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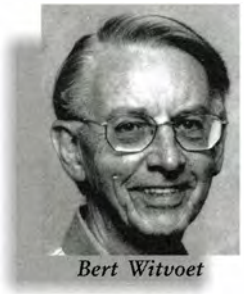
Editorial


Bert Witvoet

Blinded by the god of Our Age

Truth is very important in God's world. Jesus said time and again: "I tell you the truth," and then he made a statement or told a story. Why did Jesus make a point of reminding his hearers that he was speaking the truth? He must have realized that the usual discourse or teaching of his day was shot through with lies. Jesus was surrounded by liars in the form of religious leaders. Witness the heated exchange between him and some Jewish leaders in John 8: 44: "You belong to your father, the devil.... When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies." And so he set himself apart from contemporary rabbis by repeating over and over again, "I tell you the truth."

In Jesus' day and in ours, there are two enemies of the truth: people who lie and people who are blind. Those who lie know the truth but suppress it. Those who are blind are not lying; they just don't know where the truth is situated. I would say that our society and our culture suffers mostly from blindness. Lies play a significant role in ordinary human relations. But blindness is a sickness that infects all of us, even institutions. Satan himself is not blind. He knows what is true and what is false. But he has managed to drop the fog of blindness into this world so that even well-intentioned and honest people can and do mislead us.

Honest groping

Blindness explains why smart astronomers and physicists do not see the name of God written in this universe. Blindness explains why kind people think it's inhumane to have laws against abortion on demand. Blindness explains why decent and honest people believe that the source of knowledge is human rationality and intuition. Blindness causes pollution and destruction of species, dependence on the might of weaponry and a trust in unlimited economic growth. Blindness argues that education should be neutral, that democracy is the road to happiness, and that there is no such thing as absolute truth.

Has anything changed since the beginning of time? Jesus railed against the Pharisees as "blind guides," and the Apostle Paul defends the gospel of truth by saying that "the god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God" (2 Corinthians 4:4). One could also expect such a statement to be made in 2 Torontonians 5:1 or 1 New Yorker 3:7. The god of our age has blinded the minds of our contemporaries.

Spiritual submission

But in the darkness of this world, a light came, and that light was the true light that gives light to everyone. Jesus, the Son of God, is able to give sight to the spiritually blind so that all who believe in him can recognize the truth, can know it and live out of it.

Knowing the truth is first of all a spiritual matter. Why? Because truth is a mystery that goes far beyond our comprehension. Truth is not a set of propositions that we must try to apprehend. In fact, we cannot apprehend truth; it must apprehend us. The same thing holds true for our relationship with the Holy Spirit. We as Christians don't need to ask the Holy Spirit into our hearts; he's already there. We don't need more of the Spirit. He needs more of us. Thus, the challenge for us is to submit ourselves to the power of God's truth.

That truth is absolute, but our knowledge of that truth is not absolute. Paul tells us clearly in 1 Corinthians 13 that we know in part. The King James rendition says that we "see through a glass darkly," or perhaps the image is of looking at yourself in a distorted mirror. Whatever the original text had in mind, we know that our knowledge of the truth is incomplete — not necessarily wrong, but limited. Christians confess that God is the source of truth. He is the maker of all things. Only he knows how the creation hangs together. God reveals things to us that help us understand in part. That awareness gives us both confidence and humility.

Living the truth

Our knowledge is first of all a trust in God's faithfulness. The etymological origin of the word "truth" is, in fact, "troth." *Troth* refers to faithfulness, reliability, loyalty and veracity. In that sense, truth refers to a relationship we have with God and with his creation. God's truth tells it like it is. That truth is revealed in his Word but it also lies embedded in his Creation. Truth is a pathway we must follow. It is not, first of all, a set of doctrinal statements that we do well to embrace. It is not, first of all, a worldview that we do well to incorporate. It is a dynamic reality that we must live with all our hearts and minds.

How do we stand over against the claims of our society that truth is relative, or that there are many truths, or many paths that lead to God? We admit that our knowledge of truth is imperfect, but the source of truth is absolute. When human beings no longer see God as the source of truth, they have discarded the compass they will need for the journey of life. Truth is not only a compass for us; it is a path on which we travel. In Psalm 26: 3 David confesses, "For your love is ever before me, and I walk continually in your truth."

Of course, you cannot speak of truth without speaking of knowledge. How do we know the truth? Philosophers have come up

with different theories about knowledge of truth. I will mention five different theories here.

Five theories

First of all, there is the "correspondence" theory of truth. Whatever corresponds to the reality out there is truth. I like that definition if you place it in the context of God's creation and his revelation. The second theory is called the "coherence" theory. Whatever hangs together can be seen as truth. This is important, of course. Our knowledge of truth has to have internal integrity. But if it does not correspond to God's reality, no amount of coherence safeguards the truth.

Thirdly, there is the "constructivist" theory of truth. In this theory, truth is seen as an historical and culturally conditioned social construct. There is no transcendental truth here. The fourth is the "consensus" theory. Whatever a group of people agrees on is the truth. Not a very solid foundation for truth, if you ask me. Fifthly there is the "pragmatic" theory of truth. In this theory, truth is confirmed by good results. But who decides what is a good result?

All these theories make truth look very unstable, not grounded. Even the "correspondence" theory is nothing without faith in God's revealed Word and without the lifting of our blindness by the Spirit of truth. In a perfect world I would trust all five theories of truth. Truth must correspond to reality, must cohere, will be expressed in cultural diversity, should have consensus, and will yield good results. But if you fail to take into account the story of what has happened to us during the course of history — a good creation with reliable structure, a fall into sin with its resulting blindness and lies, forgiveness and redemption through the sacrifice and resurrection of Jesus, and the ultimate restoration of the new earth — then you miss out on the new rules for interpreting reality.

Truth will out

The history of humankind is replete with the suppression of the truth, but truth has a way of breaking through. Have you noticed how empires that rely on human strength always collapse? Have you noticed that crooks often get caught in unforeseen ways? "Truth will out!" Not always, of course. Some lies persist and cover up the truth until the Day of Reckoning when the book of true history will be opened. But there is something left in the creation that resists and rejects the lie. We call that common grace. The fallen world is still upheld, and the goodness of the original creation still shines through. Humanist theories about truth also collapse in time. That's because the lie is basically alien to the creation. Evil doesn't work. The creation groans every time evil is injected into its veins. It gasps and vomits until the poison is cleared away by the truth.

But the real hope lies not in the remnant of a good creation, in common grace. Common grace restrains evil but does not get rid of it. Our real hope lies in the dispensation of special grace and truth. Light and Truth have come into this world in the person of Jesus Christ, who successfully defeated the father of all lies. God's Word and Spirit have been given to us as guides in the wilderness of confusing theories about truth. We may pray for the lifting of blindness and for the removal of lies in our midst so that our walking in truth will correspond to God's reality, will be coherent, will be expressed in personal and cultural diversity, will have consensus and will yield good results

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The Role of Spiritual Formation Within Our Cultural Context

by Stephen Janssen

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"Why don't they do it all at once? This is so boring. It's pathetic," she said.

Thunderous explosions drew me out into the darkness toward a gathering group of neighbors. Yesterday was Canada day, and last evening some of our neighborhood gathered to watch a fireworks display presented by our local rotary club. For twenty-five minutes the sky was lit up with various colorful displays, followed by a concluding volley of impressive proportion for a town our size. A young teen-age girl watching in the darkness behind me offered the above words only a few minutes after I arrived, seemingly unimpressed with the visual celebration taking place before her. In disgust she plugged her second white earphone back into her ear, as her face reflected in the soft glow of the LCD display of her I-Pod. Evidently she preferred her own world over the approving applause and social happiness clearly evident in what looked to be her parents and grandparents gathered near her.

My quick stroll back home in the dark afforded me a moment's reflection. Although I didn't know the larger story of the young person, her words jolted me. I simply couldn't identify with her sentiments. If fireworks filling the night sky weren't a spectacle worth her attention, what was? My mind wandered to the things that impressed me or captured my attention at her age.

Spending time at the local library where the "teens and 'tweens" find a portal in their cyber- hangout at the public internet stations has been, for me, an experience that reminds me I am a foreigner in their new world. I teach students that were born when I finished high school. There is something familiar, yet significantly different about this generation of young people — some of whom I now am trusted to educate. With a mixture of fascination, fear, and faith I watch how they balance the challenge of discipleship and cultural participation.

I have read articles and books about the faith development of this upcoming generation by such authors as Syd Hielema, Richard R. Dunn and Craig Dykstra. There seems to be some consensus among Dykstra, Dunn, and Hielema about the nature of how our present cultural context has shaped a generation, specifically in the formation and development of a spiritual life. Several key themes are apparent:

Individualism

A new brand of individualism, one that is egocentric, seems to have adversely shaped young people to have a faith that thinks highly of themselves, little of the value of community, and even less of self-sacrifice. Part of humility and service to others is the willingness to work without potential of personal gain. Indeed, the substance of quality relationships is not only time spent, but loyalty promised. Sadly, "the virtue of loyalty — which accepts limitations to one's options — is seen as naive and even irresponsible," says Richard R. Dunn.[1] Culture has driven relationships to be manipulative, short-term, and self-serving.

This generation's concept of faith has not remained immune to individualism. Dunn comments that the privatization of faith has not only reduced faith to morality, has also combined with mass-produced clothing, music, and entertainment seeking to be "more-over-the top," has become sense-dependent. The prevalence of YouTube, I-Pods, and cell phones that function as identity-keepers reveal a culture that needs electronic stimulation like a plant needs water. Indeed "the need for speed and volume and sensation increases with each new wave of youth-culture media."[2]

Further, Richard Dunn comments: "The sensate culture worldview is a logical outcome of immersion in a sensate culture that has cut loose from its ideational roots. In postmodernity what one can experience *is* one's reality."[3]

Without "ideational roots" to make sense of a culture shaped by a hunger to consume experiences rather than know truth, reality becomes exasperating as one experience is disappointingly overshadowed by another. If experience, rather than truth is paramount, then adolescents have little to guide them through self-concept development, cultural participation and growth in the life of faith. Unfortunately, the media nearly screams the message: "If it feels good, do it" and "do it unless it starts to feel bad."[4] The cost of individualism is high. Dunn laments "adolescents naturally begin to gauge the value of their lives by the level of sensory payoff."[5] There is plenty in the development of the life of faith that has little or no "immediate sensory payoff." Growing in faith often means we must "be still before the Lord and wait patiently for him." (Psalm 37:7)

Constructivist, Relativist Truth

If experience, rather than truth, is the measure of the greatness of all things, then the exclusivity of truth is frustratingly limiting. Eager to shed the restrictions of a one-truth world, our current cultural context shows contempt at such claims that restrain our "frenzied pursuit of pleasure."[6] Dunn summarizes this reality well: "Absolute truth claims, whether moral or religious, are out. Personalized belief systems

and pragmatic moral commitments are in."[7]

In the wake of the implosion of exclusive truth very little can be assumed about engaging others within culture. Indeed, "the only standard we can impose upon each other is the "standard of tolerance."[8] This places adolescents in communities of faith awkwardly straddling a faith that joyously claims that all truth is God's truth, and a culture that has no room for such exclusivity.

Information Overload

Storage of, rather than access to (or understanding of), information is likely to be more problematic to adolescents today. The avalanche of information that bombards the world of the contemporary adolescent is staggering. Perhaps as a method of coping, the sensate teen is drawn towards a "spirit of intrigue" that leads many to become "consumers, rather than users"[9] of information. With little time to process anything, the sorting mechanism becomes subconscious; that what is spectacular, exceptional, unusual, revolting, even voluptuous, receives attention. Further, there is an extremely low correlation between the information observed and action taken.[10]

Discernment must become the life raft of students lost in a sea of informational overload while on their faith journey. Discernment "...seeks both the presence of God and the power of evil amid the swirling array of relationships, structures, dynamics, and spirits present in a culture."[11]

Generational disconnect

Every generation faces a cultural landscape that is different from that of their parents. Advancements (or, perhaps more cautiously, changes) in politics, economics, culture, ethics, and technology make parents increasingly strangers in the world of their children. Increasingly, students in contemporary culture experience attractive realities of which their parents know very little, if anything especially in the domain of technology.[12] Unable to truly connect with their children, they are faced with three options: (1) struggle to re-learn many practices and habits alongside their children in order to remain influential in those areas, (2) trust that other forms of education will guide or counter whatever children encounter, or, finally, (3) out of desperation, fear, or fatigue — do nothing. Few students have the luxury of parents with the first attitude.

Richard Dunn captures this disconnect between generations in his comment: "[In the past] seeing life from the perspective of an adolescent was like learning a new dialect of the same language. In this generation caregivers encounter an entirely new language, spoken by postmodern sensate adolescents. Until one can hear and translate the truth into this language, attempts to lead sadly serve only to widen the intercultural, intergenerational gap further."[13]

Methods of parenting, teaching, and faith-nurturing of old may have to be abandoned in order to remain influential in a generation perhaps more unlike their parents than any before.

Devotional practices and community

The natural outcome of the rising trend toward individualism is greater dependency on oneself. The perceived autonomy of the individual perpetuates the lie that "I know what's best for me."

Craig Dykstra observes how the breakdown of community has encouraged this perspective: "The thousands of self-help groups that now flourish throughout our country are filling a vacuum created by the loss of practicing communities of devotion."[14]

This is a departure from living together in a community, observing "disciplined, patterned actions designed to create distinctive ways of seeing, understanding, and being."[15] These "communities of devotion," as Dykstra refers to them, embody the truth that God designed covenant communities for a purpose: so that members may bless, guide, serve, support, care for and encourage each a "chosen people, a royal priest hood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God" (1Peter 2:9)

The cares and concerns of people are not solely inconveniences to be overcome. The nature of many public prayers in communities of faith shows that they are not immune to individualism — many represent personalized wish lists of problems to be solved to make life more comfortable. However, "God doesn't solve all our problems; at best he transforms our understanding of the problems by situating them within the story of his covenanting grace, and he thereby transforms our desires so that our desires become his desires."[16]

Worship, too, is affected by our present cultural context. Made hungry by a sensate culture for intense worship "experiences" and significant faith-connection relationships, many adolescents immerse themselves expectantly in high-powered, high-paced, age-specific events expecting to be filled. Soon emptied of this transient "experience," they rocket up and down looking for a solidity of faith they don't understand takes commitment, long-suffering resolve, and devotional practice.

Focusing on this trend, Syd Hielema comments: "The deepest bonds within the body of Christ are not found in instant intimacy but rather grow through years of faithfulness, shared experiences, and even conflict."[17]

Adding it all up

It is a great challenge not to become overwhelmed, discouraged, and even despondent after studying the contours of the landscape of our present cultural and faith lo-

cales. This sort of stock-taking is an exhausting journey, and, if the journey isn't completed well, it becomes a futile activity. The gift of God's story to his people is the sure knowledge of its most perfect completion. Until that day we must "...stand firm amidst the fuzziness and ambiguities of virtual reality, to cultivate reality ... build community and personal maturity ... and to see Jesus more clearly through the cacophony and over-stimulation of our day."[18]

Let us pray for a quieting of our world to hear the "still small voice" of the Lord.[19]

End Notes:

1. Richard R. Dunn, "Describing the Elephant" in *Pro Rege* 29,(March, 2001) p.14.
2. Ibid, p.12.
3. Ibid, p.12
4. Richard R. Dunn, *Shaping the Spiritual Life of Students,* (Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 2001), p.39.
5. Ibid, p.40.
6. Ibid, p.40.
7. Ibid, p.40.
8. Ibid, p.40.
9. Ibid,p.32.
10. Ibid, p.15.
11. "Describing the Elephant" p.21.
12. For instance, see Marc Prensky's terms "Digital Immigrants, Digital Natives"
13. *Shaping the Spiritual Life of Students,* p 45.
14. Craig Dysktra, *Growing in the Life of Faith, second edition,* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 2005), p.8.
15. Ibid, p.7.
16. "Describing the Elephant" p.13.
17. "Festival Envy, the 4 contexts of worship," Syd Hielema, *Reformed Worship,* available at http://www.reformedworship.org/magazine/article.cfm?article_id=1292
18. "Describing the Elephant" p.24.
19. I'm reminded of singing Mendelssohn's *Elijah*. See NKJ 1Kings 19:12ff.

Should Multiple Perspectives Scare Us?

by Richard Abma

Richard Abma (rwabma@hotmail.com) teaches social studies at Calgary Christian School in Calgary, Alberta.

My grade 10 social studies class went sideways the other day. Yes, "In 1492 Christopher Columbus sailed the ocean blue." However, he was not a good guy, much less a hero, and he did not discover the Americas. In fact, John Cabot did not discover the Canadian eastern shores; nor did Jacques Cartier discover the Gulf of the St. Lawrence River. My students were perplexed. So many things they had learned as true in their grade-five social studies class was being undercut by this new perspective. Was this an example of compromising the truth? What is true? Was this a shift in paradigms that would limit my ability to teach from a biblical perspective? In defence of their existing understanding they pushed back. After some questions and discussion points, they grudgingly acceded to this view, although they showed signs that they were not entirely at peace with it.

Multiple perspectives

What had we encountered that day? Why did it feel as if we just had an educational curve ball thrown at us? It was one of many expressions of the new social studies curriculum that became mandatory in my jurisdiction (Alberta) this academic year. As the introductory matter of the curriculum says, "Exploring citizenship and identity through a multiple-perspectives approach creates a learning environment that promotes mutual respect and understanding among learners, and provides for a more comprehensive understanding of social studies issues" (p.1). When it comes to the "discovery" of America, the alternative First Nations perspective was that all the lands European explorers had come to were already inhabited by them, in some cases with dense populations and well developed civilizations. How could an individual from Europe claim the discovery of a land already discovered and well-populated with First Nations people? My students understood the point of this perspective yet wanted to refer to the European explorers as "European discoverers," meaning that they discovered it *for* the Europeans.

Columbus: no longer a hero?

What we struggled with that October afternoon, and continue to work through, is the postmodern framework the new curriculum is demanding of us. The old familiar perspective has to make room for other possibly less familiar perspectives. Richard Middleton and Brian Walsh point to this in *Truth Is Stranger Than It Used to Be: Biblical Faith in a Postmodern Age.* They say that modernity has ended, first because the "classical form of the Columbus story embodies the worldview that was once central and unproblematic in the West and is now rapidly losing hold on the heart of our culture. The second [reason] is that an alternative version of the Columbus story, the version of the aboriginal peoples, is increasingly being told and *heard* when previously it had been effectively silenced" (p.11).

Pluralistic society

We are experiencing the alternative (and perhaps truer) version of the stories of discovery. In addition to the multiple perspectives with which we are engaged, this curriculum also assumes a position of pluralism. "Central to the vision of the Alberta social studies program is the recognition of the pluralistic and evolving nature of Canadian society" (p.2), says the curriculum guide. Later it goes on to say "Living together in an increasingly pluralistic world requires an understanding and appreciation of diverse viewpoints and perspectives that arise from differences in culture, gender, class, ideology, spirituality, philosophy, values, language and experiences" (p.2). Singular perspectives familiar to teachers in the past are to be replaced with multiple perspectives in our teaching today. Reading further, the document claims that the Alberta social studies program "promotes interactive, experiential, authentic learning that encourages students to challenge their presuppositions and construct their own point of view. It is designed to promote metacognitive thought by encouraging critical reflection, questioning and the consideration of diverse points of view" (p. 5). The promotion of spiritual awareness and personal views of the world and one's place in it underlie a postmodern assumption that the single metanarrative (story) of society is to be replaced with alternative voices, alternative narratives or stories for one's life. Middleton and Walsh are right. "Truth isn't what it used to be."

Alignment with the lie

The initial fear faced by a Christian teacher of social studies framed in such a postmodern way would be significant. Rela-

tivism and pluralism are a threat to our understanding of the singularity and particularity of truth in the person of Jesus Christ. Is it really a threat, or am I just defending my own philosophical version of the truth? Even Christian academics in our community challenge my presuppositions about the truth. As Brian Walsh and Sylvia Keesmaat tell it in *Colossians Remixed: The Subversion of the Empire,* the "past-told stories have proven to be destructive lies. The grand story of the Marxist utopia collapsed along with the Berlin Wall. The heroic tale of technological progress blew up with the Challenger explosion. The progress myth of democratic capitalism that promised economic prosperity and social harmony strains under the weight of economic contradiction, ecological threat, and an ever-widening gap between the rich and the poor, both domestically and internationally" (p.23). No story or worldview — including the story of God's redemption of all of creation in Christ, should be connected to a particular movement in history, whether Marxist, technological, or capitalistic.

"The postmodernist ... insists that stories such as these — stories that have so shaped our lives — are not stories of emancipation and progress after all but stories of enslavement, oppression and violence" (p.23). A Christian perspective that connects itself to these stories will be connected to its enslavement, oppression and violence.

Another problem I encounter is that my quickness to develop a singular Christian worldview about an historic or current issue is challenged by the need to acknowledge alternative and often-contradictory worldviews. The issues are truly complex and can seem greater than our understandings can contain. Unresolved and conflicting multiple perspectives can also lead to fragmentation, numbness and boredom. A student who has enough of a challenge getting his head around one perspective may end up befuddled by a variety of, and potentially conflicting," perspectives. These are all real challenges that need to be worked through.

Positive outcomes

Opportunities presented by such a postmodern framework do exist, however. Postmodernism has proven to be good in the sense that it is about defining or determining one's understanding in the now, in the contemporary moment. As such, how students understand the world *now* is going to be different from the way their parents defined and understood things. Students have a different set of realities by which to come to an understanding of the world. We should also admit that relativism is a reality, to some degree. All views and understandings are based on the relative place in society and history one is placed in. We should not expect even our biblical worldviews to lead to uniformity of thought and expression.

My initial fear going into this year of teaching a postmodern approach to social studies including its relativism and pluralism has diminished. My reservations when planning for this year was that I would be compromising the truth about history and, possibly, even the truth of Christ and the advancement of his kingdom to a plurality of truth claims. What we have actually experienced in our classrooms is that students have unveiled injustices in its many forms. From the imperialistic practices of Great Britain in India and King Leopold II in the Belgian Congo, to the abuses associated with the Canadian residential schools and the exploitation of Mexican laborers of the maquiladoras, and the rural poor of China who migrate to the industrial sweat shops — we have seen much hurt and suffering in this world. We were surprised to find that a transnational corporation had gained legal ownership rights to much of the water of Bolivia. Even rainwater was "owned" in parts of Bolivia, leading to one quarter of the income of some Bolivians going to water costs!

Have we had to compromise the truth in this postmodern, multiple perspective approach to global issues? The more we show injustice for what it is, and the more we unmask the idolatry of political and economic power structures and take the perspective of the poor, the aboriginal peoples and the sweat shop labourers, the more we see the full story of these injustices and the need to live radically Christian lives, following Jesus Christ as "the way, the truth and the life." My experience with the new curriculum has been an affirmation that truth is not a set of familiar facts and familiar perspectives but a life lived following him who is the Truth.

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Curriculum as Noun, Verb, Preposition and Adjective

by Alisa Siebenga

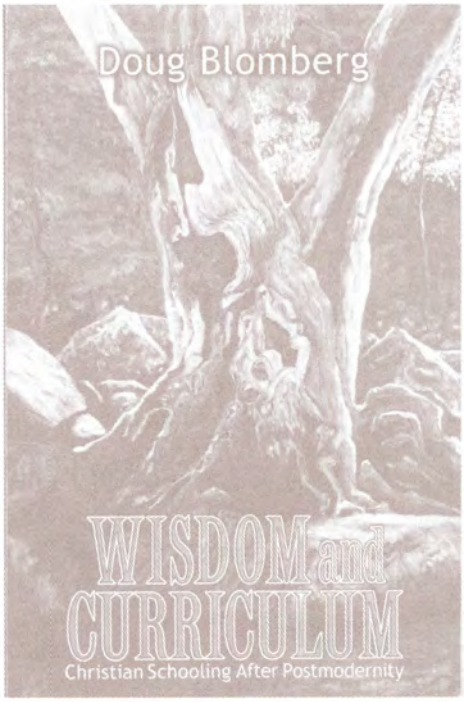
Alisa Siebenga is an educator who lives in Calgary, Alberta.

Doug Blomberg is Senior Member of Philosophy of Education at the Institute for Christian Studies in Toronto. He has written a book entitled *Wisdom and Curriculum: Christian Schooling After Post Modernity*. In this book he displays a passion for wisdom that leads to justice in education. He shows his hand in the following quote:

"I am motivated by concern for those whose obvious talents go unrecognized, unrewarded, and which indeed, are often denigrated by schools. The Bible's teaching on the gifts that God has given to each and every one goes hand in hand with its central injunction to seek God's Kingdom and justice, for justice requires that everyone be given his or her due, that all people be respected for whom they are and that all people be treated with integrity. And justice is one of the prime values that wisdom seeks to realize" (Blomberg, 150).

Imagine a school whose purpose is to seek God's Kingdom. Imagine a school where every child's gifts, not just the academic gifts, are celebrated. Imagine a school where children are trained to seek wisdom in its many varied forms and to become disciples who ably respond to the world around them. If you're like me, I can hear you saying, "Why, that is the aim of our school." Unfortunately, if Doug Blomberg is right, our aims and goals have been derailed by prevailing philosophies that have little to do with a biblical philosophy.

In his book *Wisdom and Curriculum: Christian Schooling After Post Modernity*, Blomberg explores the question of the aim and focus of Christian schooling. His premise is evident as soon as you view the cover. Blomberg chose a painting of a gum tree, which, in the words of Russel McKane, Blomberg's colleague, "is a metaphor of a mature life lived in Christ. We may be scarred by events, but if our faith is rightly based, we are able to stand. Psalm 1:3 describes this as 'wisdom.' We now know this living water: 'Christ the Power and Wisdom of God' (1 Cor. 1: 24)."



The book takes the reader on a journey through complicated and contentious issues where both the philosophies and the assumptions that undergird these issues are unveiled. To help the reader explore the issues, Blomberg begins by taking the reader to the school where he began his journey, Mount Evelyn Christian School. While at Mount Evelyn, he began to think about curriculum as integral rather than just integrated. According to Blomberg, an integral curriculum examines the wholeness of creation. Creation isn't simply something which is objectively studied; it is something that speaks to the learner. Creation speaks because it is one way in which God reveals himself. In the humble conversation between creation and learner, the mystery that is life is revealed with all its puzzles and conundrums.

When the learner is obedient to the will of God and to the normative laws God instilled in creation, as well as empathetic to the situation, righteousness and justice occur. This Hebraic and biblical view contrasts with the dominant view of today's culture which ensnares learners in a dualistic view of theory and practice. Wisdom results when a more biblical view of the learner, the subject and the ways of knowing are employed. For Blomberg, this more biblical view began to see fruition at Mount Evelyn Christian. The success of the school encouraged him to continue exploring a faithful view of Christian education.

A normative reponse

Throughout the book, Blomberg explores the biblical idea of wisdom and contrasts that with the dominant philosophies under which the majority of our Christian schools operate. As one would expect, he begins with the fear of the Lord as the root of wisdom. Wisdom is gained when people experience God's world in its fullness. With a wisdom perspective, experience is more than pounding a hammer, driving a car, or going on a field trip. These are all valid aspects of experience, but experience is also reading, thinking, examining the interconnectedness and diversity of creation. It is when people humbly and faithfully respond to God's creation (hearing and doing God's will), that they are able to pursue wisdom. Blomberg calls this pursuit a normative response, and this response ultimately reveals what is of value.

If biblical wisdom is the goal of education, than curriculum is the way the goal is reached. In his book, Blomberg not only

sets forth a philosophy of Christian education, but he also considers how curriculum aids in the pursuit of wisdom. He begins by parsing the word curriculum into various grammatical forms.

Curriculum as a noun is the course of study; as verb it is the actual experience with the subject; as a preposition it is the framing of the curriculum, the way in which the teacher relates to the student; as an adjective it is a description of the world, or, in other words, the worldview embedded in the curriculum.

After defining curriculum, Blomberg again contrasts a biblical view of curriculum with the dominant view, demonstrating the various "isms" at play in the curricula that are seen only as courses of study — curricula that are used, unfortunately, by all too many Christian schools.

The author continues to lead the reader through this alternate view of curriculum by proposing the play, problem-pose, purposeful response, curricular design; many readers may recall this design from the earlier book by Blomberg and Stronks, *A Vision With a Task*. For those new to the idea, a very basic understanding of the three stages follows.

Three stages

Play is the initial encounter and connection with creation. It forms the basis for learning and draws the learners outside of themselves. In this phase students and teachers, as image bearers, enjoy all God has made, responding in thanksgiving for the good gifts.

Problem-posing deepens the experience of those who have played in God's garden. Here the learners begin to ask questions (or problem pose): What should be done? How is it to be accomplished? Are the proposed actions obedient or disobedient to God's will?

Purposeful response asks for and allows "freely chosen action directed by and toward normative ends; it is wisdom as realization" (200). This response is not conditioned but, instead, it encourages students to respond in a variety of ways. In this phase, students begin to move beyond forming a Christian world and life view, to putting that view into practice. Wolterstorff refers to this as tendency learning. Blomberg refers to it as the formation of character. When students begin to respond thoughtfully and purposefully, maturity and sanctification begin. Blomberg describes himself as a philosopher and lover of wisdom; this is evident throughout the book. Alas, his philosophic bent may prove challenging for some readers. There are places where this book is a demanding read. Fortunately, the more complex aspects of the book are explained through a series of dialogs and characters. ℭ

A Way of Wisdom

Wisdom is learned
experientially
and expressed in ways of acting
sensitive to context.

She is embedded
in reciprocal relationships with the
natural and
social world,
characterized by care and love,
for the world is ordered and coherent,
turned not toward evil but
fundamentally beneficent.

She is communal
as well as individual,
recognizing the authority of an ongoing
tradition but
holding to this flexibly.

She rests in trust,
an optimistic view of life's potential,
intimately linked with
commitment to a source of order and
meaning.

She thus favors radical belief,
characterized by
empathy,
vulnerability,
dialogue,
listening to what the situation
says.

She recognizes a normative
demand;
there is a way one ought to act in a
given situation
and not to do so
is disobedient:
she is partial to justice and righteousness.

She revels in
the dynamic character of life,
the challenges of
the serendipitous and contingent.

She eschews logical control,
knowing her own limitations,
favoring humility and submission,
a patient acceptance of
the mystery at the heart of life.

She accepts there will often be puzzles,
but
does not surrender
her optimism in the face of these,
because of
an undergirding faith
in the interconnectedness and
reliability of all things.

Doug Blomberg

The Road of Two Revelations

by Tony Kamphuis

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God has revealed himself in two books: the Book of Scripture and the book of his creation. Although this sounds like a nice concept, and a biblical one at that, we may not be so keen on it if we give it some thought. In fact it may not be a very "nice" concept at all, because it seems to have the ability to complicate things. On the other hand, not being clear on this point can also make things quite muddy.

The two-book concept provides a solid rationale for having the kind of Christian schools we want: places that are both authentically Christian and genuinely schools. So this idea isn't one we should let slip quietly into the background! Our schools are different from the run-of-the-mill Christian school when we work out of this "dual self-revelation" of God. If we don't move forward with this concept, we'll likely sacrifice the chance to "be all that we can be."

Our schools can be more than "schools with the Bible." We don't need to be like the public school in all things except for the bit of devotional activity or Bible study that happens at the periphery of the school's activities. Rather, we can be Christian in our very approach to all areas of our work. As a school, "our work" is all about studying the complexities of God's creation. That is what all schools — Christian or otherwise — do for six or seven hours a day, whether they acknowledge God or not. This is why schools exist! To do this well, however, Christian schools need a healthy respect for and an understanding of not only God's special revelation through the Bible, but also his general r evelation in creation. And that poses certain difficulties.

Biblical fence posts

Most of us would acknowledge that it can be a real challenge to understand and interpret the Bible consistently and in keeping with its grand truths. But the good thing about focusing primarily on the role of the Bible in education is that such a focus has, at least, a certain self-limiting characteristic: we have to stay relatively close to what has been recorded in Scripture. That means we need to justify our positions, clarify our understandings, and promote our perspectives through appeals to the received text. There is certainly plenty of diversity in understanding that text and its meanings for our lives and times, but, at least, there is a common "touchstone" to which people must appeal if they agree to take the Scriptures seriously.

Producing such well-rounded material is not easy at all!

Too big in scope

But what do we do with the "book of creation"? First of all the contents of the book are so immense and so intricate because each day people around the world uncover new things, new relationships, and new connections. To this vast amount of information we need to add the unimaginable creativity of human interpretation! In the best of circumstances we quickly argue about the meaning of things that we see before us, but with the Bible there is at least some agreement within Christianity about its main themes. When we start to read the book of creation, we seem to have lost even that level of common ground. Not only do we read and interpret differently, but the content of this book changes over time as well! Wouldn't we have a much easier time of it if we just stuck with the written book of revelation, the Bible, as the earmark of a Christian school?

Different approach today

It may be easier, but that ease would be a short-lived experience. And would we really be happy with where that approach would lead us? Consider pedagogy. When we think of what it means to be Christian teachers, we don't turn to the Bible with the expectation that it will give us all we need to know about teaching effectively. To be sure it has some key things to show us in this regard, but often we don't read even those indicators very well until we've gained insight by studying the "book of creation."

For instance, if we go back fifty years or so and peer into the windows of a Christian school classroom, we might witness a pretty serious attempt to study biblical content. But the way in which a teacher from that time brings the material to his students with varied abilities and personalities may be brutally simplistic, revealing a very truncated understanding of learning styles (to say the least) and probably of human nature (to say a great deal more).

Having gained a better understanding of learning styles and human nature through the study of psychology, anthropology and educational philosophy, a trained Christian teacher today would take a different approach. The teacher who keenly desires to be Christian in her approach sees with fresh eyes some themes that actually did reside in scripture all along — that being made in the image of God does not mean we are all identical or that "one approach can fit all" when it comes teaching strategies. Before studying psychology, such a teacher may have seen that idea through a glass darkly, if she was interested in seeing it at all! But after her study of psychology, her

reading of the "book of scripture" is actually enlightened by the reading of the "book of creation."

Biblical corrections

But this works both ways! We are hopefully inoculated against some of the more wayward interpretations of the "book of creation" by what we read and understand from the "book of scripture." We look askance at some beliefs about human nature or the nature of the learner and gently probe at how this understanding came to be. If interpretation of the creation doesn't line up with our reading of scripture, we are rightly skeptical of its claims. The over-the-top claims about the centrality of self-esteem in a child's development comes to mind in this context.

When I look at some of the curriculum material being developed in Christian education circles of late, I rejoice because I see in them a willingness on the part of educators to be shaped by both "books" of God's self-revelation. These curricular materials are not products of a "lop-sided" Christianity. They are, in effect, saying, "We want to be thoroughly Christian, and in order to be that we need to be informed and shaped by God's revelation as it comes to us from all sides."

A real challenge

Producing such well-rounded material is not easy, not easy at all! Those who want simple answers and easy formulas will resist such material and call into question the author's real motivations. "Are you elevating something else to the status of Scripture?" they may ask. "Are you doubting the perspicacity of God's word?" We want to reassure them that we, too, rely on Scripture as we examine the findings of those who operate out of a fundamentally different (secular?) framework. We study their conclusions with the spectacles of scripture firmly in place. Why would we fail to make use of such an amazing gift from God? Still, we shouldn't think that the Bible will just "give us the facts" on something like pedagogy, as encyclopedias might claim to do. What Scripture (special revelation) does do is give us the perspective from out of which we can interpret pedagogy.

Setting a high standard

So what does this mean for us educators in Christian schools? It means we need to embrace both books of God's self revelation. We can't retreat into a simplistic, "We teach the Bible" mentality. Rather we need to be blazing a trail into unexplored areas of God's world, and we need to wonder together at what we find, asking "What does this tell us about God?" "Our fellow humans?" "This amazing creation?" In effect, we will be regarding as true what God tells us in scripture about the other "book" — the creation. And then we need to hold ourselves to a very high standard indeed in regards to how we approach the task of educating children.

Finally, we need to trumpet the importance of not letting this approach be confused and eventually displaced by an easier, but less Christian, take on Christian education. We need to jump with both feet into the investigation of God's marvelous, intricate, diverse and yet unified creation. We need a certain boldness and commitment to this approach, even when we so often get it wrong, or end up being just a little "off."

Because when we get it right — when we capture just enough of this view from both angles — the depth of perception that is sparked deep within our students, the look in their eyes, that sense of awe and the wonder that triteness can never generate … these will never be dislodged.

The Christian School: a Prophetic Voice?

by John Van Dyk

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What makes your school a *Christian* school? This question, easily put aside in the face of pressing practical problems, never goes away. It skulks behind the immediacies of enrollment patterns, finances, and government requirements. We sometimes unwittingly hush its persistent voice with familiar language about Kingdom service, biblical world-and-life views, and a curriculum centered on Jesus.

The distinctiveness of a Christian school is not a mere theoretical matter, of interest only to arm-chair philosophers and abstract academics. On the contrary: the issue addresses our pocket books. To send children to a Christian school (or students to a Christian college) is an expensive enterprise, one that needs increasing justification. Why should parents shell out thousands of dollars in tuition, resources that could save hungry children from starvation?

Positive signs

One answer is that many Christian schools still are wonderful places, populated by dedicated, faithful teachers and principals who love the Lord and who love children, educators who tirelessly seek to do God's will, even when confronted by seemingly insurmountable obstacles. Many Christian schools are still caring, prayer-filled places where seeking the Kingdom first remains high on the agenda. Such distinctively Christian schools, it seems to me, are worth the expense.

Is your school among them? The question takes on renewed urgency in the face of the relentless onslaught of the forces of materialism, consumerism, potential technological abuse, and pop culture. Whereas in former years the Christian school offered some protection from the world's distortions, in our present age of malls, Internet and I-Pods, no defense seems adequate. The enemy is within. Secularism assaults even the most sacred recesses of the Christian life.

Two dualisms

As I work with Christian schools and teachers, both domestically and internationally, I see much ground for gratitude and celebration. The Lord continues to bless, often in surprising ways. Yet I cannot escape a nagging worry about a lingering myopia stalking even the best of our schools, threatening the very reason for their existence. The myopia I mean results from a kind of "double dualism." With one of these two dualisms we have become very familiar, and we have learned to address and critique it — the old medieval dualism between a spiritual, religious part of life practiced in church, Bible study and private morality, and a neutral, secular realm of the standard curriculum, universally accepted assessment and grading practices, and practical teaching methods presumably unaffected by the Gospel. In our schools, honed by the Reformed tradition, we have in theory rejected such medievalism and worked hard at "integrating faith and learning."

> *"Make no mistake, the spirits of the age are evil spirits."*

In practice, however, a second kind of dualism is more subtle and less frequently recognized: it is the dualism between what we say and what we do. What I mean is this — we have become very adept at using the *language* of integration, perspective, worldview, and Kingdom service, but at the same time we easily foster, often simply by our lifestyle, or by our political affiliations, an accepting attitude towards the typical North American priorities: a luxury home, a TV in every room, gadgets and paraphernalia we don't need, an almost religious dedication to the world of sports, and the glorification of celebrity and financial success, no matter what the pressure on our personal or family life.

In an affluent, pornographic, self-gratifying, and greedy culture such as the one in which we live, mere discernment and perspective, though critically important, are not enough. More than ever we need a prophetic voice.

What is it?

What is a prophetic voice, and what does it sound like? It is a voice that not only discerns, describes, and evaluates the spirits of the age, but aggressively challenges them. Make no mistake, the spirits of the age are *evil* spirits. They bamboozle us into believing that it is perfectly acceptable to be dualistic in the second sense — to have the perspective right and at the same time embrace the seduction of materialism and secularism without protest. These spirits relegate the pain in the larger world to a peripheral concern. A prophetic voice, in contrast, declares without apology that to succumb to consumerist idolatry, along with all its trappings, is wrong.

But the prophetic voice not only unmasks and condemns the lust for extravagant affluence; it also equips for alternatives. It articulates strategies for subversive entry into the world. It aims for liberation from the bondage imposed by idols that turn the worship of God Almighty into a part-time hobby. The prophetic voice seeks to en-

able God's children to be in and not of the world. It questions the status quo and explores the ramifications of a schooling practice designed to change the world — to make all things new. The prophetic voice aspires to unlock the prison cell in which the preoccupation with standardized tests and achievement goals keeps visionary, shalom-seeking education incarcerated.

Foundational questions

How does the prophetic voice do that? By asking tough, critical questions. The prophetic voice reframes the essential questions about curriculum and teaching, assessment procedures and admission policies — indeed, about the entire school itself. Some examples: Why do we do what we do? What vision prompts our decisions about curriculum and instruction? When we critically examine our practice, what hidden priorities come to light? Where in our educational program do we find clear evidence that the Bible's call for justice and servanthood, its unmistakable warnings about wealth and greed, are at the very top of our agenda, overshadowing all other concerns including those about academic success, entry into the workforce, and social acceptance?

Is our school really a bright light on a mountaintop, shining forth in a suffering world that cries out for redemption? Is our school a prophetic voice? Or is it a place heavy on "spiritual" activity and strict rules to guarantee moral rectitude, all the while herding students through a standard curriculum that does not materially differ from that offered by a good public school? Is our school a radical change agent or does it quietly teach our children to blend in with our culture? Could it be that we, in the affluent West, bathing in the comfort and appeal of our secular, advertising-soaked, sports-crazed culture, are too easily blinded to our calling to be prophetic?

The careful reader may conclude that these questions add up to no more than an old stale reconstructionist philosophy or, even worse, to a warmed-over social gospel theory. Appearances to the contrary, I cannot evade the haunting words of the Old Testament prophets, of Jesus and of Paul about unequal yokes, light and darkness, about peace, love, justice, righteousness and shalom — all themes in danger of receiving short shrift when Christian education accepts an unacceptable status quo.

Suggestions

Well, you may ask, even if what you say is only partly true, how do we go about cultivating such a prophetic voice? For starters, I offer four simple suggestions:

First, more talk. Yes, talk is cheap. However, cheap talk is superficial, tinkering talk. Such talk suggests quick fixes and avoids the tough questions we don't like to hear. Prophetic talk, on the other hand, is reflective talk, generated by a commitment to radical self-examination, eager to think outside of the box, willing to set aside for the moment all external constraint structures, ready to consider what might be and what ought to be rather than what is now the case.

Second, select stakeholders to participate in the talk. These should include some of the most creative teachers, administrators, students and parents.

Third, create a space for talk (of the right kind). Set aside a block of time, possibly in the early summer or towards the orientation week. If possible, provide a small stipend for the participants.

Fourth, reframe the essential questions and prepare initial answers, along with potential guidelines for step-by-step implementation. Don't hesitate to ask what a Christian school could really look like. Let your Spirit-guided imagination soar. Investigate why home schooling is becoming so popular, even among parents of children now in the Christian school. Identify the greatest needs in our world globally as well as in the lives of the students and ask to what extent our standard curriculum prepares to meet these needs. Consider again the ultimate purposes of the school in light of what the Bible says about wealth, the poor, about justice, about reconciliation of all things in a hurting world.

Yes, but

Objections to these suggestions appear at once and come in legions: Who will organize such a talk session? Who will select the stakeholders? How will we find the time? Don't you know that committees end up with mostly talk and no action? And how could we ever implement alternative approaches? Besides, your plan has been tried many times and ended up in do-nothing failure every time. And your proposal to provide funding is perfectly outrageous, in view of the financial pressures already confronting us. And so on and so on.

These and similar objections, I venture to say, are uttered by another voice — an insidious voice that persuades us to stick with the tried and tested, to stay with a modest, supposedly realistic vision and mission, to avoid rocking boats at all costs. This voice, inspired by a combination of fear, pragmatism and an appeal to the "real world out there" drowns out any attempt to be prophetic. This voice once again places the distinctiveness of the Christian school on the back burner.

But we cannot make an end run around reality. As we make our way into the 21st century, the old question presses us with a new and unrelenting urgency: What makes a Christian school really *Christian*? The presence or absence of a prophetic voice may well make the difference.

Christian Worldview 101

by Peter Schuurman

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G. K. Chesterton maintained that while it is important for a landlady to know the income of her renter, it is more important for her to know his worldview. "The most practical and important thing about a man," he said, "is still his view of the universe."

Everyone has a worldview — whether people articulate it or not. I realize that the word "worldview" is not in the Bible, but the Bible certainly offers the believer a worldview. Stating your worldview can be a helpful, short-hand way of saying what your basic beliefs about reality are or what your comprehensive framework or story is by which you see the universe." To intentionally think about your worldview as a Christian can be a coherent and consistent way to faithfully engage culture and avoid the pitfall of anti-intellectualism. The Bible doesn't directly talk about every cultural reality you encounter today; but the b*iblical worldview* certainly can be applied to every single letter of your life — and every corner of the classroom.

Let me set up a contrast to make it more vivid. Three short words can be used to describe the culture of the university today: "publish or perish." Life, in this picture, is about scrambling after seductive but elusive goals with a calculating, competitive eye cast towards others. Being crazy-busy is normal, suspicion is cast on your neighbor, and your long-term security becomes a permanent anxiety.

The Christian worldview is a universe away from that pursuit. It, too, can be summarized in three short words: "love or perish." Life, in this picture, is about building a culture of love around you, a culture that is conscientious about the needs of neighbors, seeks to nurture beauty, and guards what is true.

To be brief, I offer four notes on the basics of Christian worldview thinking:

First, your worldview arises out of the core of your being, out of your deepest desires and longings. Worldviews always start in the heart. For some, their desire is for money, power or pleasure. But when God becomes your heart's desire, your life leaps towards his dream for the world. Everything changes. You change the way you treat others, you change the way you consume things, and you change the way you see reality. This is the Christian worldview: seeing life through Jesus Christ.

> "This is a theology of life, not a theology of the knife!"

Second, your worldview arises out of a framing story. Every people has a story. For Christians, the story comes through the rich and diverse voices of the Bible, which gives us this plot: all things were created good but because of the sin and brokenness that sully the earth, all things need to be restored by God's suffering, covenant love in Jesus. Think of it in four chapters: creation, fall, redemption, and, finally, still being written now, our improvising participation in Christ's redemption project.

Third, a Christian worldview refuses the compartmentalization of "sacred" and "secular" things. When your heart wants what God wants, you do not just add prayer and Bible study to your life, although you will do that. You suddenly see everything with Kingdom-of-God glasses, and your whole vision for life is radically altered. You don't just add a "God-view" and a "church-view" to your "North American life-view." Your whole "world-view" gets a new prescription: whether you are looking at mutual funds, municipal elections, or marsupial survival, the light of God's desires illumines the reality in a fresh way. The whole world is a burning bush of God's grandeur. Again, this is the big picture of faith: God's new world is coming, and it restores every sad and broken thing — from polluted oceans to pornographic art to the panicked human heart — into his new ecosystem of hope and healing. Everything is sacred. It is humans who twist sacred things to serve secular purposes.

Fourth, this worldview is not only therapy for individuals; it's a new framework for culture-making together. Jesus is not just Lord of Sunday morning, not just Lord of the human heart, but Lord of the whole universe — geology, dance, and surgery. Therefore Christians seek to be co-workers with God in renewing all things towards God's original intention, and they do this as a community. Rather than participate in the culture of competition, they pursue a culture of communion, communion with God's Spirit, his planet, and his church. This shalom — a new world where life flourishes — is our calling and destiny, and is visible to those who have the eyes to see it. We nurture an alternative culture for the common good.

God saves us, but not so we can die and fly to heaven. He saves us to recruit us for his earthy mission of renewal. As a Chinese professor who recently became a Christian said to me: "This is a theology of life, not a theology of the knife!" Worldview is about imagining another world that's possible — a planet better than the one handed down to us.

ROOM 219

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One True Sentence

My Modern Fiction class has just completed a study of Ernest Hemingway's highly acclaimed novel *A Farewell to Arms*. It is a stretch for many of the students, mainly because Hemingway's style is so minimalist, even though, as one critic said of him, "He writes on a broad canvas." Hemingway was obsessed with the desire to write what he called "one true sentence," and the literary world has speculated for years about what that might mean. And did he ever write one?

When we begin our study of the novel, I mention the one true sentence concept and ask my students to go home and try to write one of their own. Invariably they ask, "Well, how do you define that?" or, more importantly, "How does the author define that?" When it comes to the author's definition, we have only clues. We know that Hemingway has a high regard for nouns — not abstract, but concrete nouns, because to him abstract nouns like "glory" or "sacrifice" had little substance. We know that he took to heart Gertrude Stein's advice to never use the word "very" in one's writing — something he did only occasionally. It was considered too excessive. There is much more that could be said, but this column is not meant to be a literature lesson.

So my students try to write their one true sentence, and in trying to do so, they get at least a glimmer of what a formidable task that actually is. We write some of their sentences on the board and wrestle a bit with how successful they have been. And as they read the novel, I urge them to look for one true sentence in the entire novel because, when they have finished the novel, they have to choose that sentence and defend it. That is much harder than it sounds.

The reason I mention this assignment is that I am more and more conscious of how important language is. We speak to each other every day, and many of us write every day, and, yet, we have become increasingly careless with what we say. Two glaring and, perhaps, shallow examples of this may serve to clarify. One is the now familiar, almost acceptable, tendency to use the word "like" inappropriately in our speech, as in "And then he stood up, and like, everyone got quiet." A second, more recent, phenomenon is the popular text-messaging craze, by which language is literally amputated, and so is communication. In every classroom it is imperative that teachers use the language of their particular discipline with deliberation and precision so that optimum learning can occur.

In the movie *Babel*, which won the Oscar for best picture last year, the theme of the inability to communicate is presented with unsettling forcefulness. The movie depicts the following scenarios: A young wife and mother is seriously injured in Morocco and finds that the language barrier exacerbates the frustration of cultural differences. An adolescent who cannot hear or speak is desperate to find a way to work through her sorrow over her mother's death. Two small boys cannot find the courage to speak of their terrible act of carelessness. A caretaker of two American children crosses the border to Mexico with them in order to attend her son's wedding and is unable to find a legitimate way to get them back home. Perhaps the "one true sentence" for each scenario is as simple as "I need your help."

My students chose some intriguing sentences from the novel. Here are a few:

"Old men do not grow wise — they grow careful."

"When you love you wish to do things for."

"I am going to die."

"Always is not a pretty word."

"War is not won by victory."

"You cannot know about it unless you have it."

"The world breaks everyone, and afterwards many are strong at the broken places."

Language is most effective when it is articulate. Perhaps one reason we laugh at the verbal clumsiness of our leaders is that we are embarrassed by how a lack of skill in this area may indicate a lack of skill in leadership. The well-chosen word has been pushed into the background. As educators in any discipline, we must participate in pushing it forward.

Virtuous Teaching

by Stan Ward

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Is it possible to teach virtue? As educators and Christ-followers, we hope so. After this last school year, I know so.

Since I teach a class in medieval history and literature, I thought it would be appropriate to introduce my students to four cardinal virtues: prudence, temperance, justice, and fortitude. C. S. Lewis defines these virtues in *Mere Christianity*. Prudence is "practical common sense, taking the trouble to think out what you are doing and what is likely to come of it." Temperance is "going the right length and no further." This is different from our modern concept of temperance, so Lewis is quick to point out that temperance does not necessarily mean "abstaining." Justice "is the old name for everything we should now call 'fairness'; it includes honesty, give and take, truthfulness, keeping promises, and all that side of life." Fortitude is courage, both "the kind that faces danger as well as the kind that 'sticks it' under pain. 'Guts' is perhaps the nearest modern English."

Keep the virtues

Once I defined these virtues for my students, we used them in our discussions about literary characters and historical situations. We discussed how characters demonstrate the virtues and how they fall short. Though I originally introduced the virtues for only one lesson, my students kept bringing them up throughout the semester. At the end of the school year, I began dialoguing with them about what worked and what didn't work in that year's class. When asking what to keep and what to remove for next year, the class gave me a unanimous response: "You must keep teaching the four cardinal virtues."

Their adamance amazed me. Though I did not start using the virtues until the second semester, these students insisted that I start teaching it early in the year next time. Wanting to know why they felt this strongly, I added a question about the virtues to my end of the year survey. Here is a sampling of their responses to the prompt, "Please comment on the four virtues. How have they influenced your thinking?"

"The four virtues have become a foothold in reading and being a better judge on myself with the virtues as standards."

"I think about these a lot. They are helpful; I never knew about them prior to class."

"I have actually caught myself doing something or thinking something and stopped myself and thought, 'you need to show more fortitude' or 'OK, I am seriously lacking prudence.' I think they kind of summarize how to be a good person."

"I like talking about the virtues. Since a lot of them were throughout the books we read it made me think about my own life."

Four benefits

Teaching the cardinal virtues generates a variety of benefits. First, the virtues are accessible to non-Christian students while still being sympathetic to a Christian worldview. Put simply: one does not have to be a Christian to understand the benefit of these virtues. Though we may teach at Christian schools, that does not necessarily mean that all of our students share our Christian commitments. The virtues can become a bridge for those students, making a Christian worldview both more accessible and more desirable.

Since news headlines are full of people who either demonstrate or lack these virtues, pointing this out can lead to great class discussions. Using the cardinal virtues this way teaches thinking and analysis. Before using the virtues as a discussion tool, we define our terms. Then we must find concrete examples that can be applied to these terms. Finally, we evaluate whether or not our examples match the criteria of our definition and then consider why.

The difficulty of using the virtues is that sometimes one must choose between virtues. Sometimes both historical and literary characters seem to strive for justice and show fortitude, but they lack temperance (Shylock from *The Merchant of Venice* is a great example). But this decision to pursue one virtue at the expense of another is like real life. Sometimes life places us in difficult situations that require us to choose one virtue over another. Trying to wade through which virtues are pertinent to which situations allow students to see life for what it is: a complex journey that requires discernment.

But the four virtues go beyond history and literature. A fourth benefit to using the virtues in a secondary classroom is that the virtues provide a corrective to many teen (and adult) issues. We live in a world full of lust, greed, envy, and a number of other issues that need temperance. Additionally, subjects like math and science are tough (especially for those of us with a literary bent) so fortitude is the price for success. Both teachers and students want a certain measure of justice — though we may disagree exactly how that justice works in a given situation. And no matter what subject we teach, we have a responsibility to help young people develop a sense of prudence, realizing that the choices they make today have far-reaching consequences.

Testing virtue

At the end of a final exam last year, one of my students ran out of time and was not able to complete his essay. He had worked hard to prepare for the essay and I knew it. He had met with me multiple times outside of class to ask questions and I watched

him pore over the year's literature in search of quotes that would support his thesis. Naturally, he was angry about not being able to finish. Unfortunately, he chose to demonstrate his anger to me in a way that was not appropriate. After his outburst there were a few moments of awkward silence. Then he approached my desk, looked me in the eye, and said, "I'm sorry, Mr. Ward. My response to you was inappropriate. It lacked temperance. I took my anger too far."

Though that student has gone on to make some unwise choices since then, I am still hopeful for his future because of the prudence he showed in that moment. Please consider not only talking about the cardinal virtues with your students, but modeling them as well. Proverbs 14:18 tells us that "the prudent are crowned with knowledge." When you choose to both teach and embody the cardinal virtues, both you and your students will be blessed.

Gotta Get You onto My Clipboard or Rex's Magical Mystery Tour

by Jan Kaarsvlam

Jan Kaarsvlam had to leave his home economics teaching position in Guatemala and, indeed, has had to leave the entire country, following what began as a simple attempt to invent and market what Jan called "A new kind of burrito/taco/jello kind of thing" and ended in a complete devaluation of the Guatemalan quetzal. After being escorted to the border, he hitchhiked north until he found himself detained by US Customs agents who are convinced that his E-Z Grader is, in fact, some sort of terrorist encryption decoder.

"That skunk is so flat, it's got the stink squished right out of it!" said John Cloudmaker, pointing to a piece of black and white fur flapping in the autumn breeze on the roadway ahead of school counselor Maxwell Prentiss-Hall's 1988 silver Yugo.

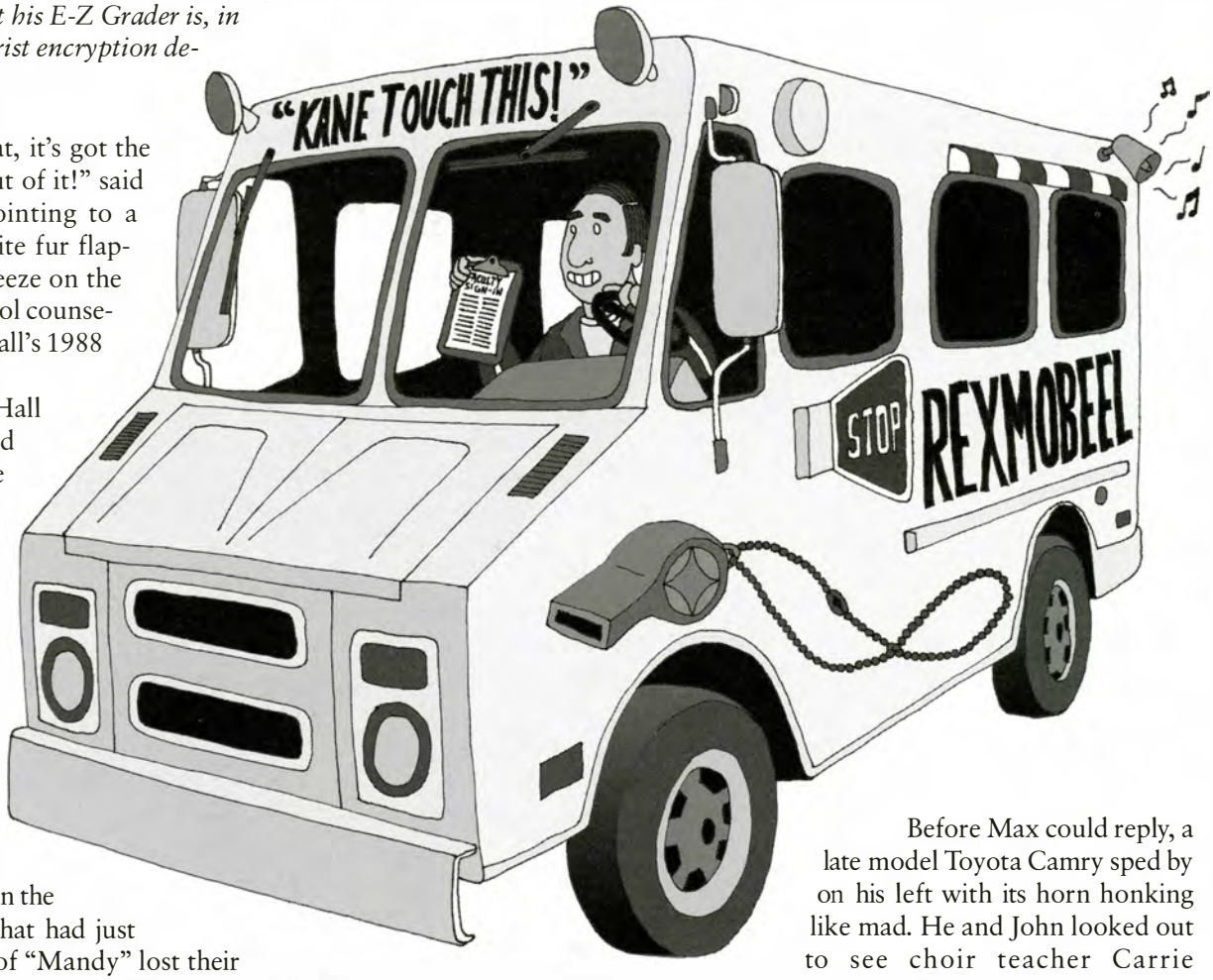
In a panic, Prentiss-Hall swerved to the left and managed to run-over the carcass with two tires. A musky scent filled the automobile.

"Looks like I spoke too soon," said Cloudmaker.

"Sorry." Maxwell stole a sheepish look at his companion and then focused on the road ahead, fiddling with the radio to get better reception on the Barry Manilow song that had just started. As the strains of "Mandy" lost their static, Prentiss-Hall asked the new Bible teacher, "So what do you think about Bentley's making us sign in at the game?"

A week earlier, when it became clear that the Bedlam Christian Berzerkers football team was going to make it downstate, the administration had called off school on the day of the big game. However, Principal VanderHaar, worried that teachers might misperceive this as a vacation day, required all faculty either to work at school for the full day or to sign in at the game on the clipboard that would be with physical education teacher Rex Kane.

"Well, Maxwell, speaking as a newcomer," said John Cloudmaker as he set aside his Reader's Digest, opened to *Improve your Wordpower*," I find it odious, bordering on manipulative and mischievous malfeasance. At Red Mesa Christian, where I come from, the administration treats us like professionals. If we say we are going to a football game, the principal believes us."



Before Max could reply, a late model Toyota Camry sped by on his left with its horn honking like mad. He and John looked out to see choir teacher Carrie Wellema, shop teacher Gord Winkle, and janitor Ed McGonigal wave at them. They were laughing. They were dressed in Hawaiian shirts and Winkle held aloft a cupcake with a hula dancer on it. Max and John waved as their colleagues pulled away.

Max said, "Huh. They're sure dressed funny for a football game. Anyways, I don't know that Bentley's trying to spy on us. Isn't it his job to monitor the staff?"

"Monitor, yes," said John, "but dictate our every movement, no. Last week we had parent-teacher conferences two different nights. The week before that, grades were due and we had no records day. Many of us have pulled back-to-back 60-70 hour weeks. Maybe some R-and-R would be a good use of our day off. If we were professionals, we would get to make that decision. Bentley is deciding for us instead."

More wild honking interrupted the conversation. A bright yellow VW Beetle shot by on the right. Christina Lopez was driving while Greg Mortiss awkwardly attempted to bounce a beach ball back and forth with Red Carpenter who was stuffed into the back seat, his knees crammed up near his chin. A stack of beach towels filled the back window. The steel drums of calypso music from the VW's radio rattled the sides of Max's Yugo. Christina and company sped into the distance.

"That's weird," said Max. "They look like they're going to the beach or something."

"You think."

"Ooh, ooh! I love this song," Max said. He cranked up his radio all the way until the one remaining front speaker crackled with the sound of Air Supply's "All Out of Love."

John Cloudmaker's lip curled almost imperceptibly and his right eye began to twitch. He said, "If I'd been able to have my choice, I probably would have slept in today and then put in three or four hours grading my students' epistle papers. Instead I'm...."

"All out of love, I'm so lost without you," Max crooned. With a strange guttural sound, Cloudmaker snapped the radio off.

"Hey! C'mon, man, Air Supply rocks!"

"I have a headache," John said. "Besides, I want to finish my point. Bentley is creating more problems than he's solving here. If he would treat us like adults, we'd act like adults. But instead he treated us like kids, and...."

John stopped talking as he and Max simultaneously heard the mechanized strains of "Pop Goes the Weasel." The song hearkened back to their youth, briefly transporting them to the halcyon days of hot and blissful summer days and cool treats. All that dissipated as Rex pulled up on their right in his signature vehicle — a fully restored 1973 Good Humor Ice Cream Truck. Rex gave an excited wave and held up the clipboard.

John waved back. Rex motioned to roll down the window. John did, and Rex shouted something frantically. John held his hand to his ear and shrugged. Rex shouted again. When he could see that John still didn't hear him, he held up an index finger as if asking John and Max to wait. Then he dropped his clipboard onto his lap, threw his right elbow on the steering wheel, and started to write something on the clipboard.

The ice cream truck veered to the left, nearly driving Max and John into a ditch. Then it lurched right and rode down the rumble strips cut into the shoulder. Rex didn't seem to notice any of it. He looked up only once, and that was to shake the ink back into his pen. After a moment he was done. He held the clipboard up for John to read: ALL OF US GOING TO WATER PARK. FOLLOW ME.

Rex shot them a thumbs up and then sped past, shooting down an exit ramp beside a sign that said "Skunk River Falls Indoor Water Park — We take the stink out of the drink." Before Max could say anything, John grabbed the wheel, and the Yugo veered to the right, following in Rex's wake.

Query

Boys and Girls Learn Differently

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.

Question #1

Why is it more difficult for boys than girls to control their anger and other emotions when they don't achieve certain goals in the classroom?

Response:

The question implies that it is more difficult for boys than for girls. That may not be exclusively the case, however. Studies show that there are distinct gender differences that lead to certain behavioral expressions. The context and the age of boys are not disclosed, so we will look at how boys learn and the context in which they learn.

At the preschool kindergarten age boys tend to lag behind girls as much as a year in the development of their verbal skills. When they find themselves in an uncomfortable situation, they may become physically aggressive because they do not have the words to describe their feelings. As Gurian (2001) states, "The male brain and chemistry impel males to practice less eye-to-eye contact and more shoulder-to-shoulder, less 'Are you OK?' and more 'You're OK, so get up,' less 'Let's talk about it' and more 'Get out of my way.' Clearly, also, social trends and pressures push males toward more of this behavior, and females toward greater use of behavior based in immediate empathic reactions" (p. 92). One of the ways adults have dealt with this is to teach children to use their words to express how they are feeling so that others in the situation can respond. Children are taught to "use your words" to redirect their aggressive action to a more empathic action. In general, this is the type of classroom behavior desired by most adults.

All children are unique and develop at their own rate and in their own way. We may have to examine the ways in which we create our classroom learning environments to determine which students are given the advantage. Gurian (2001), in *Boys and Girls Learn Differently!* contends that classrooms are set up in ways that give the female student the advantage. Boys do well in interactive social activities that allow for decreased verbal interaction, increased spatial interaction, and physical aggression. Based on nature (the way the brain develops) and nurture, he sees the general nature of females and males expressed in the classroom as follows:

"...males tend toward impulsive behavior, females toward sedentary; males tend to be loud, females quiet; males tend to be less mature, females more considered; males tend to be aggressive and competitive in a classroom, females passive. Especially at puberty and in adolescence, females and males are even more different in their hormone-led strategies in the classrooms, with many males seeking outward dominance and many females seeking inward excellence" (p. 58).

Another important factor to consider is that females also have longer attention spans than males; therefore they do not have the same need as males to move from one classroom activity to the next. Gurian encourages educators to question whether we have created classrooms that accommodate boys' natural impulsivity, the working of their brains, their learning styles — rather than misdiagnosing them with ADHD, ADD and learning disorders.

To return to the original question, the answer may lie in examining the frustration level created by the way we set up our classrooms for learning, or it may lie in determining where the child is at in his ability to give verbal expression to his feelings. These are only two suggestions; there may be many more. The best thing we can do is carefully observe each situation to try to identify why the child is responding in a particular way.

Reference:

Gurian, M. (2001). *Boys and Girls Learn Differently!* San Francisco: Jossey Bass.

Question #2

In a previous article you talked about the differences in the way boys and girls learn. What are examples of good activities that stimulate both boys' and girls' brains?

Response:

Although the Bible does not give a direct answer to this question, we read examples of God indicating what has to be remembered and how to do so. In Deuteronomy 6 the Lord tells the children of Israel to remember the commandments, "Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates." Upon crossing the Jordan River, the twelve stones taken from the Jordan were set up at Gilgal as a reminder

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of what God had done for the people of Israel. Parents were to tell the story to their children. Jesus told stories, used parables and performed signs and wonders. At the "last supper" he broke the bread and poured the wine and said, "Do this in remembrance of me." Action was and is required.

A quotation by William Glasser says: We learn 10% of what we read, 20% of what we hear, 30% of what we see, 50% of what we both see and hear, 70% of what is discussed with others, 80% of what we experience personally, and 95% of what we TEACH to someone else.

This tells us something of how we should teach if we want our students to learn. Christian and secular researchers and educators have built on the work done by Howard Gardner in the area of brain research. Although we are created to function as an integrated whole in unfolding or unwrapping the realities of the creation, the ways in which we acquire knowledge is indeed complicated. Howard Gardner (1983) identified different ways of knowing that we all possess to some extent. They are linguistic, musical, logical-mathematical, spatial, bodily-kinesthetic, and personal. Other competencies, such as aesthetic, spiritual, ethical, technical and economic may be added (Stronks & Bloomberg, 1993). What is important is how teachers focus their teaching strategies to include these ways of knowing as well as the four major learning modalities – visual, auditory, kinesthetic and tactile.

Tate (2005) makes a comparison of brain-compatible reading and language arts strategies to learning theory in the table on this page. As we develop our curriculum units to meet the expected student outcomes, we can incorporate a variety of learning strategies so that all students are presented with opportunities for learning that correspond with the ways in which their brain most readily gains knowledge. One strategy would be to use music to learn a new concept. Music can change the mood of the brain and even help develop the spatial part of the brain involved in problem solving and critical thinking. What is more important, it helps a child remember long-term when the concept is put to music. Music is recommended as a motivator for learning vocabulary or developing phonemic awareness. The Animated Literacy program is based on this premise and helps young children develop recognition of the structures of sound in language. Song lyrics as well as the use of rhymes, chants, or raps help teach sight words, recall vocabulary definitions, demonstrate comprehension, learn memory work or acquire other language arts skills. Both long and short-term memory are improved through writing so this skill can and should be used in every subject area across the curriculum.

Graphic organizers are another effective strategy. They are so effective because they promote communication between both the left and right hemispheres of the brain. Teachers can provide graphic organizers to help teach the skills of main idea and details, sequence of events, character traits and motives, and cause and effect. Students can also be taught to design their own graphic organizers to help them with comprehension of texts (Tate, 2005, p. xiv). Not only the act of creating but also the summation of the curriculum material presents a visual that can more readily be recalled.

The book from which these examples are taken presents a wealth of practical ideas that can be used in the classroom. With some research and sharing with colleagues, you may find other examples that can be incorporated into your curriculum planning to enhance the learning of all your students.

Brain -compatible reading and Language Arts strategies	**Multiple Intelligences**	**VAKT (Visual, Auditory, Kinesthetic, Tactile)**
Brain storming and discussion	Verbal - linguistic	Auditory
Drawing and Artwork	Spatial	Kinesthetic - tactile
Field Trips	Naturalist	Kinesthetic - tactile
Games	Interpersonal	Kinesthetic - tactile
Graphic Organizers, Semantic Maps, and Word Webs	Logical-mathematical, Spatial	Visual Tactile
Humor	Verbal - linguistic	Auditory
Manipulatives	Logical-mathematical	Tactile
Metaphors, Analogies and Similies	Spatial	Visual-auditory
Menemonic Devices	Musical-Rythmic	Visual-auditory
Movement	Bodily-kinesthetic	Kinesthetic
Music Rhythm. Rhyme, and Rap	Musical-rhythmic	Auditory
Project -based and Problem -based Instruction	Logical-mathematical	Visual Tactile
Reciprocal Teaching and Cooperative Learning	Visual-linguistic	Auditory
Role Plays, Drama, Pantomimes, and Charades	Bodily-kinesthetic	Kinesthetic
Storytelling	Visual-linguistic	Auditory
Technology	Spatial	Visual-tactile
Visualization and Guided Imagery	Spatial	Visual
Visuals	Spatial	Visual
Work Study and Apprenticeships	Interpersonal	Kinesthetic
Writing and Journal	Intrapersonal	Visual-tactile

Gardner, H. (1983). *Frames of Mind, The Theory of Multiple Intelligences.* New York: Basic Books.

Stronks, G. & Blomberg, D. (Ed.). (1993). *A Vision With a Task: Christian Schooling for Responsive Discipleship.* Grand Rapids: Baker Books.

Tate, M. (2005). *Reading and Language Arts Worksheets Don't Grow Dendrites.* Thousand Oaks: Corwin Press.

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On Teaching Absolute Truth

Al Boerema (ajb37@calvin.edu) associate professor of education at Calvin College, Grand Rapids, Mich., asked the Dot Edu panel to consider the topic of truth in our time. "How do we teach absolute truth in a culture that offers so many faith choices and that considers the claims of Christianity intolerant?"

December 4, 2007

Jolene Velthuizen wrote:

Well, let's start right out with the tough stuff. Isn't it true that Christianity is indeed intolerant when it states that it is the only true religion? Religions like Hinduism or Universalism that embrace other faiths *are* tolerant. So maybe we agree that the claim of Christianity can be labeled intolerant. But, of course, we would prefer it if the label included something about love; maybe even something about serving those around us. That would, in fact, be the truth of Jesus enacted.

It is my goal for each of my students to embrace the Christian faith and put Jesus in the center of their lives. To see children express their trust in God and his saving work in Jesus is incredible and so full of truth. Yet, where does Jesus fit into their eight-year-old lives? And what does Jesus say about their Navajo ceremonies and their beliefs?

Working at a Christian school near the Navajo reservation, I live with the challenge of teaching how Christianity relates to children who grow up in the Navajo traditions and ceremonies (or often a mix of those two religions). My students struggle with a lot of fear as all eight-year-olds do. Many of Rehoboth students have stories about demons entering their home and coming after members of their family. Navajo traditional beliefs come with a lot of fear. I don't deny those experiences: they are very real experiences. So I teach my eight-year-old students that Jesus is more powerful than the demons. I encourage my kids to pray when they are scared and to say the name of Jesus when they feel attacked.

Our middle school English and Bible teacher is Navajo, and he is a Christian. But many in his family hold to their Navajo traditional beliefs and ceremonies. He has chosen not to condemn his family's choice in belief, wanting to remain a part of his family and their family events. When he mentions about his Christian belief, it is not a challenge or a condemnation. He hopes (and prays a lot) that the testimony of his actions, his love, and his confidence in Jesus will show his family members that he has a peace they are missing.

So I would like to teach my children two valuable truths: that Jesus is more powerful than the other forces around them, and that loving and serving others is spreading the truth of Jesus, even when words are not exchanged.

Jolene

December 4, 2007

Pam Adams responded:

Hi, all: Jolene shares many interesting thoughts. I believe the Navajos are not much different from any other group of people. Each of us is seeking the truth. We all have fears and doubts. We can't make it on our own. What a comfort it is to have the truth come to us in the ultimate expression of love. I believe Jolene is correct in stressing love.

I think the problem with some Christians and why they are sometimes seen as intolerant is that they seem to have the answer to everything. What a very different picture we get from Jolene's colleague who patiently prays for his family. He doesn't condemn, but models the Savior's love.

I think we can all learn something from this Navajo teacher. Preach the gospel in love and be gentle with those who see things differently. The fact that Jesus chose me gives me reason to be thankful, not reason to judge others.

Pam

December 4, 2007

Tony Kamphuis added:

The question of truth is a tough one for Christians raised in a culture so influenced by Greek thought. The idea of an objective "truth" that sits out there and waits to be uncovered and that is

the same to all people in all times and places just doesn't compute well with a God person who says, "I am the Truth."

I struggle with this because I don't want to surrender my absolutist claims too quickly! But the clean and tidy notion of "truth" as a set of propositions to which all should assent just doesn't capture everything it claims to capture.

I say we choose the more messy path that implies that we teach our students the truth that we were meant to live in an environment of love, that currently we are not living in that environment, and that Christ has come to redirect us to that fantastic place we were created to inhabit. I confess that Jolene's experiences give her comments on this a credibility that I respect. Not all ideas are positive ones, and we do need to be discriminating and teach discernment.

We need to ask ourselves and ask our students: "Does this belief we see being lived out bring life? Does this belief open up our understanding of God's created reality? Is it consistent with what I know of the world?" In my area we Christians probably try to live syncretistically with consumerism. We don't challenge our family members (or ourselves!) too often with those inconsistencies — but that is probably as close as we get to what Jolene speaks of.

Tony

December 7, 2007

Tim Leugs responded:

Well said, everyone. I recognize truth in all of the words you say. With a common thread of love and patience flowing through these articles, I sense a leaning towards the belief that our calling as Christians is not to judge others but to love them while remembering the love God has for us. Just as Jolene's colleague has loved and respected his family while holding fast to his God, so should we love and respect those other members of our culture and world while holding fast to God. What would the world indeed look like if we as Christians truly treated all people (regardless of their faith choices) with the same care and respect that we show within our churches and Christian schools! When the wider Christian body aims to reflect Christ's love in this way, while steadfastly remaining in the Truth itself, it will be well on its way towards abolishing those stereotypes and true-to-life examples of intolerance that we tend to show. Through the inadvertent evangelism that grows from simply loving others, others will recognize the absolute truth of Christianity not as a leash or a cell but instead as a doorway into relationship.

Tim

The panel consists of:

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

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

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

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

Words and Pictures:

Graphic Novels in the Christian School Classroom

by Annette Witte and Bill Boerman-Cornell

Annette Witte is an education/English major at Trinity Christian College in Palos Heights, Illinois. She will be completing her student teaching in the fall of 2007. Bill Boerman-Cornell is an assistant professor of education at Trinity Christian College.

Christians are a people of the Word. We believe that God gave us his Word in the Bible. English teachers in Christian schools have an easy time justifying their subject matter by saying that teaching students to understand text is vital for them to be able to make sense of the Bible. English teachers might further point out that learning to see what is happening in stories told by words might actually help us develop our imaginations — a pedagogical feat which might in turn help us believe in a God we can't physically see.

This article is intended to make a case for what we will call the "graphic novel" — book-length stories using the conventions of a comic book. Why would a Christian English teacher want to use such a resource? Isn't it true that lots of studies found fault with students' reading of comic books? (Slover, 1959) Wasn't there a fear in the 1950s that comic books would lead to everything from poor reading skills to juvenile delinquency? (Wertham, 1953) Don't students use the pictures to avoid reading the words?

Why teach graphic novels?

We can think of three reasons why we should teach graphic novels. First, the criticism of comic books by Frederick Wertham and others was largely discredited through the efforts of a great many other researchers at the time, who discovered that comic books have sophisticated vocabulary (Thorndike, 1941), that comic books do not detract from reading acquisition but may, in fact, contribute to it (Swain, 1978), and that comic books are useful for increasing student motivation to read (McCarthy & Smith, 1943). Having said that, the myth remains that the comic book format somehow makes stories told in that way less worthwhile.

Second, our world is becoming increasingly multi-modal. That is to say, we are regularly called upon to make sense of the intersection of pictures and words. Consider magazine advertising, billboards, websites, power point and other recent additions to our discourse. In order for students to make sense of this in a critical way, they need to be versed in the language of the interaction between words and pictures. Modern graphic novels are heirs to a history of hundreds of years of developing such a language. If we want our children to be equipped for a society that communicates through words and pictures, graphic novels may be a good place to start.

By far the most compelling reason for studying graphic novels in a Christian School English classroom is that some of them are, simply put, excellent stories with compelling themes. Art Spiegelmann's *Maus* won a Pulitzer Prize for its depiction of a couple's escape from Auschwitz. Other graphic novels like *The Tale of One Bad Rat* and *Blankets* have been critically acclaimed for their portrayal of themes like escaping childhood abuse and struggling between the demands of art and the demands of tradition.

How can I teach them?

The possibilities for incorporating graphic novels into the curriculum are endless: graphic novels offer innovative avenues into traditional curriculum, provide a foundation for translating abstract concepts into the concrete, and link class experiences to the world abroad. As Jim Burke says, "Learning activities are anchored in the world beyond your class and provide authentic experiences that not only engage students but teach them what they need to know to succeed after leaving school" (Burke 2003). As educators we are constantly striving to facilitate student connections: connections to previous knowledge, connections with classmates and the community, connections to the outside world. Authentic learning occurs when students make these connections.

With these possibilities in mind we will take a look at numerous disciplines and offer practical examples of how teachers can implement graphic novels into their curriculum. Take note that categories overlap and that many graphic novels are useful in multiple disciplines.

The English Classroom

There are ample opportunities to incorporate graphic novels into the English classroom. For example, graphic novels provide a great place to start for second-graders who are first encountering dialogue markers and conversational narrative: all words in the text bubbles deserve quotation marks; all words outside the bubbles are outside both the dialogue and, consequently, the quotation marks. Graphic novels provide a visual, practical way for young students to learn the ins and outs of narrative dialogue.

A similar case can be made for students who are first learning elements of plot. The multi-modal nature of graphic novels allows students to see the setting, the main characters, the rising action, the climax, and the resolution. Students can easily analyze the impact of the setting on the characters because they can see the characters interacting with that setting. As this skill develops, it will translate out of the English classroom and into other classrooms as well. Again, graphic novels can be used

to make abstract concepts concrete.

In addition to these mainly practical applications, graphic novels offer a wealth of resource to literary study as well. For example, teachers could integrate Jeff Smith's *Bone* series into a unit on epic. Smith uses epic conventions (some more than others) to drive his narrative. After studying a classic epic, students could use *Bone* as a comparison and contrast point. Which epic conventions are present? Which are absent? What is the impact on the narrative? This analysis could culminate into a number of assessments including a paper or presentation.

A final example, *The Amazing True Story of a Teenage Single Mom*, by Katherine Arnoldi, provides a thought-provoking lead into a number of different narratives, one being *The Scarlet Letter*. *The Amazing True Story* realistically presents the life of a teenage mom — a life that enfolds the stigma, the prejudice, the struggle, the hope. Studying this story as a prelude to Hester Prynne's tale offers an emotional lead-in as well as a commentary on the differences between modern single mothers and puritan single mothers.

The history classroom

When approaching any historical text, teachers in this discipline ask a few basic questions: Is this piece biased? Whose bias is presented? Is this a primary or secondary source? What can we learn from primary sources? From secondary sources? Appropriately, history teachers strive to indoctrinate their students with the same critical attitude. Graphic novels provide a different medium for students to interact with these questions and search for their answers.

Take *Maus: A Survivor's Tale* by Art Spiegelman. This graphic novel takes a biographical look at Art's father's life during the Holocaust. In this tale, Jews are depicted as mice, Germans as cats. The artistic choices that Spiegelman makes are an entryway into discussions on bias, prejudice, and the realities of the Holocaust.

While the story itself merits study, it also provides many opportunities for long-term projects or papers. Dr. Mark Jones, an English professor at Trinity Christian College uses *Maus* as a foundation for a semester-long term paper. His project can be easily transferred into the History classroom.

Maus is a frame story. Framing the cat and mouse presentation of WWII is the story of Art's relationship with his father. Through conversations and interviews, father and son struggle to understand one another and how the past impacts their present and future. After studying this story, Dr. Jones outlines the term paper: students research a recent historical event and intertwine with their research interviews with "experts" on the topic. Experts range from grandparents who lived through the depression to soldiers who took part in different wars. This project asks students to examine both primary and secondary sources in order to more thoroughly understand an historical event.

Students traditionally write their first official term papers during their sophomore year of high school. This assignment can be an intimidating experience. Using Dr. Jones' *Maus* project, or a variation of it, provides a high interest and fulfilling term paper experience for students of diverse ages and backgrounds.

The social sciences classroom

Whether they offer a government class or a world issues class, teachers have at their disposal a variety of graphic novels. It is in this discipline that the power of graphics gains a new force: graphic novels place faces with the names of genocide victims in Rwanda, correlate images with rhetoric in the September 11 attacks, and provide concrete links to issues that may otherwise seem inaccessible.

Graphic novels provide an excellent lead-in for a world issues teacher to approach the subject of terrorism. Recently, the 9/11 Report was released in graphic novel format. This new release provides a narrative drive to the report. Students can examine the paths of the hijacked planes in a synchronized format and associate important names with faces in the terror-

ism/counter-terrorism investigation.

To bring perspective to the terrorism discussion, educators can introduce *The Freedom Fighter's Manual*. This manual was distributed throughout Nicaragua by the US government as a sourcebook for opposing the oppressive regime. The graphics depict Nicaraguans participating in acts of resistance, from going to work late to placing nails on highways and roads. The line between resistance and terrorism can be thin; these graphic novels provide a context in which students can discuss the complex issue of terrorism.

American Born Chinese is applicable on many levels in the social sciences classroom. First, the narrative weaves traditional Chinese myth with a modern story. Students can examine the importance of tradition in Chinese culture and how that tradition impacts everyday life. In addition, *ABC* presents the plights of both a minority student and an immigrant student in an everyday school setting. These stories challenge prejudices and ask students to rethink how they treat others who are from different cultures.

The religion classroom

Religion teachers have the opportunity to ask students to interact with worldviews that they may not embrace. For many students it is difficult to empathize with other worldviews and religions because they have no common experience or understanding. Graphic novels provide common experience and serve as a platform for interaction and discussion with those who hold other worldviews.

Compare two autobiographies in the graphic novel form: *Persepolis* and *Blankets*. Both tell the stories of children growing up in religious families and communities. Both children grapple with the meaning of faith and the interplay between their religion and their daily life. Both students leave home, experiment, and return home changed. *Persepolis* is written by a woman raised with an Islamic worldview; *Blankets* is written by a man raised with a Christian worldview. The two share enough common ground to spark discussion on the differences between the two worldviews and the effects of the worldviews on those who hold them. Students do not have to be either Islamic or Christian to interact with these graphic novels.

Graphic novels also deal with abstract terms when they uniquely explore main tenets of different world religions: hope, evil, purpose, and redemption to name a few. The graphic novel *Maus* offers a dismal reflection on the holocaust that leaves little room for hope; *Hope in the Dark* presents a realistic look at the effects of HIV/AIDS on African countries while leaving abundant space for hope in the future.

The fine arts classroom

Teachers in all the arts can utilize graphic novels in their classrooms. Art teachers can study various graphic novels in terms of their artwork. For example, *Teenage Mom* offers basic black and white sketches, while *The Tale of One Bad Rat* provides colorful, more detailed artwork. Analyzing these differences can extend into discussions on artistic choices and purpose in determining style. Many graphic novels are supported with websites that include interviews with the author and artist. Having students create their own graphic novels is another way to engage students in this interesting medium.

To Dance depicts the story of a young girl pursuing her dream to become a ballerina. Although directed at younger readers this graphic novel provides discussion points on the perseverance and dedication required to excel in any activity: whether dance, music, reading, or a sport. Young students, particularly girls, will be captivated by the protagonist's dream; older students will relate to how that dream plays out in reality.

Many students walking in and out of various arts classrooms are exploring exactly how their art form will assimilate into their daily lives. While *To Dance* provides a positive outlook on the relationship between art and everyday life, *Chicken with Plums* portrays the story of a musician whose art consumes him. This narrative is set in Iran, where the main character relies on music and love to carry him through daily life. When both fail, he loses his will to live and dies depressed and alone. Any passion can become an obsession, and, as teachers, we can help our students explore a healthy commitment to various arts.

Conclusion

The arguments and opportunities for integrating graphic novels into the classroom are overwhelming, but where do teachers who may not be familiar with graphic novels begin? Where do we begin when we are unfamiliar with any topic? Hit the books.

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Some Graphic Novels for Starters

by Annette Witte and Bill Boerman-Cornell

Following is a brief review of all the graphic novels mentioned in the previous article, as well as some others. Read them, familiarize yourself with them, and consider how you could integrate graphic novels into your curriculum.

Arnoldi, K. (1998). *The Amazing "True" Story of a Teenage Mom*. New York: Hyperion.

Katherine is seventeen and pregnant; she is alone with her daughter, Stacie, and faces a world that will not allow her to succeed. She runs into dead-end jobs, dead-end men, and dead-end family traps. Despite the opposition she experiences, her heart and mind dream of attending college and breaking through the dead-ends in her life. This is an authentic and amazing true story of a teenage mom who overcomes obstacles, pursues her dreams, and changes the path of her life. The graphic dimension of the narrative allows Arnoldi to depict characters as they really are — abusive monsters, self-absorbed fathers, ambitious workers, well-wishing truck drivers, and the lonely but hopeful teenage mom.

The Central Intelligence Agency. (1983). *The Freedom Fighter's Manual*. The CIA.

We loosely place the term graphic novel on this selection, but it is more a graphic guide to "Freedom Fighting." In 1983 the CIA released this document in Nicaragua. It both encourages and shows citizens how to take action against the Marxist government. Suggestions range from coming in late to work to creating Molotov cocktails and throwing them at various objects. Use this guide with discretion: while it offers excellent segues into discussions on terrorism and government bias, it also offers "how to" instructions for some dangerous activities.

Jacobson, S., & Colon, E. (2006). *The 9/11 Report*. New York: Hill and Wang.

The 9/11 Report is a graphic novel rendition of the 580-page document released by the September 11 Commission. The narrative style makes the report easily accessible for all readers, while the graphics correlate names with faces in the web of people who are easily confused. One exceptionally striking aspect is the layout of the four hijacked planes. The planes are placed on a timeline in conjunction with one another. Readers see the times and places in which certain events happened and did not happen, all of which culminates in the disaster we know as 9/11.

Lee, J., & Cowart, J. (2006). *Hope in the Dark*. Orlando: Relevant Books.

Although the graphics in this travel documentary are photographs, and although the words appear as hand-written journal accounts, the effect is the same: a graphic novel. After traveling across HIV/AIDS afflicted South Africa and Kenya, Calwart and Lee created this account. This book provides a powerful glimpse into the reality of AIDS in Africa; it depicts both the despair and optimism of Africa's AIDS generation.

Satrapi, M. (2006). *Chicken With Plums*. New York: Pantheon Books.

Nasser Ali Khan loses his drive to live when his beloved tar is broken. *Chicken with Plums* describes a seven-day period from the time when Khan gives up on life until he dies. Throughout those days he attempts to recover the passion he lost by playing other tars, talking with family members, remembering the past, and revisiting lost love. After all fails, he consigns himself to bed and dies. While this graphic novel offers interesting commentary on human motivation, human psychology, and cultural restraint, proceed with caution. Some language and graphics are not appropriate for all students.

Satrapi, M. (2003). *Persepolis: The Story of a Childhood*. New York: Pantheon.

Satrapi tells her autobiographical account of growing up during the Islamic Revolution in Iran. A deeply religious child, Marjane is forced to come to terms with the tumultuous world around her — a world that looks significantly different out-

side her home than it does inside her home. She does this through religion, protest, experimentation, and more. Satrapi provides insight into Iranian culture, Islamic religion, and coming of age in a war torn society.

Siegel, S. C. (2006). *To Dance*. New York: Aladdin Paperbacks.

Siena desires nothing more than to dance. The six-year-old dances through her daily life and into her first official classes. This graphic novel depicts her journey from Puerto Rico to the United States and to her first performance on stage in New York City. Siena faces conflict as her dad lives in Puerto Rico and her beloved teacher passes away, but her passion for ballet drives her to succeed. Siena's story is one of sacrifice and determination which lead to the fulfillment of her dreams.

Smith, J. (2005). *Bone*. New York: Graphix.

After being run out of town, three cousins find themselves lost in a desert. In the *Bone* series, Jeff Smith weaves an epic tale of the cousins' journey home. They find themselves thrown into multiple adventures and misadventures, and, ultimately, into a grand battle between good and the evil. Although this series is aimed at younger readers, the vivid artwork, amiable characters, inviting narrative, and dramatic tension attract readers across the age spectrum.

Spiegelman, A. (1973). *Maus: A Survivor's Tale: My Father Bleeds History*. New York: Pantheon.

Maus is Spiegelman's biographical account of his parents' experiences during WWII. The narrative opens in the Jewish neighborhoods of Poland and closes at the gates of Auschwitz, all the while being framed by the story of Art's interactions and interviews with his father. Spiegelman situates the present and the past together and discusses the necessity of examining history in order to understand the present. The graphics take readers on a journey into the prejudicial horrors of WWII: Germans are cats, Jews are mice, and Poles are pigs. This graphic novel realistically and appropriately handles material that is often difficult to present.

Talbot, B. (1995). *The Tale of One Bad Rat*. Milwaukie, OR: Dark Horse Books.

After fleeing a situation of incest and abuse, Helen Potter finds herself alone on the streets. She is plagued with nightmares of her past and desperation about her future. *The Tale of One Bad Rat* narrates her journey from a traumatized childhood through painful healing, to a free and hopeful future. The combination of words and graphics realistically grapple with the pain of the situation while conveying a solid truth: abuse victims can struggle through their fears, oppose their abusers, and survive with hope for the future.

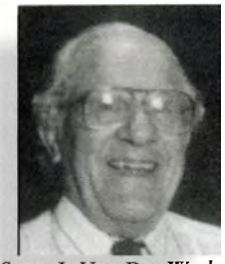
Thompson, C. (2004). *Blankets*. Marietta, GA: Top Shelf Productions.

Blankets is an autobiographical account of growing up in a fundamentalistic, conservative Christian home. The main character struggles to find cohesion between faith as presented by his family and church, and the real world as he experiences it — an average-looking-teenage-artist-outcast whose desire to draw is condemned as a waste of time. Craig's life changes when he meets Raina, a girl he falls in love with and with whom he explores the realities of love, sexuality, family, relationship, and faith. The straightforward black-and-white graphics add a powerful depth to the narrative of a boy growing up in a not so straightforward world.

Yang, G. L. (2007). *American Born Chinese*. New York: 01 First Second.

Yang weaves together three narrative strands: Monkey King, the ambitious mythological hero; Jin Wang, the Chinese-American struggling to fit in at school; Danny, the high school student perpetually embarrassed by his stereotypical Chinese cousin. This graphic novel explores the concepts of identity, stereotype, friendship, integrity, and cultural pride. The word/graphic interplay creates a compelling story line and a holistic picture of children struggling to find their place despite destructive stereotypes. Students from middle school on up can relate to the everyday adolescent issues that Yang presents in this graphic novel. ej

Walter Isaacson, *Einstein: His Life and Universe.* New York: Simon and Schuster. 2007. 551 pages plus 112 pages of notes and index. Reviewed by Steve J. Van Der Weele, Calvin College (Retired)



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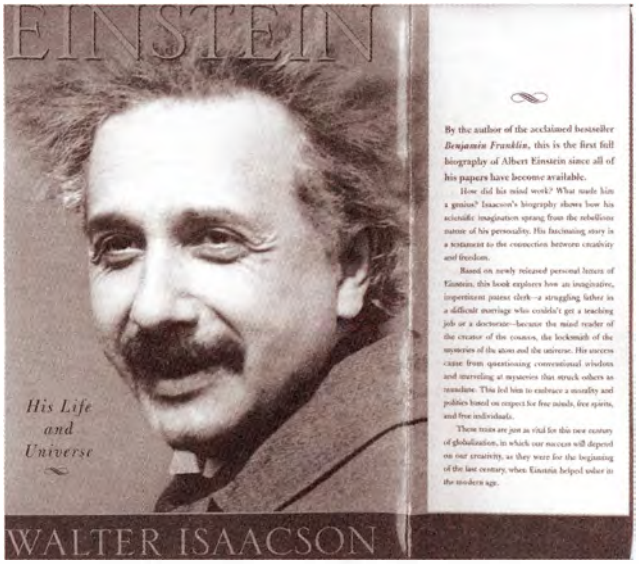
When Einstein was asked by the New York Board of Education what he would emphasize in the teaching of history, he replied, "In teaching history there should be extensive discussion of personalities who benefited mankind through independence of character and judgment." As humble a person as Einstein was, and self-effacing, it is just possible that he missed the relevance of the observation to himself. Did he not benefit mankind? Did he not possess independence of character and judgment? Both questions require a resounding Yes. And Isaacson has done us all a great favor by providing this comprehensive biography of a contemporary genius, availing himself of the many papers that have appeared in recent years. He suggests that good citizenship nowadays requires some awareness of science. Students can profit greatly from a work such as this, as they come to understand the ways and thought processes of unusually gifted people.



The title is apt. Few would want to know more about his life than this biography gives. And though there may not be enough mathematics to satisfy the professional physicist, there is more than enough science for the average reader. The skill in Isaacson's achievement lies in his interweaving of the life and the science — and Einstein's attitude towards science and the universe.

Born in 1879 in a small town in southwestern Germany, from nonpracticing Jewish parents, Einstein had a checkered educational career. In every one of the several schools he attended, he stood out as "the dopey one." He had difficulty expressing himself (the technical name for this impairment — he had only a mild case — is echolalia, a habit of repeating phrases and names several times before saying them). What is more revealing is his boredom with rote learning, his resistance to authority and constraint (he used the German word "zwang" to describe this attitude), his insistence on freedom of thought and experiment. Isaacson calls him "the patron saint of distracted school kids everywhere." It is highly probable that several teachers changed their careers rather than put up with students of this sort.

Einstein graduated from the Zurich Polytechnic in August 1900. He now faced the most difficult years of his life. He had a degree — not a doctorate, that came later — from a second ranked university, without a job prospect, without a country (he had renounced his German citizenship in 1896, put off by the narrow nationalism of the German people and the militaristic attitudes of the government). A former classmate came to his rescue by procuring for him a position in the patent office in Bern, Switzerland. No academic position could have served him as well. He was free from the constraints of academia and could do his work with independence and integrity. And he could work on his own scientific projects after his day's work was done. That work also refined his capabilities in the patent office.

Biographers call the year 1905 "the Miracle Year" for a good reason. Einstein published four papers that year, on all aspects of the physical world — time, space, electricity, light, magnetism, and the problem of the existence of atoms. But the paper that was to receive the greatest attention over the years was the paper on special relativity. (His paper on general relativity appeared in 1915) It was this paper that questioned the legacy of Newtonian, classical physics. Einstein had great reverence for Newton. He placed a wreath of flowers on the 200th anniversary of Newton's birth and paid tribute to his originality and creativity. Newton had made space and time absolute forces in the world. He regarded Space and Time as gifts of God — realities without relationship to anything external, unchanging conditions of our lives. Einstein saw fissures in the formulas and assumptions of classical mechanics. He linked space and time, calling these forces spacetime. Time and space interact with each other. Nothing happens in space that does not happen in time; nothing happens in time that does not happen in space. For one thing, he emphasized the role of the observer. There is no universal clock in the world, where events can be said to happen simultaneously. Several experiments proved the relationship of time to space. If one individual is placed in the front of a plane, another in the rear, and a third in the middle of the plane releases a beam of light, the person in the front will see the beam later than the one in the rear of the plane. Why? Because the person in the front of the plane is moving away from the beam while the person in the rear is moving towards it. It should astonish us, too, that (at least in the more prosperous

days of the airline industry) one can pull out a tray from the seat before him and enjoy a meal. This is because the plane is moving in relationship to the ground and constitutes its own world — its own frame of reference, as it came to be called. Other experiments involved the timing of lightning strikes and life on a ship at rest, where, again, birds and fish in a bowl in a cabin behave as if they were on land.

General relativity went beyond special relativity. Special relativity assumed a constant velocity, a uniform speed, and direction in a straight line. But not all motion occurs in a uniform frame of reference. Ships roll and cars speed up and slow down. General relativity takes account of gravity, and light, and acceleration. Classical mechanics had assumed that every particle in the universe is attracted to every other part. Einstein needed a new model of gravity. He showed that light and all forms of electromagnetism radiation are deflected, or bent, by gravity. It seems that space and light contain matter, and that gravity can bend space and light!

Biographers call the year 1905 "the Miracle Year" for a good reason.

Gravity exercised through the medium of spacetime introduces a greater fluidity and flexibility into nature's laws. In outer space, these forces give rise to the phenomenon of black holes. Moreover, said Einstein, gravity is caused by the curvature of the earth! Also, he came to see that mass and energy are equivalent — the discovery which made possible the atom bomb.

And Einstein's work led also to the field of quantum mechanics. He made the field possible, but eventually withdrew from some of the implications. He objected to the uncertainty principle — especially the notion that the human being creates reality by his act of observation (as in the famous experiment of Schrodinger's cat). Isaacson very perceptively traces Einstein's thoughts here. Einstein believed throughout his life that the cosmos displays elegance, beauty, simplicity. He never lost his sense of awe, of a childlike wonder. And, thus, when confronted by improbabilities, he called the attitudes of the new generation of quantum physicists "spookiness at a distance." He said they had not completed their work. He said, "Nature hides her secrets because of her essential loftiness, but not by means of ruse." God, he said, does not play dice. Here he reverted to Newtonian thinking, insisting that there have to be discernible causes for the effects in nature. He challenged his younger colleagues to look behind the realities of the physical phenomena; they replied that this is not the business of science — and besides maybe there is nothing there. He demurred. He fought positivism and atheism. He said the world exists apart from our perception of it. He called himself an agnostic — "a religious unbeliever" as he put it. But he had a strong sense of the conformity of the mind to nature's reality — nothing less than a miracle. And the brain is more than can be accounted for by the categories of physics. It harbors an immaterial presence and generates transcendence. When asked about the New Testament record he replied, "I am a Jew, but I am enthralled by the luminous figure of the Nazarene. No myth is filled with such life."

Isaacson allots a generous amount of space to Einstein's troubled married life with his first wife, Maric, and his more settled life with his second life, Elsa, as well as his relationships with his two sons (the first, Albert, became a Christian). And there were times that Einstein became more involved with political affairs than with science. After being an ardent pacifist, he came to see that some wars need to be fought. He fled Germany and settled in America, where he set up his office at Princeton University. He worked for universal world peace and headed a society for nuclear disarmament. In science, he kept working for a unified field theory that would account for all nature's forces in simple formulas. This achievement eluded him. His own words explain why: "Nature did not deem it her business to make the discovery of her laws easy for us. But she will reward our industry." Well, she has rewarded his industry and benefited all humankind — not so much through the practical application of his work carried on by others — but by helping us to think God's thoughts after Him. And Isaacson's study will surely become a classic.