirty-four years after beginning my career at Christian High, I am retiring in June. So even though I have “miles” of spring days in school to go before my teaching career “sleeps,” this speech is my “swan song.” You may know that the phrase comes from the legend that just before it dies, the swan sings a lovely plaintive song. I promise not to sing, and I have no plans to expire right before your eyes.

But still — “Sleep,” “swan song”— images of death? Who wants to hear the pathetic ramblings of an “old” woman looking ahead at her bleak future? Wouldn’t it be pathetic if that’s how I view the next stage of my life?

Upon hearing that I am going to retire, people often respond with: “So, what are you going to do?” The fact is, I don’t entirely know yet. I have ideas, a few dreams, and even a fantasy or two, but I must admit I don’t have the next stage of my life all planned out. However, I do know what I don’t want to do. I don’t want the life Billy Collins, one of my favorite poets, and twice the American Poet Laureate, draws in his poem “Schoolsville” (See sidebar on this page).

What an image: a doddering old teacher “lecturing the wall paper,

quizzing the chandelier, reprimanding the air” — which we can only hope never respond! What a lack of life — “rarely leaving the house,” the car sitting idly, and even the porch swing chained down by vines! I want to see this retired teacher having fun: jumping in the car, making that porch

swing on the front porch while he’s chatting with the neighbors. Doing good: “mayoring,” helping the truly old person across the street. Or keeping his mind fresh with new things: learning another language, memorizing a poem or a Bible verse every day.

## Schoolsville

Glancing over my shoulder at the past,  
I realize the number of students I have taught  
is enough to populate a small town.

I can see it nestled in a paper landscape,  
chalk dust flurrying down in winter,  
nights dark as a blackboard.

The population ages but never graduates.

On hot afternoons they sweat this final in the park  
and when it’s cold they shiver around stoves  
reading disorganized essays out loud.

A bell rings on the hour and everybody zigzags  
in the streets with their books.

I forgot all their last names first and their  
first names last in alphabetical order.

But the boy who always had his hand up  
is an alderman and owns the haberdashery.

The girl who signed her papers in lipstick  
leans against the drugstore, smoking,  
brushing her hair like a machine.

Their grades are sewn into their clothes  
like references to Hawthorne.

The A’s stroll along with other A’s.

The D’s honk whenever they pass another D.

All the creative writing students recline  
on the courthouse lawn and play the lute.

Wherever they go, they form a big circle.

**Needless to say, I am the mayor.**

I live in the white colonial at Maple and Main.

I rarely leave the house. The car deflates  
in the driveway. Vines twirl around the porch swing.

Once in a while a student knocks on the door  
with a term paper fifteen years late

or a question about Yeats or double-spacing.

And sometimes one will appear in a window pane  
to watch me lecturing the wall paper,  
quizzing the chandelier, reprimanding the air.

In *The Once and Future King*, a popular retelling of the King Arthur legend by T.H. White, Arthur’s magician and teacher Merlin tells his young pupil, “The best thing for being sad [or bored, or boring] ... is to learn something.... You may grow old and trembling in your anatomies, you may lie awake at night listening to the disorder of your veins, you may miss your only love, you may see the world about you devastated by evil lunatics, or know your honor trampled in the sewers of baser minds.... [Then] Learning is the only thing for you. Look what a lot of things there are to learn.”

“Learn!” You may think, “that’s all I do: learn. In fact, I should be home tonight learning my vocabulary, my math, my history!” Admittedly, you are expected to learn a lot. After all, we live in a scary world where college tuition rises every year and the tiniest difference in your grade point or test scores can cost big money. Besides, a high GPA is something to be proud of — it *is* a mark of achievement, of using the excellent mind God has given you. All true, but I hope you can still sometimes revel in the simple joy of learning. Learning something just for the fun of it! And in school, learning to earn a good grade, sure, but not just for a grade.

Remember: learning is an active process — it’s something *you*, not



your teachers or parents, are ultimately responsible for. I like the way Alfie Kohn, expert in education and philosophy puts it this way: "Learning is something students do, NOT something done to students."

And while you're at it, learn to look beyond the immediate. Yes, you are intelligent, but avoid the temptation of thinking you already know everything, and of believing that everything that doesn't immediately excite or affect us is unimportant, or stupid, or boring. In Chaim Potok's novel *The Chosen*, Reb Saunders tells his son's friend, Reuven, "Anything can be a shell, Reuven. Anything. Indifference, laziness, brutality, and genius. Yes, even a great mind can be a shell and choke the spark."

The life of that teacher in "Schoolsville" is small and boring. But I wonder if the lives of some of his students are, too, including the lives of those "As strolling with other As." Isn't it sad how we can turn even learning into a type of segregation? Of course, we all enjoy spending time with people who are like us, but associating *only* with people like us is another way of making our lives small.

How sad that being smart and earning good grades can create in us a sense of superiority that makes us look down our noses or avoid people whom we see as less smart, or witty or talented. In the same scene from *The Chosen*, Reb Saunders goes on to tell of the time he heard his brilliant son, Danny, mocking an ignorant man. "[Danny] laughed once and said, 'That man is such an ignoramus, Father.' I was angry. 'Look into his soul,' I said. 'Stand inside his soul [or as Atticus Finch would have said, 'Stand in his shoes'] and see the world through his eyes. You will know the pain he feels because of his ignorance, and you will not laugh.'" Don't we all need to learn to look inside our own souls and the souls of others? Because maybe we have something to give to "those people."

In our media-rich lives, it's hard to avoid hearing about the sorrows of the world; vaguely, we know there's a lot of need "out there." But did you know that 1 in 5 Americans is functionally illiterate, that many inner city kids never travel farther from their own homes than did serfs in the Middle Ages, that the life expectancy in Botswana is 33 years? Yes, we know, but do we care? Confucius said, "To know what is right and not to do it is the worst cowardice." So there's something you could learn — how to help another person who needs those gifts you have.

Okay, we know that, but here's another slant — maybe "those people" have something to give to you. Even the genius Galileo once said, "I have never met a man so ignorant that I couldn't learn something from him." What could we learn from the refugee who came here with nothing, not even the ability to speak English, who works all day in a laundry for minimum wage while raising two children, and somehow still finds the energy and drive to attend ESL classes two nights a week? What could you learn from the student who lockers next to you, for whom every test must seem like an exercise in futility, and yet who shows up every day and tries to do her work on time, never asking for a break? There's something else exciting and important to learn!

"Okay, okay, love learning, don't be proud, help others — got it. Can we go now? I've still got that math to do." Of course, I should hurry. Deadlines loom. I understand. After 34 years of spending my own share of evening and weekend hours grading papers and making lesson plans, I know the weight deadlines have for all of us. Sometimes it feels like all we can do is keep our heads down and plod on. And, of course, when we're busy with deadlines and what's due tomorrow, it's hard to see the big picture or think very far ahead.

Maybe that's part of why I don't have my retirement planned: often I simply don't have the time or mental energy to think that far ahead.

Maybe that's why it's so stressful for you juniors and seniors as you think about college choices. Where should you go, what will you major in? From the time we are little children, people ask us, "And what would you like to be when you grow up?" Maybe you've simply thought, "older" or "out of school."

I think we've all felt like Tom Joad in *The Grapes of Wrath* who declares he's just "puttin' one foot in front of another." But here comes the good part — the epiphany, the vision. Tom Joad doesn't end the novel still with his eyes on the ground or in a book, still just "puttin' one foot in front of the other." He looks up, sees need *beyond himself*, and gets a vision of life!

Putting one foot in front of the other every day — keeping up with assignments, meeting deadlines, studying for tests has taken you a long way on the academic road. You have learned a lot, and, clearly, your minds are growing. You are capable in so many things that were completely foreign to you such a short time ago: algebraic formulas, French vocabulary, research papers conventions. And as you get older and continue to learn, you will be amazed at what you don't know now.

Be proud and happy about your learning, but don't forget the one area that sometimes excellent minds make us think we don't need to know.

There's a scene in *Prince Caspian* from the *Chronicles of Narnia* that ties in here. You may remember that when she is reunited with Aslan after a time of separation, Lucy notices he has changed: "Aslan," said Lucy, "you're bigger." "That is because you are older, little one," answered he.

"Not because you are?"

"I am not. But every year you grow, you



will find me bigger.”

Recently my minister reminded our congregation of that powerful scene. He noted that while students’ minds do grow, sadly, sometimes their spiritual life does not. And ironically because that has not grown, they begin to think they have outgrown God. That wonderful mind God has given you can be a wonderful friend or a deceiving traitor. History is, and literature and the Bible are, full of examples of people who let their intelligence mislead them. So tonight, Ash Wednesday, the beginning of Lent, a night on which many of us would be in church if we were not here, maybe this is a good night to ask yourself, “Do I

know more about God than I did a year ago? Do I know God better than I did a year ago?” Maybe this is a good moment for you, and for all of us, to promise ourselves that we will study and work on our relationship with God as earnestly as we do our schoolwork.

So, yes, be proud of your good mind. Use it. Keep learning — about all the things you must and you want to learn. Read, read, read. Find things to be excited about! Ask questions! Find ways to help others and to let them help you. Use that mind to know God, not to convince yourself you don’t need him.

I like the message of a poster in my room:

“I don’t know what the future holds, but I know who holds the future.” Those are comforting words for someone in my situation, and I hope for someone in your situation, too. None of us truly know “what’s next.” I do know God is in control of whatever that “next” is.

But, unlike Collins’ old teacher, I hope one thing you and I never stop doing is learning. Because when we do — when we stop learning, stop listening, stop looking and asking questions, always new questions — then it *is* time to die. I pray we all have miles to go before we sleep; with God’s help, let’s make those miles count. ☪

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*Continued from page 5*

a share of whatever is harvested for twenty weeks between June and October.

Third, our over-use of energy contributes to many environmental problems, most notably poor local air quality and global climate change. It is therefore important to find ways to consume energy efficiently in your home, place of work, and as you travel. Support government policies that promote energy conservation and support the development of alternative forms of energy. Some specific examples include walking or biking short distances instead of driving, making fuel efficiency an important consideration when you purchase

your next car<sup>5</sup>, keeping your home cool in the winter (and wearing a sweater) and warmer in the summer in order to reduce the energy required by furnaces and air conditioners. I am hopeful that in the near future government incentive programs will encourage more people to remodel homes with the goal of making them more energy-efficient, or even to purchase and install solar panels and sell excess electricity to the local utility company.

In response to a question from the Pharisees, Jesus claimed that the greatest commandment is to “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind” and that the second greatest commandments is to “Love your neighbor as yourself.” (Matthew 22:37, 39). If we love God, and our neighbor as ourselves, we must not live in a manner that damages God’s good creation, or harms (or even kills) other people. The Contemporary Testimony of the Christian Reformed Church addresses this in a paragraph under the heading “The Mission of God’s People”:

*Grateful for the advances  
in science and technology,  
we make careful use of their products,  
on guard against idolatry  
and harmful research,  
and careful to use them in ways that  
answer  
to God’s demands  
to love our neighbor  
and to care for the earth and its  
creatures.*

(Paragraph 52; *Our World Belongs to God*)

#### Footnotes:

<sup>1</sup> The term “exploit” has many meanings. In this article, I use the term “exploit” to mean “make good use of.” We have to exploit the earth’s resources to survive. I use the term “over-exploit” to refer to the excessive (unnecessary) use of the earth’s resources.

<sup>2</sup> All verses quoted are taken from the NIV translation of the Bible.

<sup>3</sup> DeWitt, 1998 is citing John Calvin (Calvin, John. 1554. Commentaries on the first book of Moses, called Genesis. Translated in 1948 by John King, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, MI.)

<sup>4</sup> DeWitt, 1998 is citing Kuyper. (Kuyper, Abraham. 1928. “So God Loved the World!” Chapter 7 in *Keep Thy Solemn Feasts: Meditations by Abraham Kuyper*. Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, MI, USA.)

<sup>5</sup> Oddly enough, while Canadians have recently indicated that the environment is their number one concern, a recent poll concluded that prospective car buyers showed only minimal concern over the environmental impact of their choice. ☪



Nancy Knol  
Column Editor  
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## Story As Garment

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

I love Wendell Berry. I love his essays, his novels, his poetry. Not long ago I read his most recent novel, *Hannah Coulter*. If you are looking for an action-packed novel, this definitely isn't it. The tone of the story is low key, familiar, soft. Dramatic things happen, as they do in every life; but most of the novel is about simple, ordinary events, like tilling the land and making a house home, and bringing up children in the best way the characters know how. It is a book I would not recommend to one of my students just yet because, quite honestly, I think you have to live a few years before you can appreciate the wisdom and richness of this generational story.

Wendell Berry makes me understand why I became an English teacher. I love words and stories, and I admire those who can use them and tell them well. At one point in the novel, the narrator, Hannah, thinks about all the stories she and her husband told their children about themselves—stories about the “olden days” when there was no indoor plumbing or paved highways, or, for that matter, nuclear bombs. And the children could not get enough of them. “But,” Hannah muses as an old woman, “did we tell the stories right? ... Did we tell the stories in such a way as to suggest that we had needed a better chance or a better life or a better place than we had? ... Suppose your stories, instead of mourning and rejoicing over the past, imply that everything should have been different .... Or suppose the stories you tell them prompt them to believe that farming people are inferior and need to improve themselves by leaving the farm. Doesn't that finally unmake everything that has been made? Isn't that the loose thread that unravels the whole garment?”

Teachers are storytellers, whether they teach literature or not. Our students are most attentive when we tell our stories, are they not? They want to hear about who this person is who stands before them each day, demanding so much of their time and attention and effort. And it is so good when it becomes reciprocal, like conversation, like real community. My students have heard many of my stories. Some of them are sad, like the story of the death of our seven-year-old son. Some are humiliating, like the story of my failing geometry in high school and, consequently, having to attend summer school. And some are funny, like the time when, as a new driver, I badly damaged two of my parents' cars at once in our driveway. Just recently I even told a story about a time when I did something really shameful in high school—I participated in mocking a girl who was socially inept, and

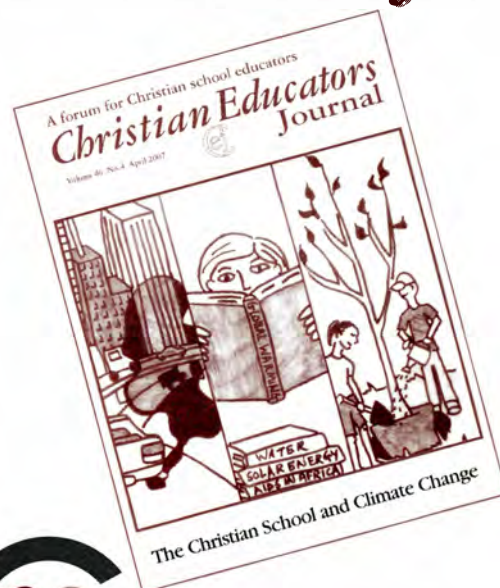
she eventually left our school.

Did I tell the stories right?

“The chance you had is the life you've got,” says Berry. “You can make complaints about what people, including you, make of their lives after they have got them, and about what people make of other people's lives ... but you mustn't wish for another life. You mustn't want to be somebody else. What you must do is this: ‘Rejoice ever more. Pray without ceasing. In everything give thanks.’ I am not all the way capable of so much, but those are the right instructions.”

We must tell our stories and let the good and the bad of us reveal itself. If we tell the truth, our students will come away with more than just information; they will know who we are. And maybe they will recognize themselves in our stories and find the courage to tell their own. ☺

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## Do We Walk the Talk on Environment?

Al Boerema (ajb37@calvin.edu), associate professor of education at Calvin College, Grand Rapids, Mich., asked the Dot Edu panel: “Are we doing enough as Christian schools to encourage a caring attitude towards the environment?”

February 22, 2007

Johanna Campbell replies:

Personally, I think our schools are doing a great job teaching their students to be good stewards of God’s creation — loving God’s creation, praising God for his creation and finding out what man’s dominion over creation means in their lives. A lot of this study translates into service to the school community as well. A university president in British Columbia recently accused Christians of being so other-worldly that they have no interest in the environment, since they believe they will escape this earth and go to heaven. Is he right? Honoring God’s creation and taking care of it in our own personal lives is an area that still needs much improvement. Are we doing enough about composting in our own back yards, recycling, not polluting our soils and streams, reducing gas emissions by car pooling, taking care of trees, caring for animals and loving our neighbor? Our personal lives tend to be very selfish and materialistic also when it comes to the environment and our students need their eyes opened to that fact.



Johanna Campbell

Johanna

February 28, 2007

Timothy Leugs responds:

Johanna, I couldn’t agree with you more when you talk about how selfish and materialistic our culture is. I similarly agree with you when you say that our students need their eyes opened to this fact. I don’t know, though, that we are doing *all* that we can to teach our students to be good stewards. Part of the difficulty of living in Western society comes from absorbing the materialistic consumerism that surrounds all of us — Christians and non-Christians alike.

Looking at this issue through these glasses of materialism, I am unsure of two things: how much should we be doing to honor



Tim Leugs

God’s creation, and how does what we do fit with what the rest of the world is doing? The first of these asks for a basic definition: what is the standard for caring for the environment? What particulars exist showing what we need to do to be faithful stewards? We would love to have a clearly set list saying “recycle all #2 plastic,” but we don’t have that. All we have is a calling to be responsible stewards as shown in Genesis 1, caring for and using creation in the service of God and humanity.

The second thing I am stuck with is not any easier to figure out. How should our work towards caring for the environment compare with what the rest of the world is doing? Should we as schools simply encourage our constituent families to recycle at home? That does not seem as if it is a great enough effort towards responsible stewardship. Should we forbid families from owning gas-guzzling SUV’s? That seems like overkill. There has to be a happy medium between these two. But is that happy medium something that is aimed at making us feel that we as consumers are doing enough to help the world, or should it be aimed towards pleasing God?

Tim

March 1, 2007

Pam Adams jumps in:

Hi, Tim and Johanna. I fear in the United States this issue has been politicized. If you talk about creation care or global warming, you are considered to be liberal. Political conservatives (many Christians are political conservatives), follow the lead of George Bush and say that global warming is hype from Al Gore.

I believe we are not doing enough. I have spoken to several knowledgeable people who feel it is almost too late for our planet. We are slowly destroying it. That does not mean we should not try to do something to change the course.

As teachers we do affect how our students think — so we need to redouble our efforts to teach creation care. Any ideas on how to do this from the rest of you?

Pam



Pam Adams



Albert Boerema  
ajb37@calvin.edu

## March 7, 2007

**Johanna Campbell responds:**

In Canada, our government is now (at last) focusing very much on the environment. It may become an election issue. As I was driving to work this morning with my daughter, we discussed this issue. She will graduate this year as an environmentalist. She is adamant about the government setting rules, "or the people won't do anything. If it touches their pocket books, people will sit up and listen," were her words. "We need to reward those who do show consideration for the environment and penalize those who don't. Make it cheaper for those who drive cars with less gas emissions, reward companies that focus on recycling or reducing waste, encourage public transit and so on." I believe Christians should be involved in writing environmental policies. They should be passionate about God's beautiful earth and how to preserve it for future generations, and they should put their money where their mouth is. If we prayerfully and passionately encourage our students to take creation care seriously, we will be able to make a difference as we serve our neighbors and save our planet for God's glory.

**Johanna**

## March 7, 2007

**Tony Kamphuis contributes:**

In my experience, the schools do a decent job of teaching environmental responsibility, but we don't always model it that well. The students do alright at "talking the talk," but students observe that teachers produce one-sided photocopying, that buses are left idling, that schools use excessive "security" lighting at night, and don't even get me started on the excessive packaging we see in the lunches. All of that goes without comment! When I taught at a high school, we had a few teachers pass through who were thoughtful about caring for God's good earth. I learned a great deal from them, as did our students. I realized I talked a good earth care, but my practices — and our school's practices — hmmm.

At our schools we are trying some initiatives to do better. Road-side clean-up is one such effort. An area Christian school is planting trees in the spring as part of their "Good Neighbor" activities. Those are tangible ways in which we can help the students develop and then 'exercise' their abilities in this important part of the Christian life.

**Tony**



Tony Kamphuis

## March 8, 2007

**Jolene Velthuisen adds:**

I can add a couple of ideas for schools to implement. Our school honored the year's theme of "Creation-Keeper" a few years ago. Throughout the year, the elementary kids worked hard at keeping our playground clean. We also worked on some service projects that targeted the environment and some activities with recycling which included having a guest speaker from a recycling initiative on the Navajo reservation. Right now we manage a small pond of saline water on the high school property. We are just beginning to look into how best to use it to promote care for the environment, as well as making the pond a hands-on learning opportunity for science. That project is just starting, and the potential is great. Living in the southwest, we deal with the issue of water conservation much more than do most people in the United States. We hope that this pond can become a part of water-conservation studies and water-use projects. I think we need to focus on instilling in our students a sense of care for the environment. And that is best done through example, as Tony pointed out. Our own attitudes and actions best show our students good ways to care for our Lord's creation.

**Jolene**



Jolene Veldhuizen

## 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.

**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 Velthuisen** (jvelthuisen@rcsnm.org) a second-grade teacher at Rehoboth Christian School in Northwest New Mexico. ☺



# Slouching Toward Bedlam

## Cal on a Hot Tin Roof

### or It's a SAD, SAD World

by Jan Kaarsvlam (kaarsvlamj@yahoo.jp)

*Jan Kaarsvlam has recently left his position as a water safety instructor in Ontario Christian School in California, after leading students in a protest against the General Mills Corporation. He argued that promotional character Lucky the Leprechaun fostered "a stereotypical and negative image of the Irish." Jan's protest featured a lengthy water ballet-based activity with authentic costumes. Unfortunately, Jan did not get administrative approval before the protest, and a number of parents, who didn't relish the idea of their children spending eight hours in a swimming pool wearing green knickers and topcoats (and who happened to enjoy Lucky Charms), pushed for his immediate dismissal. He has since taken a job as janitor at Lansing Christian School in Lansing, Illinois.*

The mid-semester doldrums seemed to have sucked the energy out of everyone in the room, so that when school counselor Maxwell Prentis-Hall walked into the staff room and slumped in a chair, he had to sigh three times, loudly, before someone noticed.

It was art teacher Gregg "Rigor" Mortiss who finally looked up from his coffee. "Hey, Maxy, what's the matter?"

"Thanks for asking, Gregg. I guess I've picked up a bit of Seasonal Affective Disorder, you know, SAD? Actually, SAD affects over half a million people in the U.S. alone, so I guess I am not surprised that I got it. Actually, over 37% of all...."

Mortiss got up from his chair, muttered something about having to go hose down the kiln, and walked out of the door. Max sagged into his chair and sighed loudly again.

Rex Kane, Bedlam Christian's beatnik gym teacher, walked in the door right at the end of that sigh. "What's the matter, Max, you look like your dog died."

"Well, actually, I think I have Seasonal Affective Disorder. SAD is a mental illness that causes ordinary people to feel depressed. Scientists think it has something to do with the amount of light."

Max trailed off as the door opened again and Cal VanderMeer, Bedlam's Bible teacher entered. What stopped Max was Cal's appearance. Though the temperature outside was in the single digits, and in the teacher's lounge the mercury seemed to be hovering around 48 degrees, Cal was dressed in a short sleeved Hawaiian shirt, shorts, and sandals. He clutched a ream of loose paper to his chest like a blanket, and he was shivering.

Rex stopped nodding at Max's discourse about SAD and addressed Cal. "Whoa doggies there, little buddy, it isn't May yet. Little early to be giving up the long-johns, isn't it?"

Cal responded — though he seemed to be responding to an invisible audience more than to Rex — "This half of the school

is freezing cold, but down by my room it feels like the tropics? I had to open the window last hour, just so my students wouldn't pass out. Do you have any idea how much energy that wastes?"

"Not as much as it took to produce all this paper you're wasting," Rex said as he plucked the top sheet off the pile. It was a yearbook survey that was a mere three lines long. Over 80% of the paper was blank and would remain so on its way to the landfill.

Confronted by this truth, Cal sighed heavily, which reminded Maxwell of his problem. "Cal, you sound sad. Maybe you suffer from SAD. As I was just about to tell Rex, SAD occurs disproportionately in certain demographic groups. Among twenty- to thirty-year-olds, SAD . . ."

"Are we all hypocrites?" Cal asked, ignoring Max.

"Absolutely!" Rex answered with what seemed like glee. "Every last one of us. Just two weeks ago, we capped off a week of chapels on the environment and God's call for good stewardship, but who are we kidding? Our heating system is antiquated and wastes incredible amounts of energy, but the school board doesn't care enough to change it. All of us teachers waste paper. We've switched from chalkboards to whiteboards, and so now we all go through five to ten plastic markers a year, all made from petroleum, and all adding to the waste stream. They'll end up in a landfill where they'll still rest eons from now, long after we've rotted to dust. Mortiss talked in chapel about stewardship, and I laughed at the irony, considering he drives a Hummer back and forth 20 miles to work every day. In the warmer months, Carpenter and Kleinhut both run the a/c in their rooms "to protect the computers," but they keep the thermostat at 72 degrees. Do the computers need it that cool, or does somebody else? Walk through this school after dismissal. Every teacher leaves their lights on despite the fact that their rooms are empty. I could go on and on. Absolutely, positively, we are all hypocrites."

Rex smiled, reached across in front of Cal, and grabbed a gooey Boston cream donut, the last one in the box. "Including me," he continued. "I teach kids to eat healthy food like fruits and vegetables, then I race here at break every day hoping for sweets. The trick is getting here before Winkle polishes them all off."

As if on cue, the door swung open and shop teacher Gord Winkle entered. He wore a blue denim apron. His eyes fell on the empty donut box and a look of horror washed across his face. Then he spotted Rex hurriedly hiding the last donut behind his back.

"Hey, let's go halvesies on that, Rex!" Winkle said. He stepped toward Rex who backed away from him.

"Um, I don't think so, Gordo. You know what they say about

finders keepers.”

Rex dashed around the end of the table, then took the donut from behind his back and brought it toward his mouth. From Gordon’s mouth came a soul-wrenching expression of desperation, and he dove toward the doughnut. Unfortunately, there was still a table in the way. Gordon slid down it, and though those seated at the table pulled their coffee mugs out of the way as he slid, Gordon build up a sizable pile of newspapers, memos, and partially graded papers. Rex, still chewing his first bite, tried to cram the rest into his mouth. Gord grabbed hold of his hand. As they both squeezed, the donut popped like a pimple, spraying custard over both of them.

“Now look what you did!” Rex whined, wiping with the cuff of his sleeve at some custard just below his right eye. “You ruined it!”

“Hey, buddy,” Gord said. He stopped momentarily to lick the custard off the palm of his hand. “You’re the one who wouldn’t share. Don’t blame me.”

Winkle returned to licking cream off his hands and forearms. He made little ecstatic grunts every time he tasted the sugary substance. Rex decided to take his leave before Gord started trying to lick custard off him. There was an awkward silence, and then Cal pushed back his chair to leave.

“You know,” he said to no one in particular, “that little donut episode is a metaphor for the earth. We all want it for ourselves, we all squeeze it for everything we can get out of it, and one day, if we keep it up, it won’t be here for any of us.”

He crossed the room. At the door, he paused and looked back at all of them. “The worst part is that everyone sitting in this room knows that, but none of us is doing anything about it. We pay lip service to stewardship, but what we really model for our students is behavior as appalling as what we just witnessed. Rex is right: We are all hypocrites. How are students supposed to learn from us?” He left, shutting the door firmly behind him.

Moments later, the bell rang, signifying the end of break. Maxwell heaved one last heavy sigh. Now he felt SAD indeed. ©





# Reflecting on a Teaching Career



by Alyce Oosterhuis (alyce@kingsu.ca)

*Alyce Oosterhuis is professor emerita of educational psychology at The King's University College in Edmonton, Alberta, and a DSA program coordinator for the Association of Independent Schools and Colleges in Alberta, Canada.*

Looking back on more than forty years of teaching in elementary classrooms, university campuses, and teacher training institutions, I must admit that my focus has shifted. I have often told student teachers that they cannot expect to change every child they encounter in their future classrooms, but that it is important for them to make a difference in one child's life every year. Yet, as I reflect on those for whom I may have made a difference, I realize that teaching is not so much about me making a difference, but about how my students have made a difference in me. So I'm a slow learner.

When I analyze all the BA and MA and PhD courses taken, the workshops and conventions attended, the speeches, programs and course outlines developed, it is clear that what has molded me more as a teacher than any one textbook or mentor, were the students who cried: "I can't do it!" "This is boring!" "Recess is my favorite activity!" "You can't make me do it!" "Why can't I get an 'A' on this project?" Because of them, I adopted different strategies, devised new techniques, questioned essentials for learning, debated effective pedagogy, tried to soften my hardest edges.

## Learning style variety

In the '60s it was the third-grade student who could read his own hand-written stories but not the third-grade level reader that made me realize that the teaching of reading controversy is much more complicated than the whole language vs. phonics de-

bate suggests. Children have unique learning styles. Some need frequent repetition. Others find mnemonic devices and rhythmic rhymes helpful. Still others depend on vivid experiences to leave a memorable imprint on the mind.

So we imitated train style seating on the classroom floor as we chanted sounds, words, rhymes. We drew bizarre pictures around words to accentuate unique spellings or word uses. We studied patterns and shapes and created them in multimedia forms. Students created their own plays, memorized their unique dialogue, performed choral readings, published their own "books."

## Multi-discipline tack

In the '70s it was the sixth-grade class which expressed an intense boredom with ancient history that caused me to devise a thematic unit that integrated all their subject areas for a month of ancient Greek learning sessions. For science they studied Archimedes' principles; in geometry they learned the Pythagorean theorem; in art they reconstructed the Doric, Ionic and Corinthian pillars; in language arts they became experts on Greek heroes, myths, debating, public speaking and drama; in history they learned about the many wars; for physical education they practiced Olympic type sports; their music classes contained Greek music and dancing (a la Zorba the Greek); for second language lessons they memorized the Greek alphabet; for cultural studies I distributed recipes for a variety of Greek foods their parents could prepare.

On the last day of the unit, the students came to their classroom "temple" (all desks had been removed to make way for pillars and platforms) in costumes depicting their chosen Greek hero or heroine and described their character to other classes. We debated various issues, performed a mod-

ern version of *Antigone*, engaged in Olympic "javelin-throwing," running, and gymnastics, and then enjoyed a lunch (which could be shared by other classes) of moussaka, souvlaki, fruit salad, spinach pie, spanakopita and Greek salad. The day was concluded with the soundtrack of the movie "Zorba the Greek" and the class dancing Greek style. After this unit, all social studies were made more experiential, although not as extensively as the Greek one.

## Application tasks

In the '80s, as I observed university students trying to find examples of applications of the theories they were mastering, I adopted the "case study" method in their Child and Adolescent Development course. Students had to locate three children in different age groups to "test" them on Piaget-devised tasks, or Vygotsky's zone of proximal development, or Kohlberg's moral development sequence. In the Learning Theories course I had them complete a self-modification project to evaluate the application of behavioral principles to such habits as: hair twirling, nail biting, poor study skills, or too much TV watching. In a course on exceptionalities they were given the option to volunteer for 30 hours in a school or group home, day care or other institution, to work with special needs children or adolescents. In a life-span developmental psychology course they were assigned the task of recording the life stories of geriatric clients in nursing or senior citizen homes.

## Beating boredom

In the '90s, as I watched students' eyes glaze over during lectures, I attempted to incorporate debates and various other activities: brief assignments which would

*Continued on next page*

# Connection, Not Repetition

by Keith Albers

*Dr. Keith Albers is a speaker, consultant and trainer on all things related to children's and youth ministry and education. He is the founder of Equip the Next Generation. He has spent eight years as a public school educator and two years as the administrator of a Christian school.*

Learning depends to a large degree on connecting new information with old information. Hence, my goal as a teacher is to get brain cells in the students to work in the largest possible groups. We have seen the strength-in-numbers model work for a large number of varying concepts, but when it comes to learning, the more brain cells used, the more likely learning will occur. Let me use a metaphor taken from athletics to illustrate my point.

When a football coach diagrams a play, he designs it so that each player on the field has a role in its success. Failure by one or more players often results in failure of the play. However, for the success of the whole, those on the team closer to the development of the play *must* be successful, whereas others, on the periphery of the play, may fail in their efforts without jeopardizing the favorable outcome. Of course, the more players who are success-

fully involved in the play, the better the chances of success.

In the same way, the success of learning has to do with brain cells "ganging up." We need to involve the greatest number of brain cells with a new piece of information for it to be learned in the first place, and then for it to be retrievable. We cause cells to gang up on information by using as



many neurons and synapses as possible, and, in doing so, we link information. This concept of linking new information to that which is known is what I have come to call "making connections."

Connections are the links that we put together ourselves between something new and the sum total of our experiences, our prior knowledge, and any other things we have learned, read, or seen. Therefore,

learning involves the connecting of information already in long-term memory to new information.

## Emotional connections

A key ingredient to recall is to recognize that not all connections are created equally. The more personal, emotional, and sensory is the event or information to which we connect, the stronger the connection it will be in memory. Many of us remember where we were and what we were doing on September 11, 2001. Why do we remember that day rather than some other arbitrary date that has less meaning? The World Trade Center was attacked and the towers tumbled before our very eyes. The emotions and pictures we saw on that day were burned into our memories.

Is this an extreme example? Absolutely. But the concept applies across the board. I remember so many details about June 28, 1997, right down to the weather conditions, people, and places. Why? I have a powerful connection to that day — my wedding day. It is highly personal and emotional, therefore a vivid memory.

But let me step out of the category of events for a moment to illustrate this point in a different way. I happen to know a lot about coal. I know different types of coal,

*Continued from previous page*

move them from their desks, poster presentations, micro-teaching lessons with peers, group presentations, games, contests. Teachers brought their elementary students to the college classroom to provide the necessary interactive experience for these practicing teachers-to-be. Student teachers were assigned the task of analyzing the eye contact, teacher movement, frequency of student contribution, and gender differences in the college classrooms they attended during the day. Students

learned about good assessment practices by designing rubrics for their mini lessons and by critiquing the assessment practices of others. And, although they disliked evaluating their peers, I made them assess others' anonymously written midterm essay answers in group-grading sessions.

## Bottom up response

In the past year, I surveyed a number of principals and teachers to determine which courses and practices in their university years had been most useful. Which courses

would they consider essential in preparing a teacher education program for Christian educators? A strikingly different response between the two groups: many principals felt such a program should have courses in perspective, curriculum development, worldviews; teachers wanted to see more weeks of practicum experience. I may be a slow learner but, clearly, I am a teacher who owes many words of gratitude to all students who made a difference in molding my teaching practices and theories. ©



for example, and EPA requirements, safety standards, and shipping regulations. Why do I know these things? I have never studied geology, nor have I worked for a coal company. I didn't grow up in West Virginia, and I do not buy coal for a power company. My connection to coal is my dad. He has been a coal miner for my whole life. I have a very important connection to my dad. As a result, things that affect him — his working conditions, and the health of the parent company that employs him — get connected in my own mind to the very serious and deep vein of my connection to my father.

Many people wonder why certain things stick in their head, while others they forget immediately. I would offer the following as my answer: we remember what we are able to connect to personal, emotional, and sensory events that are already burned into our long-term memory. We will connect to things that we have read, a news story we saw on television last night, but we will more readily connect with personal experiences that are emotional and sensory for us. We can reason backward from this point. If we understand that things “stick” in our mind because of our personal connection to that information, we can then set up a means by which we use this to our advantage in teaching how to learn.

### Model the process

It is our job, then, to look for things to connect to new information that we want to learn. As teachers, we set up learning activities in order to allow students to make connections. The key idea stated earlier is that the more personal the connection, the more readily the information will be recalled. The challenge comes to the teacher, then, to *model the process*, not hand out some generic connection, or supply one from their own personal set of experiences.

The connection is valuable to individuals only if they make the connection to something inherently personal to themselves.

This is a process that is not likely to come naturally. We have to decide to model the process for the students, and we must also break down different categories for them to connect with new information. For example, if we first ask them to brainstorm things that connect personally, we might then ask them to connect with things they have read, seen on television or the Internet. Giving students different categories to think about helps them narrow their thought processes and allows them to make many different connections. If you recall, the

“Many people wonder  
why certain things stick  
in their heads”

“ganging-up” analogy, or the “strengthen-in-numbers” adage used in the beginning of this article indicated that the more connections we make, the better the chance of transfer to long term memory, and the better chance of quick and easy recall.

This process should start out deliberately, purposefully — and on paper. As students read a non-fiction selection, or hear a lecture of which they will need to be able to recall facts and information, they should write down connections from different categories down about key ideas. The idea here is to brainstorm as many connections as possible from each category given. Remember, we are trying to get brain cells to “gang up” on information. Over time, as we get more comfortable with this method, we will find ourselves making these con-

nections consciously in our heads as we read, listen and watch, and we will need to write less and less as the years go by. Further, as time passes, it becomes a subconscious act that occurs as information is presented.

I understand that this idea may seem quite foreign, strange, or even radical. But there is a level within each of us that intuitively knows that this is actually the way learning works. I chose to adopt this more radical approach during my last year in the classroom. I went to a primarily poor multi-ethnic school, which had been failing state exams for years. Using this unique approach, every single one of my students passed district assessments, and my students collectively passed state assessment for the first time in more than three years.

It has taken ten years in education, in the classroom, as a reader of professional research, and my own experience and research in the classroom to come to these conclusions. But there is something I know even better. Children will adapt to this way of thinking faster and easier than adults will. Over the years of our lives, we have become more and more used to our routines and methods. As years go by, it becomes harder to change. Perhaps the biggest obstacle to the success of this method is the resistance of the student himself. I was at a leadership conference once, when a speaker challenged us to do an exercise to examine our own level of resistance to change. He asked us to move our watch from the side we usually wear it to the other side. I think I am a pretty open to considering change, but my watch lasted on the wrong wrist for only six hours. As adults, our own resistance to change is a significant determining factor in whether or not this will work for us. Children, however, react much more readily. The younger the students, the more easily they will accept change. ©

# Scripture & Memorization



by Keith Albers

I am not suggesting, through my writing on repetition and learning, that memorization is evil and to be avoided. That may seem contradictory, but at least give me a chance to explain myself. Memorization is a very important and meaningful cognitive exercise. Memorization is an exercise that strengthens our ability to learn, think, and remember. But when we think about things that we have memorized over the years, those things that stay in our minds are those things that we have successfully connected to in a meaningful way. A large component in Christian Schools, Sunday Schools, as well as Children's and Youth ministry, revolve around Scripture memorization. This is a very positive, meaningful activity in both the cognitive and spiritual realms.

In the cognitive realm, memorization is an activity that serves as a quality exercise. It provides for improved overall cognitive abilities, as stated before. However, there are further benefits. Memorization of poetry, speeches, and other literature also provide for the student the experience of stepping outside of themselves and attempting to experience the viewpoint of the artist or author. Providing varied viewpoints and experiences for students only expands the realm of experiences that they may then connect to in the future. Memorization of literature, poetry, and the experience of these forms provides that context. It is a cognitive exercise that allows for sharpening of mental abilities and allows for further experience that provides the platform for future connections.

In the spiritual realm, the memorization of Scripture has an even farther-reaching impact. Memorization of Scripture has all of the benefits listed in the previous paragraph above. The truly awesome truth behind Scripture memorization is the "Who" that is behind the words that we are al-

lowed to connect with. Connecting with the eternal, omnipresent, omniscient, omnipotent Creator of the universe is a truly life-changing experience. As educators, we can choose the memory verses that we prescribe for our students. We can choose verses that portray truth about who God is, his character, his nature, and his attributes. We also get students in touch with creation, God's sovereignty, and, what's more important, God's grace.

## Spiritual connections

The first verse I memorized in my Christian life was Ephesians 2, verses 8-9: "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith — and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God — not by works, so that no one can boast." The strange thing is this: I did not have to try at all to memorize that verse. No one had a Sunday school curriculum that called for me to memorize it. I wasn't a child being asked to do this as an assignment or to earn a prize. I was a grown man, and through this verse I truly understood that I could not live a pretty good life and live up to the standards of a perfectly Holy God. This verse allowed me to connect with who I was — a person with the best of intentions, but, an ultimately depraved heart due to my own nature. This realization brought me to the fact that since I was ultimately depraved myself, I could not possibly "earn" heaven

through my own deeds. I did not spend hours reciting this verse over and over, I didn't write it out repetitively, I simply connected with the author of my salvation — and I have remembered it ever since that first time.

Connections this deep offer further insight into the nature of our relationship to a God we can not see. On the cognitive level, I might say this was a truly personal experience through which I understood more about the personality of God. But on a spiritual level, I actually *had* a personal experience with God himself. He taught me the nature of salvation through that interaction with Scripture. There is something inexplicably more to that than can be explained in cognitive terms. *This* is the real value to Scripture memorization: through using this as a part of our program, we allow our children to have the experience of personally meeting with and being taught by our Lord. It was a life-changing experience for me. I wish I could say it was written and organized into someone's lesson plans or in a message prepared for a Sunday Service — it was simply a loving, personal God reaching out to me. On the human plane, in this dimension, we cannot plan that, but we can offer opportunities for children to open their hearts to God's message, and allow him to work through Scripture. ☪

## Check Out the CEJ Website

Go to [cejonline](http://cejonline) to look  
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For suggestions to improve the site contact  
Tony VanderArk at [tvanderark@hollandchristian.org](mailto:tvanderark@hollandchristian.org).



# Glorify God in All Things

## SEMPER REFORMATATA: ALWAYS REFORMING

by Jack Fennema  
(jack.fennema@covenant.edu)

*Jack Fennema is professor of education emeritus at Covenant College. He writes: "Many of our traditionally Reformed Christian Schools — those founded before 1970 — appear to be struggling to maintain their original vision and passion, indicating a need for self-examination and reform toward renewal." This is the last in a series of four articles that provide suggestions for reforming schools that desire such renewal.*

The first article in this series encouraged schools to institute a renewed focus on God. The second article enjoined schools to fully appropriate the mediating Word. The third article entreated students to seek conformity to Jesus Christ. This fourth and final article in the series directs schools to glorify God in all things.

Christian education functions within a rhythm of revelation and response. Students are to know the Father in fullness as he has revealed himself through his Word and Spirit; in response they are to glorify God in all things. That, in brief, is the missional task of the Christian school.

The third article in this series focused on students glorifying God by imaging Christ. This article now focuses on the curricular side of the equation — glorifying God through the various aspects of created reality.

The doctrine of "all things."

Calvin College has recently been running an ad titled "All things" that captures the essence of the Reformed faith — the sovereignty of God. The ad reads: God created *all things*, and they were good/ *All things* have fallen from that original goodness/ Christ, who has redeemed *all things*, even-

tually will restore them, and/ We aid the Spirit's work of restoration by seeking to make *all things* better. This statement not only provides a biblical worldview from which to educate; it furnishes grounding in what could be called "the doctrine of all things." Indeed, God is Sovereign and Jesus



Christ is Lord over "all things" — a truth that serves as the underpinning of biblically-faithful education.

Immediately, we see that this pronouncement allows no room for dualism in our classrooms. We must reject a sacred-secular dichotomy. All things are sacred before the Lord, for he created them all. This world belongs to God — all of it. Christian schools within the Reformed tradition have understood this approach to curriculum. Bible is not simply added as a sacred subject to a secular curriculum; rather, an already-sacred curriculum can be seen through the eyeglasses of Scripture as being holy. So far,

so good. But two related issues within the broader Christian world tend to impinge on our understanding of these things and muddy the waters.

The first one is that much of the evangelical Christian world operates within "Soteriological Christianity" — having to do with salvation — but gives little thought to "Cultural Christianity." In fact, music, books, and film are seldom considered to be "Christian" unless the message of salvation is included. Implicitly, created reality is divided between the sacred — that through which salvation is manifested — and the secular. Christian schools, then, are viewed as ministries of a church, another avenue for evangelism. Teaching history "Christianly" involves the review of missionary activity in place and time. People deemed worthy of study are judged solely on how morally they lived — a product of salvation.

But this is a limited and limiting view of the world in which we live. Author Nancy Pearcey correctly identifies the problem in her statement: "The Christian message does not begin with 'accept Christ as your Savior'; it begins with 'in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.'"<sup>1</sup> The context for life and, consequently, education is not salvation; it is creation. The Fall and Redemption are parentheses in God's story for humankind that began in the Garden — the original creation — and will culminate in the City — the new creation. God created *all things* good, and according to 1 Timothy 4:4, they remain "good;" they have maintained their God-given integrity despite the Fall. This means that Bach is as sacred as the Gaithers, that a film can be declared "good" even though it may not explicitly contain the message of salvation, and that our schools can perform plays that possess literary integrity but may lack a mor-

alistic bent. Reformed Christian education embraces *both* cultural Christianity *and* soteriological Christianity, with the former providing the context for the latter. Christology, if you will, equals cosmology plus soteriology. Christ is the revelatory and mediating Word for *both* creation *and* redemption.

But the Christian world is divided over a second issue that impacts curriculum: *integration* versus *integrality*. Most Christian schools advertise that they integrate faith and learning. How much they actually do this in practice is a topic for another time. But the phrase “integration of faith and learning” by itself reflects an incorrect view of created reality. In essence, this statement adds (sacred) faith to a (secular) subject to consecrate it and make the subject holy. In other words, the subjects we study in school — studies which, in fact, represent various facets of created reality — are seen as being secular (not God-owned, -connected, or -serving). They can only be made holy by adding faith. Grace must be added to nature to sanctify it. This is simply a classic form of dualism under the guise of holistic Christian teaching.

The biblical truth of the matter is that all things in the world already belong to God who created and sustains them. They are integral in nature — complete, lacking nothing essential. Thus, Reformed Christian education chooses to use the word “integral” over “integration.” The difference may appear to be small, but the concept behind this difference is huge. In the former, God is seen as sovereign; in the latter, he is not. To paraphrase Abraham Kuyper: “Either Christ is Lord over every square inch of this universe — Lord of all — or he is not lord at all.” Integrality states that all things belong to God. Our task is not to *claim* territory for Christ; rather, our obligation is to acknowledge and demonstrate his existent sovereignty over that territory.

Our schools need to teach the doctrine of all things. God created all things good. Even after the Fall, which indeed affects and infects all things, the creation remained good — that is, integral. Redemption impacts all things, redirecting them toward their God-designated purposes. Someday, all things will be made completely new. Praise God!

### A new world order

Christian education cannot be “nice” and “safe” education any more than the Christian life described in the Sermon on the Mount can be “nice” and “safe.” Christ’s message was both radical and counter-cultural. To see it as anything less is not to understand the impact of the Fall on all things. All things and all people have been corrupted in all ways. The redemption of Christ is more than a mere attitude adjustment; it is a transformation — of all things. He has introduced a new world order — a kingdom of light and righteousness that will, in time, obliterate the kingdom of darkness. The kids of the kingdom who occupy desks in our schools today are invited and even commanded to join with Christ in this transformation of the world in which they live.

The Book of Revelation records the words of God: “I am making everything new!” The sentence preceding that one provides the reason: “...for the old order of things has passed away.” This new order of the kingdom of God was ushered in during Christ’s earthly ministry. Matthew tells us: “From that time on Jesus began to preach, ‘Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near.’” Establishing the new order of his kingdom was the central theme of Christ’s earthly ministry. His perfect life, atoning death, and victorious resurrection were the lynch-pins in this cosmic transformation of reality. The good news of the gospel message encompasses far more than personal

salvation. It involves life as it originally was meant to be lived — abundant life, beginning now but extending into all eternity. The repentance of which Christ preached was a turning from the old order of things in the kingdom of darkness to the new order of things in the kingdom of light.

A kingdom curriculum is a transformed curriculum — one that incorporates a new world order for all things. It is both radical and counter-cultural.

### Continuity of the abundant life

A sign in an Anglican church in Plymouth, England, reads: “We believe in life before death.” That simple statement speaks volumes for education. The focus is not on avoiding hell or even going to heaven; rather it is on life — union with the Father through the Word and Spirit (John 17:3) — that begins already, here and now, in this world. We are commanded to know the Father in his fullness and to glorify him in all things, in all ways. That is life in abundance, a life that will last into all eternity. With our glorified bodies we will someday be able to plumb the depths of who God is through all modes of divine revelation. And in response we will glorify him in as many forms and ways as our intelligence and creativity will allow. Praise God that we have the opportunity to experience life before death.

Christian education has been designed to equip covenant youth to know the Father in his fullness through the Word and Spirit, and to glorify God in all things. All this, so that the world may know that *Yahweh* is Sovereign and Jesus Christ is Lord — of all! ☪

<sup>1</sup>Pearcey, N. (2004). *Total Truth: Liberating Christianity From Its Cultural Captivity*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books. p. 45.





# All About Order and Love

*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.*

## Classroom management complex

### Question #1

I am having difficulty with classroom management. Do you have any suggestions?

### Response:

Since I do not know your particular situation, I will give some general suggestions involving gaining the students attention, teaching, establishing routines, modelling behavior and planning. I realize classroom management is complex and you would do well to find someone in your own school who could possibly mentor you. It is our responsibility to provide the best learning environment for the students so that they can learn all there is to learn about God's awe-inspiring world.

#### 1. Gain the students' attention.

In order to teach effectively, the teacher requires the attention of the students. Whether the teacher is talking or demonstrating, all students must focus on the teacher in order to learn the concept that is being taught. If a teacher begins to teach when the students are not quiet and have not given their full attention, students will not learn what is being taught. Far too often a teacher will begin teaching when only some of the attention is focused on the teacher. You know what happens. The teacher tries to compete with the students' noise and will invariably have to stop and repeat. Take the time to get the attention of all of the students before beginning to teach. Add a few seconds once you have gained their attention to help the students understand that the teacher "has the floor." If a student begins to talk while you are teaching, stop, re-establish the focus, wait and then proceed. Instruct the children that you expect them to listen, that they must remain in their seats, and that you will answer questions only after the instructions are given.

Students may have to be taught what kind of behaviors indicate that they are paying attention. Some teachers of younger students use a "Give Me Five" technique, holding up their hand and students responding with the same. The five represent: Hands

(on the desk, in their lap or opening text), Feet (flat on the floor), Eyes (on teacher or textbook), Ears (To whom should you be listening?), and Brain (focused on activity being taught). Teach and re-teach this expectation until it becomes a habit. It has been said it takes 21 days to form a habit.

#### 2. Teach a new concept.

As obvious as it may sound, students must be *taught* a new concept in order for them to learn it. Doing a worksheet may reinforce students' understanding, but a new concept is less likely to be grasped just by having it presented in worksheet format. Students must be assessed to determine what they do not know and then taught the concept or skill which they do not understand. Direct teaching involves telling the students what will be taught, the steps that will be taken to learn the concept and the activity needed to reinforce the concept. With some students you may also have to indicate a time frame. Uncertainty increases the level of excitement in the classroom. Having taught the concept, the teacher must circulate in the classroom, watching that the students are doing the follow-up activity correctly. The action taken at this point will save both the teacher and the student time since this initial observation gives the teacher opportunity to help the student who doesn't understand the concept.

#### 3. Establish routines.

If the activity involves a worksheet, instruct the students to put their papers (with their names on them) in a particular place. Establishing routines eliminates confusion and eventually allows for more learning time. Have students hand assignments to the beginning of the row, have them collected or have the students put them in a specific place. Handing them to the front of the row allows for less movement in the class, but on the other hand requires class time. Adults take routines for granted but I have noticed that young children have to be taught how to pass papers to the front of the row without a lot of movement.

By listing on the board the activities or assignments that the students are to complete during a given period of time, the students know what is expected without interrupting the teacher who may be working with other students. In addition, listing or posting the activities that students may do when they have completed the mandatory assignments allows students to move on to enrichment activities without interrupting the teacher to gain permission. By establishing routines students can take ownership of their own learning.

#### 4. Model appropriate behavior.

Students learn what is modelled. If the teacher uses a quiet



voice while walking about the classroom, the students are more likely to do the same. If the teacher uses a quiet voice while working with another group of children, and has them respond in the same manner, the remainder of the students are likely to keep the noise level lower: they will be using their whispering voices. A non-verbal cue, such as a bell, will alert the students to the need to focus on the teacher. A gentle touch, moving in close proximity to a disruptive child, or inserting a child's name in a comment (e.g. "In this exercise, Jared, we need...") will help a student focus. Draw attention to a desired behavior exhibited by a student, rather than to a negative behavior. A teacher's I-messages such as: I expect... I need you... Or I want you... lead to effective communication.

#### 5. Do planning.

One of the keys to classroom management is planning. If students are not challenged to learn at their level, they will find something to do, and it may not be constructive in the classroom setting. Initial assessment enables the teacher to know the ability level of the students. Some students will need enrichment, while others will experience challenges in their learning. Grouping will have to remain flexible because students may excel in one area and need extra encouragement in another. Appropriate differentiation of learning tasks will help eliminate disruptive behavior because most students choose to learn, provided they can do so at their ability level.

As stated earlier classroom management is a complex issue, but if students are expected to focus, care is taken to teach new concepts, routines are established, desired behaviours are modelled and adequate planning is in place, a teacher will be well on the way to creating a positive learning environment.

## Empathy natural or taught?

### Question #2

Why is it that some teachers just naturally exhibit empathy for students and others do not? Is it something that has to be learned or must we accept that some will not show the same emotion as others?

### Response:

The Oxford definition of empathy is the ability to identify oneself mentally with a person or thing and so understand his feelings or meaning. Our task as teachers is to serve, a task that

necessitates the ability to identify with our students in their struggles and in their joy. As Stronks and Blomberg state,

"The coherence that all things have in Christ is ultimately the interconnectedness of service. All things were made to serve each other. The soil serves humans by sustaining life, yet humans serve the soil by tilling it so that it flourishes. The God who is Love made a world at the heart of which love is the beat. Serving, loving, and knowing are thus three facets of the same gem. Each in its own way proclaims that standing and walking in right relationships is God's purpose for his creatures. When the reign of the Prince of Peace is truly recognized on earth, then it will be characterized by that dynamic harmony that is shalom" (1993, pg. 93).

It is this sense of harmony or peace with which we want to infuse our classrooms.

We understand that God has created each one of us unique and, therefore, each teacher operates out of that uniqueness. God's Word to the Galatians is applicable to us today and encapsulates many aspects of empathy. We are instructed to live by the Spirit and exhibit the fruit of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Gal. 5:22-25). Our created personality and our past experiences have a bearing on how we react to situations. If we are finding that we are unable to identify with our students' hurts and difficulties we have to do some individual and communal soul-searching to ensure that the expression of Christ's love is experienced in our classroom and in the school in general. Observation of others, reading and discussion are avenues which will help us in our quest of life-long learning. ☺

### Reference:

Stronks and Blomberg, 1993. *A Vision With a Task*. Grand Rapids, Bakker Books.



# Book Reviews

Bret Lott, editor, *The Best Christian Short Stories*. Stories by Homer Hickam, Larry Woiwode, Calvin Schaap, and others. Nashville, Tennessee: West Bow Press. 2006. 252 pages  
Reviewed by Steve J. Van Der Weele, Calvin College (Retired)

This collection of short stories represents a bold venture. Editor Lott announces it as such, as if in bright, bold colors. He begins his introduction by giving us his name and then informs us, in the same sentence, that he believes in the Apostle's Creed, which he then quotes in its entirety. He continues: "The book you are holding in your hands is about the most radical book you can read: We are writers who, by the power of Christ, are trying to smash the gates of serious literature with the joy and light and hope of a personal, saving, supernatural God." He does, indeed, choose serious stories — stories that go beyond the scores of popular Christian narratives whose meaning lies close to the surface and require only a minimum of probing. The stories in Lott's collection resonate with the reader because of how they mirror the human condition in sometimes disturbing ways. They hold in common a transcendent presence, an acknowledgement of sin and the brokenness of our world, and the reality of redemptive grace.

So, what are the stories like? Well, they are lively, they are good at setting us in a world different from the one we inhabit in real life, they provide suspense, and they offer challenges as they "hold the mirror up to nature." They are geographically diverse. We get whisked to the dirt roads of Africa, to an island off the shore of North Carolina, to a California suburb, to a young people's summer camp. These authors know well the worlds they fashion, employing details and vocabulary peculiar to the world of the story.

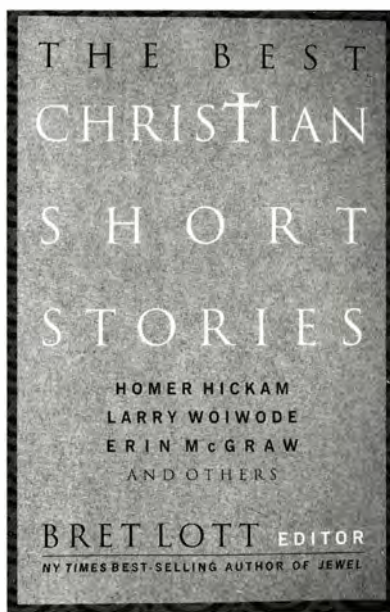
## Otherworldly reality

The transcendent presences vary from an epiphany in "Loud Lake" as experienced by two young campers who meet on the lake in their efforts to deal with the tangled relationships involving their parents, fellow campers, and the overly-zealous camp director, to the glass baby Jesus which the Bainers win in a lottery and lash to the chimney ("Things we Knew"), to the rhythms of bitterness and joy Sharon Farley ("The Virgin's Heart") experiences in her self-effacing role as matron of an orphanage operated by a mission in Tiddersane, Africa. The stories ultimately affirm, though the affirmation is never easily won. It must be said that, if many readers fail to sense the religious symbolism of, say, *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*, they will be hard put to discern the Christian pulse beat of at least some of these

stories. Here is where Editor Lott's brief but helpful introductions come into play.

In his comments he makes explicit what he regards as implicit in the stories — now and then, perhaps, more by inference rather than actual words of the text. Lott apparently assumes that since this cadre of writers are all Christians — baptized, forgiving, and forgiven people — their work will disclose a Christian sensibility. Fair enough — and a good way to proceed.

James Schaap's "Exodus" mirrors the universality of thousands of real-life marriages that have run aground. Think of the many young women who imbibe the notion from early on that they need to get out of the house as soon as possible and marry one of the first eligibles that comes around. Realities — including children — set in. The stresses of jobs and incompatible character traits soon make their appearance, and the marriage becomes strained to the breaking point. Then the parents of the daughter seek to rescue her by taking her back to their own home — children and all. But when a final confrontation occurs with the daughter's husband, things get messy. As Lott points out in his comments, all the parties have been accomplices in this disaster, and all of that must be acknowledged if things are ever going to be put to rights once more.



## Beyond externals

"Landslide," by David McGlynn, is another story which probes beneath appearances and shows up realities. The first-person narrator is one of two students at a Christian college where the Christian ethos is all-pervasive — symbols, dress, pressures to evangelize (fellow students, if necessary), dating protocol, assumptions that the students will spend some of their academic years in a mission field — who find their return from a wedding dramatically interrupted by a landslide. Though the actions of police and rescue workers occupy several pages, the focus of the story involves the relationship between the two students. Greg has come to this college more or less because he has always attended religious schools, but his passionate commitment to science rather than to the religious expectations of the college place him somewhat at odds with the narrator of the story, destined to become a successful preacher. The seminarian/narrator confesses that he failed his friend Greg on especially two occasions. He refused Greg's suggestion to delay their return home



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by a night after the road is cleared (a sensible suggestion) because he, the graduating seminarian, refused to cancel his opportunity to preach the next day. Then, when Greg called him for help some time later, instead of hopping a plane and meeting with his former friend, he made a few phone calls and went back to bed. Not all his successes as a pastor can banish the memories of his selfishness.

### Negative traits

Another story that penetrates below surface rectitude and exposes spiritual pathologies is "Ax of the Apostles," by Erin McGraw, one of my favorites. The setting is a Catholic seminary, where a domineering Father Thomas Murray fulminates about (as he sees it) the decline of student intelligence (look at the title; he does have a point, doesn't he?); student levity centering on Alice, a mannequin; a lack of seriousness among the student body. Student Adreson is more devoted to his talent for running than to his studies. But Father Murray has his secret sins. After being ordered by his doctor to shed tens of pounds as a way of managing his diabetes, he becomes a craver for food. Thoughts of food occupy his mind obsessively while grading papers and performing his holy offices. He makes midnight raids on the refrigerator and stuffs cookies in his pockets. Moreover, when a student needs to leave the seminary to care for his ailing mother, he displays an incredible lack of sensitivity. None of these deficiencies are lost on the students, who are more astute than the Father gives them credit for and display the compassion lacking in their teacher. Adreson and Father Murray now make a compact. Adreson will coach his mentor in running, and Father Murray, after reading one of Adreson's inept papers, says, "I'm here to save you." That could be a redemptive relationship.

David Drury's "Things we Knew when the House Caught Fire" also reflects unfavorably on the first person narrator. As a child

of a suburban family, he sees the encroachment of the Bainer family on their antiseptic world with disdain — and envy. The Bainers are everything the prim suburbanites are not — uncouth, neglectful of lawn and house, insensitive to prestige and wealth. But the Bainers serve as a mirror to the rest of the suburb. Their spontaneity, freshness, heedlessness of conventional mores, refusal to play the ordinary social games — all these stir up a kind of jealousy in the narrator. They don't have a right to such happiness; it isn't fair. And the big joke occurs when their home burns and firemen can't open the heavy doors through which the trucks must exit. Allaray, a tomboy, braves the fire by climbing a stepladder and fastening the glass Jesus which the family had won in a lottery (of all people!) to the chimney, for all to see. "The Results of a Dog Going Blind," by Rebecca Schmuck, reminds one of Eastern folk tales, displaying how ineptly, how blindly, society responds to various disabilities. Brett Lott's contribution, "An Evening on the Cusp of the Apocalypse" reminds us of our vulnerabilities in our highly technological world. Homer Hickam's "Dosie of Killakeet Island" narrates how a self-centered young woman achieves a focus to her life by reflecting the community ethos of Killakeet Island when she decides to search for her fiancé, missing in action.

"Resolved" is a pleasant story where families at loggerheads come together in planning a funeral. And Larry Woiwode's "First-born," (first published in 1989; all the other stories date from 2004 to 2006) powerfully portrays the pending reconciliation between a young New York couple — both refugees from other parts of the country — in the wake of the death of their firstborn son, an episode that reflects much that has gone wrong with their marriage heretofore.

Let us hope that this is the first of a continuing series of "The Best Christian Stories" series. It is off to a good start.

Quentin Schultze, *An Essential Guide to Public Speaking: Serving Your Audience with Faith, Skill, and Virtue*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic. 2006, 111 pages.

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

The world is moved by words — lectures, summons to battles, pleas for causes, parliamentary debates, campaign rhetoric, sales pitches, sermons, proceedings in courts of law, and so much more. When the speaker is a person of integrity and performs well, he or she accomplishes much. But that which is best, when corrupted, becomes the worst. One needs only to think of such speeches as Antony's address at Caesar's funeral, or Hitler's or

Joe McCarthy's diatribes to recall how rhetoric can be put to dangerous uses. To offset these, we have the address of Queen Elizabeth to her troops, Edmund Burke's addresses in Parliament on behalf of the colonies, the rhetorical power of the speeches of Lincoln and Churchill to their audiences at crucial points in their respective nations' histories.

Schultze, in fact, devotes a good deal of attention to the history



of rhetoric. He points out how already in the ancient world some speakers would reduce the act of public speaking to a commodity — an act to win fame, or to flatter, or to sell an idea through cleverness rather than through articulated wisdom. He illustrates his point from no one less than Augustine, who majored in oratory but had to change his ways when he converted to the Christian faith. (Schultze remains a hard student of Augustine). Schultze quotes generously from ancient and medieval writers as well as from such contemporary folk as Solzhenitsyn and even U2's Bono, both of whom relate the impoverished rhetoric of our time to pathologies that derive from the widespread spiritual malaise based on desire for self-fulfillment. He also finds Scripture a valuable source for defining the art of communication — from such biblical narratives involving Moses, Jacob and Esau, as well as wisdom from the Book of Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and glowing passages from the writings of St. Paul.

### Rhetoric for service

Schultze has organized his book into seven chapters and six Appendices, in addition to a brief but valuable introduction. In that introduction he calls upon his readers to reclaim Augustine's vision of rhetoric and to look on public speaking as "a noble practice," an opportunity to serve as God's messenger. He observes, "As stewards of God's gift of speech, we are all called to be servant speakers skillfully offering our verbal and nonverbal messages as living sacrifices in the service of our neighbors and to the glory of the Lord." (11)

The title chapters reveal Schultze's emphasis on speaking as an act of service — one which, of all people, Christians should perform well. "Speaking in the World" is a fine reminder of the complex world in which we live, and how crucial it is to acknowledge "the multicultural democracies" which form the context of our lives. "Naming Responsibly" is a summons to responsible use of language. "Addressing Challenges" contains encouragement for achieving self-confidence through reflection on what needs to be said and how it can be said well. "Listening Well" enjoins us to read widely, and with a large net, and to remember Augustine's admonition that all truth is God's truth, regardless of where it is found. "Crafting Carefully" contains many practical tips, many of them based on common sense: advice about adjusting the speech to the audience, the importance of storytelling, and the art of expressive verbal and nonverbal deliv-

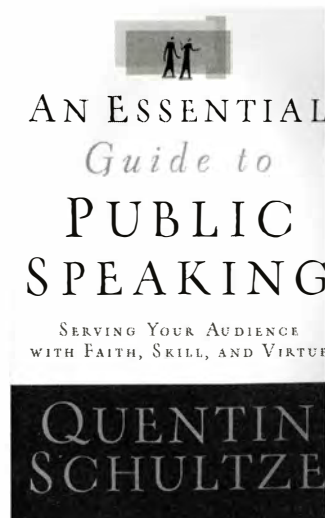
ery. And throughout the book he refers to the episode of Jeremiah breaking a pot in front of his people to dramatize the destruction awaiting them if they continue in their wickedness. "Speaking Truthfully" challenges the speaker to do his homework, so that what he or she says is reliable, and to provide the sources of his information.

### Virtuous speech

The last chapter surely is unique among books about rhetoric. It is entitled "Being Virtuous." To be a good speaker in the most comprehensive sense requires that one be a good person. He defines an array of biblical virtues and explains how integral they are to one's effectiveness as a speaker: Joy, Peace, Patience, Kindness, Goodness, Gentleness, Faithfulness, and Self-Control. These brief reflections can serve well for a week's worth of devotional readings. The book includes sidebars, on almost every page: some emphasizing the servant role of the speaker, others providing practical tips that can be put to immediate use.

Schultze presents us, in succinct and readable form, a holistic view of the art of public speaking. That view includes respect — even love — for the audience, genuine interest in the subject, and an awareness of the audience he is addressing and for what purpose. One's presentation will be controlled by his or her controlling beliefs and will exhibit integrity, accuracy, careful thought, and passion. Such a performance will not only be free of pain to the audience, but will be a source of pleasure.

What a fine book and, if widely distributed and followed, as it should be, how effectively it can improve the level of our discourse — as individuals, among families, and as members of the various groups and organizations to which we belong. Schultze has achieved a remarkable balance: he has defined the spiritual basis for all communication, especially public speaking, as well as offering a host of practical suggestions — dos and don'ts to improve one's effectiveness. Several of his endorsers are teachers who are finding his book valuable in their courses. It is not hard to see why. Others, such as Eugene Peterson, sees the book as a voice that calls for truth and builds community. Yes, it is that, too — as well as a summons to responsible participation in the life of our times. ©



# *"Style Invitational"*

*The Washington Post's "Style Invitational" once again asked readers to take any word from the dictionary, alter it by adding, subtracting, or changing one letter, and supplying a new definition. Here are last year's winners:*

- Bozone (n.):** The substance surrounding stupid people that stops bright ideas from penetrating. The bozone layer, unfortunately, shows little sign of breaking down in the near future.
- Cashtration (n.):** The act of buying a house, which renders the subject financially impotent for an indefinite period.
- Sarchasm (n):** The gulf between the author of sarcastic wit and the person who doesn't get it.
- Inoculatte (v):** To take coffee intravenously when you are running late.
- Hipatitis (n):** Terminal coolness.
- Osteopornosis (n):** A degenerate disease. (This one got extra credit.)
- Karmageddon (n):** It's like, when everybody is sending off all these really bad vibes, right? And then, like, the Earth explodes and it's like, a serious bummer
- Decafalon (n.):** The grueling event of getting through the day consuming only things that are good for you.
- Glibido (v):** All talk and no action.
- Dopeler effect (n):** The tendency of stupid ideas to seem smarter when they come very quickly.
- Arachnoleptic fit (n.):** The frantic dance performed just after you've accidentally walked through a spider web.
- Caterpallor (n.):** The color you turn after finding half a grub in the fruit you're eating.