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Seek Wisdom

Editorial


Bert Witvoet

Helpless in the Dentist Chair

A few months ago I was reclining in a dentist chair. It's not my favorite chair, but when you have to have a root canal done, it's better to sit or lie than to stand. While my dentist was drilling away as if looking for gold, he got into a spirited conversation with his assistant about the plight of the earth. He has, by the way, a very pessimistic outlook on our chances of surviving global warming in the near future. I almost asked him to stop drilling. What's the point of saving a tooth if the rest of me is soon headed for oblivion anyway?

Both he and his assistant also lamented the fate of whales at a nearby seapark called Marineland. These huge and beautiful animals are kept in a cage-like tank for the benefit of our depraved sense of curiosity. He had read that whales have bigger brains than humans and that they probably are more intelligent than humans. "Only in the area of motor skills do we exceed the ability of whales," he said. You get the picture. My dentist is down on human achievements and thinks we are not intelligent enough to produce the needed harmony in the world that is needed for survival.

He's not totally out to lunch on that one. Sin and Satan are not exactly agents of harmony. I can get pretty depressed about our inability as human societies to bring about harmony in this world. Just that morning the newspapers were filled with unrest in Iran about what appeared to be a rigged election. There's a plaque on the wall of my dentist's office that defines harmony as "the pleasing coming together of parts."

When he was finished with the less than pleasing coming together of his drill and my tooth, I stood up. My mouth was partly frozen, as if in anticipation of the coming Ice Age, but I managed to mumble something about wisdom being more important than intelligence. "Wisdom," I said, (maybe I said "widdom") is the ability to use knowledge for the good of all." He agreed, but said again that whales are wiser than human beings. I felt like saying, "Whales have a constant level of wisdom, if that's what they have, but human beings have the ability to fluctuate between great wisdom and utter folly," but I wasn't sure I could manage "widdom" and "fluccuate" at the same time, so I shook his hand and left.

It's not fair for a dentist to spout all kinds of notions about deep philosophical and religious issues for 20 minutes while I, always game for a deep discussion, was trying hard not to swallow all the water and saliva that was collecting at the back of my mouth (remember my reclining position). How can you witness about sin and grace in that helpless estate? I have found a solution, however. Before he has a chance to poke his instruments of torture into my gaping mouth again, I will hand him a copy of the *Christian Educators Journal*. Maybe it will address the issue on which he is about to pronounce. I hope he will enjoy this editorial and issue, at least. It's all about wisdom ... and the lack thereof.

BW

Introducing Our Future Editor

Gary VanArragon brings a wealth of wisdom from the areas of teaching and leading to the editorship of the *Christian Educators Journal*. Gary began his teaching career in 1970 at Hamilton District Christian High, Hamilton, Ontario, Canada. He moved from Hamilton to Lambton Christian High in Sarnia, Ontario, and finished his career at Woodland Christian High School outside of Kitchener-Waterloo, Ontario. Gary has taught in the high school classroom (predominantly history), has been a Guidance counselor and been in administration as both a Vice-Principal and Principal. Gary's interest over the years has been to connect vision and worldview to the practice of Christian education both in what is taught, how it is taught and the culture that is created in a school community. Gary currently works part-time for the Ontario Alliance of Christian Schools as the High School Curriculum Coordinator. He resides in Guelph, Ontario, with his wife Gretchen and always immensely enjoys the company of his children and grandchildren.

We look forward to his tenure and wish him God's richest blessings as he continues to serve the wider Christian educational community.

Diane Stronks, on behalf of the CEJ Board

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Cry for Wisdom

My son, if you accept my wordsand store up my commands within you,
turning your ear to wisdom and applying your ear to understanding –
indeed, if you call out for insight and cry aloud for understanding,
and if you look for it as for silver and search for it as for hidden treasure,
then you will understand the fear of the Lord and find the knowledge of God.
Proverbs 2: 1 – 5 (TNIV)

Few of us would deny that wisdom is a characteristic to be prized. If we use the word "wise" to describe a person, we are paying her a compliment. Many of our Christian schools are based on the confession that "the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom" (Psalm 111: 10 TNIV). But what exactly is wisdom, and how can Christian schools encourage the development of wisdom in students?

One dictionary definition (Dictionary.com) offers the following: "*the quality or state of being wise; knowledge of what is true or right coupled with just judgment as to action; sagacity, discernment, or insight.*" With other words, a wise person knows how to make life decisions in ways that are just and true and right, decisions that reflect an understanding both of God's will and of the world in which these decisions are made. They are like the people of the tribe of Issachar, "*who understood the times and knew what Israel should do*" (1 Chronicles 12: 32 TNIV).

At a key level therefore, the purpose of Christian education is to give students an understanding of the culture in which they live, with all of its complexities, its pain and its beauty. At the same time, students need to explore who God is, what God's shalom might look like in our world, and how they, as God's people, can contribute to the advancement of that shalom. That is the path of wisdom.

But as the writer of Proverbs notes, wisdom is not something that comes to us easily. Gaining wisdom requires that we cry for it, that we search for it. And that is often hard work. There are many voices that call us to live our lives in certain ways, and many of those voices are not the voices of wisdom, but they are voices that lead us away from God. Our schools therefore must also be places where students can safely examine those voices and develop the discernment that they will need to live with wisdom in this world.

Seen in this context, Christian education can sometimes seem like a dangerous business. Students will read, see and hear things that will challenge their faith. But the beauty of Christian schools is that students can be lead through those challenges by mature and wise Christian educators, people who know God and who know from their life's experience the truth of God's direction for life. They can, by God's grace and Spirit, help students to grow as wise contributors to the coming of God's kingdom.

Gary Van Arragon

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All Wisdom Comes from God:
John Calvin on Wisdom

by Frank Sawyer

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Introduction

Dear teacher: the following research into John Calvin's remarks relating to wisdom only scratches the surface of a rich vein of gold. It invites the reader to think about some basic issues. As teachers we are always attempting to find and share wisdom together with our students. This can be done in a wide range of pedagogical ways, depending on the age of our students and the topics we are called to teach. After meditating on the following, a teacher may be able to streamline the material into relevant discussion topics for the students.

Philosophers seek wisdom

The ancient Greek philosophers, including Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, as well as the Stoics, Sophists and Epicureans, all had something to say about wisdom. Usually wisdom was attributed to the gods — and some of the philosophers began to form the concept of a high God or divinity, a concept which was not to be reduced to the popular stories about the gods. It was usually said that we can only participate in this divine wisdom in a limited way. Yet it remains our duty to seek more wisdom.

Socrates spoke like that and Plato agreed. Aristotle advanced in the direction of looking at wisdom as human insight and skills that can be learned and applied in concrete situations. His writings on ethics are full of wisdom. Wisdom for the Stoics included belief in the great wheel of fortune, and this was sometimes expressed as personal trust in divine providence. The Sophists looked at methods and techniques for successful management of human affairs as the road of practical wisdom. The Epicureans had no deep need for the gods (who they said were quite distant); they emphasized wisdom as a peaceful life among friends.

Calvin knew quite a bit about the history of philosophy and was aware of such tendencies of "schools of thought" to produce their own views on wisdom. He was both appreciative and critical of what they had achieved.

The Bible and wisdom

Since Calvin was primarily a Bible scholar, theologian, church pastor and leader, we need to summarize in short form some of the biblical thoughts about wisdom, for these formed his central source.

In the Old Testament there are many aspects to the expression of wisdom. Wisdom is seen as keeping God's commandments (Prov.4:11), and is characterized by prudence (Prov.8:12) and discernment (Prov.14:8) as well as humility (Prov.10:8). Wisdom in the Old Testament is placed on the side of God, as in Proverbs 8, which places wisdom at God's side at the very beginning of creation. Human wisdom is displayed in the Old Testament in a variety of aspects, such as human skills and abilities, ethical conduct and piety. Indeed, respect for the Lord God is said to be the beginning of wisdom.

In the New Testament the word *sophia* occurs quite often, repeating the Old Testament usages. However, it takes on a special focus in Christ, who is called our wisdom (I Cor.1:30). This is contrasted by the Apostle Paul to worldly wisdom — which today we sometimes call exclusive humanism, namely, the kind which *excludes* God.

All wisdom is a divine gift

Calvin echoes the philosophers, but especially the Bible, by saying that wisdom is a gift of God. He often comments that we receive this wisdom through the Bible as the Word of God, and by means of the Spirit of God. He further echoes the Bible when he speaks of the blindness of human conceit.

Wisdom serves the common good

Calvin recognized that the human side of wisdom includes capabilities and skills. However, we all know that wisdom is more than skill or knowledge or imagination, for a skillful, knowledgeable or imaginative person may be unwise. But "in practice" wisdom is applied somehow to our decisions and actions. It somehow has to do with insight into appropriate and virtu-

ous living — but then in concrete living. Should I speak up or be silent? And if I speak, what should I say in difficult situations? Calvin often states that all our abilities should be used wisely to serve the common good and the good of our neighbor. He emphasizes human solidarity. To quote a couple of phrases from Calvin:

All are neighbors to each other. It is sufficient that someone should be a person for them to be our neighbor. (Sermon on Luke 10:30).

When we see that God has created the human race in such a way that we are allied together, and no one holds back where he can help but we contribute all we have at our disposal for the common good, can we fail to be moved by such fellowship? (Sermon on I Cor.11:11-16).

Wisdom through experience

We can illustrate this by showing how Calvin recognized the relative attempts of human culture in regard to the arrangement of society. He writes:

It therefore does not matter that they [laws and constitutions] are different, provided they all equally press toward the same goal of equity. [The preference of laws is made]...with regard to the condition of times, place, and nation.... (Institutions Iv.xx.15 & 16)

So Calvin understood that, although there is cultural relativity, all positing of social arrangements should press toward the goal of fairness and justice. He spoke about such things very regularly, as his understanding of our human calling was to transform things according to virtuous standards. These standards he sought by a careful reading of the Scriptures. It is interesting that, on the one hand, he enthusiastically extols our duty and calling to do the will of God. On the other hand, his realism has him say that in actually understanding and applying wisdom, "the greatest geniuses are blinder than moles!" (*Institutes II.ii.18*). That brings us to the theme of our limits.

The limits of human wisdom

True wisdom is also a matter of recognizing our limits. For Calvin it was important to say that we receive the wisdom of self-understanding through our relationship to God:

Nearly all the wisdom we possess, that is to say, true and sound wisdom, consists of two parts: the knowledge of God and of ourselves. (Institutes I.i.1)

First, we should consider for what purpose we have been created and endowed with no mean gifts. ...Secondly, we should weigh our own abilities – or rather, lack of abilities.. ...The first consideration tends to make us recognize the nature of our duty; the second, the extent of our ability to carry it out. (Institutes II.i.3 & 8)

Calvin expresses biblical realism here. The key to the old philosophical question of "understand your own self'" is found in listening to the Word of God. From the Word of God we learn not only our duty but also our limits. In modern times great thinkers (Nietzsche, Marx, Heidegger, Freud, Sartre, etc.) have pointed out the ambiguity of human motives and human ideologies. But Paul, Augustine, Kierkegaard, Dostoevsky also did the same. Jesus also spoke that way, especially when dealing with the religious leaders, as in Matthew 23. That the heart is deceitful (Proverbs 2:10) is at the center of recognizing not only limits, but also the evil tendencies in human affairs.

Abraham Kuyper, one of the major neo-Calvinist leaders, applied this to the "social question" (of poverty) by commenting that great social problems are partly due to human errors — for example, regarding the means to solve the problem. But, he said, these problems are also due to sinful abuses, which are defended by means of ideological self-justification for maintaining one's own power or financial gain. Calvin and the Calvinist tradition have been notably strong on recognizing the smokescreen of human self-justification. Like everyone else, however, we Calvinists do not always apply these insights to ourselves. Calvin himself knew that "the more power a person holds, the worse he will be, and the more roughly he will treat his neighbors" (*Commentary on James 2:6*). Calvin could also say that a variety of evils are "even greater among those who call themselves Christians" than among the pagans (*Sermon on Deuteronomy 20*).

Framing our lives

There is a passage in the *Institutes* (II.ii.18) where Calvin talks about spiritual wisdom as meaning the "framing our lives" according to God's law. Other translations say "regulating our lives." This was such a central point for Calvin that he said that the prime use of the moral law (for example, the ten commandments) is to guide the daily life of the believer. Calvin saw this principle as primary because the law then becomes a personal guide. The other uses of the law he said (as was traditional) are: i) the restraint of evil in society; and ii) the call to repentance. The use of the law as a restraint to evil in society was called the "political use." It is worth pointing out that Calvin saw this view of law as important but not enough in itself. In our own time, the scale has tipped away from applying the Ten Commandments across society, and viewing them once again as a word to God's people. That is how they were originally given, as part of a covenant to those called to listen to God's will. In other words, they remain of supreme importance to Christian identity, even when they cannot be applied as a social program in our secularized society.

Socrates more than anyone pointed out that we cannot define wisdom. Yet his intention was not to say that we should give up the quest, but, rather, that we should go forward in refining our understanding of the virtuous life and examine our own practice. Calvin more than anyone emphasized that we are blinder than moles in regard to seeing and accepting divine wisdom. Yet his intention was not to discourage us, but rather to say that we should go forward in transforming our own lives and society.

Discussion questions

1. Are their similarities and differences in the wisdom of the philosophers and the wisdom in the Bible?

2. Do you think most people still say that wisdom is a gift from God?

3. Give examples showing how wisdom serves the common good, and how unwise actions do not.

4. How can we have the wisdom of recognizing limits when popular scientific education suggests that we are becoming "all knowing"? When popular technology suggests we are becoming "all powerful"? When advertising suggests that we could become "all wealthy"?

5. Formulate in a couple of sentences what it means to you to try to frame your life according to the will of God?

Assigning questions to students

a. Use such resources as books, encyclopaedias, or the Internet to tell the main features of John Calvin's life.

b. Some caricatures of Calvin make him into a stern and fatalistic thinker. Can you find evidence which repudiates this view?

c. Calvin said that our life should glorify God and serve the common good. Can you find five quotations from Calvin to illustrate this?

d. John Calvin made sharp statements about the abuse of power, the foolishness of war, and the responsibility we have to help our neighbor. Can you find statements by Calvin on these themes?

e. Calvin said that true wisdom comes from the knowledge of God and the knowledge of ourselves. List three points about each of these kinds of knowledge and how they may relate to each other.

f. Calvin thought that the Ten Commandments form the basic guidelines for living according to the will of God. Discuss the wisdom of each of these ten — different students may be assigned the task of defending the wisdom of one of these commandments.

Four reading sources:

John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1967).

Graham Miller, *Calvin's Wisdom: An Anthology Arranged Alphabetically* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth publishing, 1992).

André Biéler, *Calvin's Economic and Social Thought* (Geneva: World council of Churches, 2005).

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Thought Without Practice is Dead

Wisdom for a love of Educating

by Dirk Windhorst

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Many Christian schools have Psalm 111 verse 10 inscribed on their cornerstones: "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom." How has this foundational verse affected Christian day-school education? There is little doubt that much attention has been paid to the beginning of wisdom. A God-fearing school community is not afraid to pray aloud and to put the Bible at the centre of the curriculum. Indeed, in the Reformational branch of Christian schools there is an ongoing, conscious and self-critical attempt to scrutinize and shape every subject of the curriculum from the vantage point of a biblical worldview. But how seriously have schools taken the end of education implied by Psalm 111? Is wisdom truly the purpose of Christian education? If so, how successful have Christian schools been in achieving it? Do we know what wisdom looks like? How does one test for wisdom?

Webster's gives three synonyms for wisdom: knowledge (accumulated learning), insight (ability to discern), and judgment (good sense). One can recognize parts of Bloom's taxonomy of educational objectives here: to comprehend and recall what one has learned (knowledge), to analyze a problem and apply knowledge to a new situation (discernment, insight), and to evaluate a proposal or outcome (judgment). Who can argue against wisdom so defined as a worthy goal for Christian schools?

More than knowing

Nevertheless, what binds the various definitions together is a straightforward idea to which a secular pragmatist such as John Dewey and a Christian mystic such as Simone Weil could agree: Wisdom means knowing what to do in a particular situation and acting on that knowledge. It combines knowing and acting, thinking and doing. Wisdom is directed more towards concrete practices than it is towards abstract theories. Do our schools encourage or impede the development of wisdom in this sense? Seventy years ago, the answer was clearly negative as Dewey (1933) observed:

> *Because their knowledge has been achieved in connection with the needs of specific situations, men [sic] of little book-learning are often able to put to effective use every ounce of knowledge they possess; while men of vast erudition are often swamped by the mere bulk of their learning, because memory, rather than thinking, has been operative in obtaining it.* (p. 64)

One could possibly argue that memorizing information is no longer the dominant mode of learning in North American schools, and that Dewey's criticism no longer applies. Indeed, many educators deplore how knowledge is often equated with mere information and seek to develop higher-order thinking skills with their students. This implies an overall commitment to wisdom, doesn't it?

Practical thinking

About thirty years ago, a Christian school principal told the parents of a boy in Grade 8 that his poor grades indicated that he would never amount to much. Despite this dire prediction, the parents saw something in their son to which the principal was blind. They had seen him work in the family business (wholesale florists), and it did not surprise them when he eventually took over management of the firm. When he hired me on as vacation relief in the summer, he taught me his sales route by putting me behind the wheel while he gave directions from the passenger's seat. I was forced to pay attention to the route by experiencing it first-hand, not second-hand in the passenger's seat, or third-hand through someone else's written directions. I was instructed to write down my own directions for each stage of the journey every time we stopped. Writing served to consolidate learning, not initiate it.

This boy had grown into a man who seemed wiser than his former principal. Yet, the Christian school had not allowed the boy's gift for practical thinking to shine through. Do not our schools emphasize third-hand learning through written directions over first-hand learning through direct experience? And if wisdom emerges out of practical thinking as one prominent psychologist suggests, then are not our schools failing to educate for wisdom?

Instinctive knowledge

Sternberg (1998) sees tacit knowledge (a part of practical intelligence) as the core

of wisdom. By definition, tacit knowledge does not need to be expressed in words. A person can know how to be a wonderful parent or teacher without having the ability to articulate and explain to others how it is done; conversely, a person can talk a good line, but be unable to perform. It is not uncommon for a writer to describe the beauty of a hockey play without having the skills necessary to stick-handle on skates; conversely, highly skilled players often can only mumble a few clichés to reporters in post-game interviews. Tacit knowing is having a "feel" for a particular context, to "read" a certain situation correctly before acting. Hence, Sternberg argues, it cannot be taught directly; it can only be learned through practical experience. Good teachers have this kind of tacit knowledge, and their instincts have been honed primarily in the crucible of teaching practice, not in the study of educational texts. Indeed, tacit knowledge may be a necessary prerequisite for understanding and appreciating what is communicated through lectures, discussions, articles, books, or computers.

In the world outside of school, the immediacy of real, practical problems furnishes a natural stimulus to think, and testing the worth of an idea entails trying it out in practice. With the artificial stimulus of marks and grades provided by schools, students are more likely to memorize pre-made patterns of symbols (so-called thoughts) and recall them for paper-and-pencil tests without necessarily understanding how the symbols function in connection to the things they symbolize. Understanding can best be achieved by thinking through problems for oneself, especially if the solution to the problem has immediate practical consequences. For example, over a century ago a number of boys in the Dewey laboratory school at the University of Chicago kept making the error of putting the decimal in the wrong place when calculating the cost of lumber. This mistake disappeared soon after the students were given the responsibility of purchasing the lumber themselves for a clubhouse that their schoolmates were building (Dewey, 1933, p. 100).

'Real' problems

Even today, how often do we find elementary students trained to follow recipes or formulas in solving so-called problems? In one Christian elementary school that I observed recently, Grade Four students were given a series of math questions that reviewed different problem-solving strategies. The students were lost and upset because the teacher would not tell them which strategy to use with which problem: "Do I add, subtract, multiply, or divide?" Problems for them meant manipulating numbers according to certain patterns. Had they never been given the stimulus to think through a problem for themselves? Had they not been led to visualize the concrete situation to which the words and numbers referred? For them, it was a school exercise, not a real problem. It had no meaning which connected it to their experience; it was part of that strange and esoteric world called math.

"As faith without deeds is dead, so thoughts untested in practice are phantoms."

How can one educate for wisdom in a Christian school? How can the beginning of wisdom (the fear of the Lord) lead to the end of wisdom? How can teachers and students follow Jesus Christ who is the perfect embodiment of God's love in the flesh, the very Wisdom of God in whom all things hold together? Or, as James might say, how can authentic faith be expressed through concrete action? As faith without deeds is dead, so thoughts untested in practice are phantoms.

Physical experience

Both Dewey and Weil believed that wisdom in the concrete, practical, and action-oriented sense described above was rooted in working with one's hands. Weil (1942/1977) believed that schooling must be conceived in an entirely new way, that it may shape men [sic] capable of understanding the total aspects of the work in which they will be taking part. Not that the level of theoretic studies must be lowered; rather, the contrary. More should be done to excite the intelligence to wakefulness, but at the same time teaching must itself become more concrete. (p. 71)

In his laboratory school, Dewey's curriculum was structured around the idea of occupations and manual training — cooking, sewing, gardening, carpentry. Learning to read, write, and calculate were gradually connected to purposes formulated by children as they sought to solve such problems as separating wheat from chaff or spinning thread from raw wool. The study of science, history, geography, and all the other subjects flowed out of concrete activities that made sense to the developing child as he or she was guided to understand the material basis of society.

Avoid tourism

Both Dewey and Weil agreed that wisdom is rooted in a certain kind of transaction with the environment, an action intelligently directed towards the environment that rebounds in ways that strengthens an

individual from a moral point of view (Dewey). On the rebound, this activity could unify powerful emotions and clear thoughts resulting in a truer perception (Weil). This indirect action — activity diverted from immediate outlet through inward deliberation towards a measured, mediated expression — was work.

How is work connected to perception? In the early evening, two men are walking beside a pear orchard recently harvested. One has spent the day picking pears and is getting ready to go home. The other is a tourist who has never picked fruit. The laborer perceives the orchard differently than the tourist does because the former's perception has been deepened and disciplined by a more-or-less strenuous physical contact endured over a sustained period of time. Weil considered this to be a truer perception because it was fashioned by a more genuine contact with reality. To what extent are our schools producing students who perceive the world like workers rather than tourists? To what extent does the curriculum encourage a deep engagement with God's creation rather than a cursory sampling of pre-digested bits of information continuously applied over thirteen years of compulsory schooling?

Sense of accomplishment

The following illustration is drawn from my own experience working on a fruit farm. The purifying joys of physical labor were not what initially drew me to the farm at the age of nine. It was the opportunity to drive a tractor. Even though I was paid little or no money, I sensed that driving a tractor was not just a favor that my father (with the tacit permission of the owners) extended to a bored kid: I had a contribution to make. During harvest season, I drove the tractor in a stop-and-go fashion through orchards and vineyards while my father and his co-worker loaded up the trailer with baskets of Blue Delicious plums or Concord grapes or bushels of Bartlett pears. I saved them the extra effort of getting on and off the tractor between stops.

So began my first of eighteen consecutive seasons of work on a fruit farm. I did not want to return to school in September. Some days I would look out of the Grade 5 classroom window, and with a lump in my throat, see my father loading up grapes at the end of a vineyard. Each day at 3:30, I would tear out of the building and run the quarter-mile from school to farm, joining my father until suppertime. Each autumn Saturday, from seven in the morning until six in the evening, I would pick fruit in the field or help grade and pack it in the barn or — my favorite — haul trailers fully-laden with fruit from field to barn. When my father could no longer work because of debilitating arthritis, the owners of the fruit farm invited me to work from May through August — the summer break for university students.

Tacit knowledge as the core of wisdom

Change of perception

It was during the first full summer of farm work that I experienced the joys of arduous labor. Using a long-handled shovel, I had to cut down weeds missed by a tractor-drawn disc-harrow. This meant going around the trunk of every tree through approximately 100 acres of pear, plum, cherry and peach orchards. When blisters began to form on my palms, I felt envy for a more senior co-worker who sat on a tractor all day. How was I going to make it through two exhausting weeks of ten-hour days working by myself?

As my blisters changed into callouses and my muscles firmed up, the ceaseless rhythm of my swinging shovel brought me to a state in which I paid attention to ordinary things. The changing position of the sun, the rustling of leaves, the sweet scent of grape blossom, the variations in temperature, the perspiration rolling off my forehead, the pain in my back — these were all savored and endured as I thought along with Weil: "...only those possess nature and the land who have been penetrated by it through the daily suffering of their limbs broken by fatigue" (cited in Pétrement, 1973/1976, p. 444). I was alive! The idea of sitting on a tractor began to lose its hold on me. The stench of diesel exhaust and the steady roar of the engine seemed more and more repugnant. My perception had changed.

Work and play

Now, I am not arguing that students should be subjected to this kind of physical labor as soon as possible. I believe that I was in a position to receive the fullness of this experience because of many previous summers contributing to the work of the farm while enjoying what seemed like play to me— driving a tractor. Unlike play in the strict sense of the term — where activity is enjoyed without regard to where it might lead — work involves setting up ends-in-view and determining what means, or series of steps, would result in consequences which most closely approximated desired ends. Nevertheless, enjoyment is an essential part of work so conceived. Work is play transformed into something more intelligent. At the mercy of whim or

circumstance in "pure" play, a casual interest can become an absorbing interest, one that moves a person to peer into where an activity might lead — the genesis of work. If play and work do not interpenetrate through this transformation of interest, if they are isolated from each other, then play will degenerate into "fooling around" and work becomes drudgery.

How can play and work interpenetrate? First of all, there is "play" in the flexible relationship between means and ends. Means determine ends at the same time as ends determine means. Continuously along the sequence of steps employed as means, ends become clarified, modified, or even discarded as the consequences of actions become increasingly visible in deliberation. Secondly, a person employed in this kind of work experiences a sense of freedom in direct proportion to the amount of responsibility he or she has in planning and executing the work. This is what Weil sought to achieve in making factory work more of a joy and less of a monotonous burden. Rather than having bodies performing actions on behalf of other minds (as is the case in most factories), or having younger minds receiving the pre-fabricated thoughts of older minds distilled through teachers or textbooks, and developing skills without reference to purposes that the students themselves formed (as is the case in most schools), Dewey and Weil sought to strengthen the connection between thinking and acting in every working person. As this connection grew, wisdom emerged.

Open to grace

Even though Dewey and Weil found much agreement on the psychological genesis of wisdom, their paths diverged once they considered wisdom in a broader context. For Dewey, wisdom was connected to nature through the moral striving of the human part of nature. It came into existence as human beings modified actual conditions towards ideal ends, ends which themselves were suggested by natural situations previously experienced. The wisdom of human action took into account the generic traits of nature (stability and contingency) to which it was always subject even as it sought to manipulate these traits in creating a better life for all.

For Weil, wisdom is connected to nature in a double relation. Nature is subject to a divine wisdom even as human wisdom is subject to nature. Human modification of actual conditions is not a one way street: both human actions which change natural environments and human joys and sufferings given or inflicted by nature are tempered and enlightened by a divine love — a wise persuasion — which is communicated to those who, like Job, ardently desire it and are willing to wait patiently and attentively for it.

In remaining open to the possibility that divine grace both transcends nature and is the very cause and reason for nature's existence, Weil was wiser than Dewey. Nevertheless, Dewey has much to teach us if we are open to the possibility that grace can operate through those who do not acknowledge its presence.

If, like Doug Blomberg (2007), we are willing to question a tradition of schooling that has exalted theory over practice, then, perhaps we can find the courage, desire, and delight to re-conceive Christian day-school education — to educate for a love of wisdom.

Further information:

Dirk Windhorst has taught for 22 years in Christian elementary schools and 8 years at Redeemer University College. His doctoral dissertation is entitled Educating for a Love of Wisdom: John Dewey and Simone Weil.

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So That They May Believe

by Dora Stroobosscher

Dora Stroobosscher (dora@cogeo.ca) is a retired teacher who, with her husband, Marc, spends several months a year working with indigenous schools and educators in South Africa. She lives in St. Catharines, Ontario.

It is a warm afternoon in March, 2009, the second day of a five-day Teachers' Conference in the Limpopo province of South Africa. Ingwe Ranch, the conference venue, is located in a lush, semi-tropical setting, approximately 100 km. south of the Zimbabwean border. About 75 teachers representing eight Christian schools have just finished attending a plenary session and are finding their way to the next workshop.

About 15 of these teachers have wasted no time in getting to the workshop they have chosen to attend. For the next two hours they will continue to work on writing a Bible Curriculum, one which will eventually become a complete Bible program for Gr. K-3. The workshop leader has not yet arrived. She is still in discussion with some teachers about the topic of the plenary session, a topic that presented the multi-layered word CREATION. It was just one of a series of plenary sessions that challenged teachers to a deeper understanding of God's redemptive story.

The fact that the leader is not yet there does not deter the teachers. The materials — Bible stories, Bibles, lined paper, Bible story books and other reference materials — are all laid out, and they know what to do. When she arrives, they are already busy, working in groups of two or three. Their first challenge is to arrive at a lesson focus. What does this Bible story reveal about God? How will this story move the learner to faith, a faith that leads to true wisdom? Those, after all, are the most important questions that face any Bible teacher. They are reading the photocopied version of the Bible story which they have chosen, then find the same story in their Bibles and read it again. Depending on the story, they decide that the focus will be that:

- ☐ God is a God of justice and of love. He destroyed the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah but showed love to Lot and his family.
- ☐ Joseph suffered at the hands of his brothers, but God had a bigger plan in mind for him.
- ☐ Sometimes God can take a long time to answer our prayers. He just asks us to remain faithful and to keep trusting in him.
- ☐ Jesus was able to heal a sick man just by speaking

Enthusiastic start

Then they discuss what might be some lesson outcomes, keeping in mind the LO's (Lesson Outcomes) prescribed by the South African Department of Education. Will the learners develop their listening skills, participate in a group discussion, plan and present a drama, learn a new song, fill in a puzzle or a worksheet, color a picture? The possibilities are endless, and the workshop leader has to remind them not to squeeze too much into one lesson. But it is difficult to curb creativity. Some groups make up a new song and practice singing it together. Others groups choose to split up the work. One does the artwork for a sequencing activity, another makes word cards to help learn the names and develop vocabulary, and a third begins to write the actual lesson.

What questions will the teacher ask to set the stage? How best can the lesson be presented, and what kind of responses might be expected of the learners? What kind of activities can reinforce what has been presented? What can be said or done that will encourage learners to go beyond the lesson, and what activities can be assessed or evaluated? Will there be time for prayer or reflection? Each group finishes writing their lesson, complete with a section called Teacher Preparation. What will the teacher need to know and do in order to be prepared to teach this lesson?

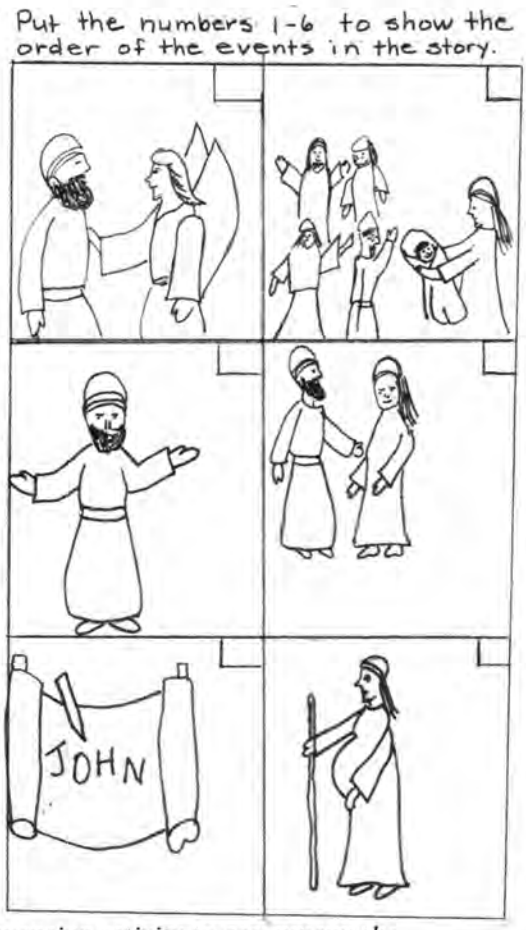
They are anxious to start on another story, but their time together is up. The rough drafts of their work are given to the workshop leader, who will edit it and find someone to type it. They leave, excited about having been personally involved in writing a Bible curriculum that will benefit many Christian schools ... and, they were able to do this with little outside assistance.

Overcoming challenges

That is the end of this story, but now let's go back to the beginning.

The idea for a Teacher Resource binder for Bible was born when principals of three Christian schools in Limpopo, South Africa, visited southern Ontario in the fall of 2007. They had visited a number of Christian schools and were overwhelmed by the endless possibilities of a biblically integrated approach to Christian education. Our

The Man Who Received Glad Tidings



A sequencing activity to accompany the story of Zechariah was hand-drawn by one of the teachers.

discussion led me to ask the question: *We have been in a number of Christian schools in Limpopo and noticed that not one of them has given Bible teaching a slot in the timetable, although they do start the day with all-school devotions. I know that adding a subject called Bible still does not mean that the biblical worldview is integrated into every subject, but it seems to me that it would be a good place to start in order to set yourself apart as a Christian school.*

I received a very unexpected and sad answer: *Dora, many of our teachers do not know the stories well enough themselves. We do not have the many Bibles and Bible story books that you have here.* My mind went into racing mode: *What if I would write the stories to avoid any copyright restrictions?* My totally unrealistic offer was accepted as a precious gift! Well, to borrow from Robert Frost's poem *The Road Not Taken,* "way leads to way," and I found myself traveling a few different roads.

Time traveled right along with me, and I was now faced with a very real problem. It was already May, and we were returning to South Africa in August. One of the proposed projects was to begin work on the Bible Curriculum, beginning at the Foundation (K-3) Phase, and not one story had been written! How was I going to keep that impetuous promise I had made? I went to our personal library and there came across a Bible story book that my own five children had grown up with. *The Bible Story for Younger Children* by Anne De Vries was old, but, as I browsed through it again, I also realized that it was one of the best I had ever come across.

On an impulse, I called the publisher, explained what my challenge was, and asked if I could at least borrow some of the ideas used throughout this outdated book. What an answer to prayer when I was given permission to use all the stories as a basis for this curriculum! It took some cutting and pasting to separate the stories so that each could be used as a lesson, and I realized that some stories that were missing would have to be added, but the work could begin.

The work takes off

That is the beginning of this story, but now let's go back to the middle.

My husband, Marc, and I arrived in Limpopo at the beginning of September, 2008, to continue our work at Theocentric Christian College, an all-black school in the rural north of South Africa. This would be the fourth time we were working at this school, mentoring and encouraging teachers. Shortly after we arrived, the Association of Christian School Principals had its monthly meeting. This is an association that was started in response to a Teachers' Conference held in 2007. The principals had come to realize how important it was to be in regular contact, to support and pray for each other, and also to work on projects that would benefit all of the member schools. The idea of a Bible curriculum was wholeheartedly endorsed. The principals agreed that this project would warrant closing the Foundation Phase for one Friday each month so that the teachers could be involved in the writing process.

On the first of these Fridays, twenty-four teachers from eight schools came to Theo. We discussed the importance of a Bible program which focused on learning about God and leading children to a strong faith in him. We "walked" our way through a model lesson with all the necessary components. The teachers then worked in groups, each group writing a lesson using the same Bible story. Then came presentation time! We were amazed at the creative and various ways that the same story could become a lesson, and we had fun, singing and dancing our way through the song one of the groups had written as part of their lesson. The teachers were now ready to strike out on their own, and, by the end of the first session, the rough drafts for the first ten lessons had been completed. Between that Friday and the next one in October, I spent time editing and making some revisions. The clerk of Theocentric agreed to type out each lesson and to "fancy up" the worksheets.

Twenty-one teachers came to the next session. A few were new, but most were ready to carry on where we had left off and were very able and willing to show the newcomers how it was done. We began that session by pretending that they were the learners and I, the teacher, taught them one of the lessons they had written. They then received a binder containing all ten lessons and spent time looking through the neatly typed, professional looking work. Laughter and pride filled the air as they recognized their own work, and they were ready and eager to do more! When we returned to Theocentric in February, 2009, two more of these curriculum writing days were planned. In all, including the writing workshop at the conference, 48 lessons have been completed. The fully completed Bible program will look like this:

- ☐ Kindergarten: Creation – death of Moses (completed)
- ☐ Grade One: A New Land- end of the Old Testament
- ☐ Grade Two: The Life of Jesus: birth-ascension(nearing completion)
- ☐ The Kingdom Grows: Pentecost-apostles' missionary journeys

Future projects

That is the middle of this story, but now let's look ahead into the future.

The teachers did not want to wait until the whole program was finished. Already now they use the completed lessons in their classrooms. They are excited about working with lessons that they themselves have written, lessons that will help them as they teach their learners that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, that our God is an awesome God, and that they are encouraged to have faith and trust in him.

As one of their goals for this year, the Association of Christian School Principals is working to develop a common curriculum for their schools so that they can choose curriculum-writing projects that will benefit all schools. They are also identifying those teachers who have the skills and passion for writing biblically-grounded curricula for other areas of learning. God has already blessed and equipped those South African Christian school teachers who worked on the Bible curriculum for South African learners, a curriculum that is written for the culture in which they live! May more join them, and may they aspire to wisdom, creativity, and enthusiasm as they continue this work together.

Shine Like Moons

by Michael Goheen

Michael Goheen is pastor at First Christian Reformed Church of New Westminster, B.C. This article is an excerpt from a speech given a few years ago at the BC/NW Teachers' Convention in Lynden, Washington

The gospel's call in education is far more radical than most of us are willing to admit. In a postmodern world where the light of the Enlightenment is failing, the people of God need to double their efforts to ask: "What would a school look like if it were radically shaped by the gospel, by the biblical story, rather than the Enlightenment story...?

Spiritual discernment will have the following five elements if a faithful educational embodiment is to take place.

First, we must understand the biblical story as one unfolding story that reveals to us universal history and our place in it. When the story is broken up into devotional, theological, historical-critical, or moral bits, it is easily absorbed into the reigning cultural story. Holding fast the word of life means holding fast the Bible as one story that begins with the whole creation and ends with its renewal.

Second, we must understand much more adequately the foundational idolatrous assumption and currents that are shaping Western culture. We have been deceived by the myths of a Christian culture or secular neutral culture. A Chinese proverb says: "If you want to know about water, don't ask a fish." If you want to know about Western culture, don't ask someone who is Western! The thriving churches in other parts of the world have enabled us to have a new set of eyes to view our culture.

Third, we must have a cultural strategy for dealing with the idolatrous forms of education that are prevalent in our culture. We cannot simply reject them nor adopt them. The forms of our culture must be subverted.

Fourth, we must be ready to work and suffer. It will take hard work to understand the biblical and cultural story. It will take hard work to discern idolatry and creational insight. Faithfulness will also bring suffering. Paul makes it clear that those who live godly lives in Christ Jesus will suffer. If status and success in the educational world are more important than our faithfulness, we will not shine as lights but will inevitably adopt the prevailing norms.

Fifth, Christian schools must assume a posture of prayer and repentance. Perhaps if Paul wrote his letter today, with our broader understanding of astronomy, he would have written: "Shine like *moons* in a crooked and perverse generation." Moons, of course, have no light of their own. Jesus Christ is the Light of the world. It is only in the light of his life, death and resurrection that the world can be truly seen for what it is.

Reading King David's Blog

And Other Ways of Becoming Wise in the Information Age

by Quentin J. Schultze

Quentin Schultze (schu@calvin.edu) is professor of Communication Arts and Sciences at Calvin College, Grand Rapids, Michigan.

In the film *Where the Heart Is*, an African-American "welcome woman," Sister Hubbard, meets the young, pregnant Novalee, who was abandoned at a Wal-Mart by her boyfriend. The Pentecostal Hubbard aims to give Novalee some advice. "You read the Bible?" asks Hubbard. "Not as much as I should," replies Novalee. "Good," says Sister Hubbard with conviction, "folks read too much of it, they just get confused. That's why I like to hand out just one chapter at a time. That way folks can deal with their confusion as it comes."[1]

Odd advice? Not for information-overloaded Christian educators. It's great that we can access copiousness information. I enjoy Googling. At the same time, however, we're plenty confused. Why? Partly because we think that by amassing information and by messaging with more and more people ever faster we will gain wisdom. We see wisdom as a mere byproduct of collecting information — not as a lifelong journey of intimacy with God, neighbor, and self.

Nevertheless, there's hope. We don't have to collect every piece of info-jetsam and data-flotsam to gain wisdom; such manic messaging actually makes it more difficult to discover wisdom. Instead we can learn to practice the ancient, low-tech art of becoming spiritually wise.

Life as email

What is spiritual wisdom? It's not knowledge of or access to information. It's not an immediate, practical skill such as surfing the Web, creating a podcast, or using a GPS.

In some respects, informational overload is the opposite of wisdom. Too much information frustrates and agitates us by robbing our everyday lives of meaning, purpose, and direction.

When you start feeling the burden of information, read this missive from T.S. Eliot: "Where is the wisdom we have lost in knowledge? Where is the knowledge we have lost in information?"[2] Confused? Madeleine L'Engle says that you depend "too much on knowledge, and not enough on wisdom."[3]

For one semester I did not have a computer in my campus office — by choice. I did all of my computer work at home so I could spend my time on campus connecting with students and colleagues. I found myself meditating on blessings. Instead of rushing back to my office between classes, for instance, I sometimes walked around campus, praising God for the facilities, students, colleagues, and so much more — listening to the Spirit speaking through Creation as well as through the echoes of Scripture from regular worship.

> "Imagine King David as a God-crushed, God-saved blogger."

Networking with God

By corralling my digital communications that term, I regained my spiritual direction. I needed to change my practices in order to make first things first in my life. Knowing that we need life priorities is wisdom. Setting life priorities is a fundamental step toward greater wisdom.

Wise persons avoid living frantically from byte to byte. Excessively high-tech ways of life seduce us into enjoyable but sometimes shallow social networks. They make us vulnerable to gossip and boasting. Our time-consuming digital interactions with others become short and thin, and we miss out on deeper communion with God and others.

The blessing of instant digital access to others can turn into the curse of relational immaturity. We end up with plenty of messengers and messages, but we suffer from insufficient social commitments and non-intimate love. In short, we live promiscuously, message to message, without longer-term, more meaningful relationships with God, neighbor, and self.

Wisdom includes ordered intimacy with reality, with the way things really are, down deep. Wisdom is not just bits and pieces of a worldview or scatterings of theological information.

The wise person first loves God above all other things and desires. This is where the promiscuity stops, where we can't hide behind online or offline anonymity. The beginning of wisdom is like the first date in a long-term love affair with God. It's both exhilarating and frightening.

Spiritual wisdom doesn't start with human knowledge, impressive power, or earthly authority. As we seek God in community, wisdom grows organically within us, gradually replacing our arrogance with humility, our thirst for information with a desire to truly know and be known.

Slow to Tweet and Quick to Listen

We gain wisdom by listening to our Lord through Word and worship, prompting and conviction, heart and mind — all of the means at the Triune God's disposal. God can speak to us through anything and anyone, often when we least expect it. Never-

theless, we have to avoid letting our spiritual attention be diverted by relatively trivial information, as Eliot and L'Engle remind us.

When it comes to sitting at the feet of our rabbi, we suffer a kind of culture-wide ADD. We have trouble sitting still, focusing our attention, pondering the Word, and applying it meaningfully to our lives. We feel like God is distant, unknowable; we hope that God is listening to us but we rarely sense that God is sending us a personal message. Unlike our friends, God does not email us or post private messages on our social networking sites.

I visited a monastery to listen to the brothers' thoughts about spiritual wisdom. They use email — but not much. They have a non-interactive website. They set aside time daily for the "hours" of collective worship. Most intriguing to me, they reserve daily time for private reading of Scripture and related literature. They follow the ancient practice of becoming intimate with God by consuming God's Word. St. Anselm's *Meditation on Human Redemption* (1090) describes such nourishing reading, "Taste the goodness of your redeemer... chew the honeycomb of his words, suck their flavor which is sweeter than honey, swallow their wholesome sweetness; chew by thinking, suck by understanding, swallow by loving and rejoicing."[4] Today we tend to read quickly; we exchange messages more than we read anything with an open heart in order to be transformed by the words. My monk friends read closely, slowly, reflectively, in order to be nourished by the God-breathed wisdom in a text.

Wisdom also comes through listening compassionately to friends, parents, colleagues, congregants, family, and students — to all of our "neighbors." We then hear their laughter and crying. We get to know them as broken but God-loved people. We gain such respect for them, and for God's work in them, that we better know when to remain silent, when to speak, and what to say. Nothing boosted my own education more than did the teachers who, like John 15 friends, compassionately heard my heart. They modeled wisdom in action.

King David the Blogger

Spiritual wisdom is age-old but never faddish. It long pre-dates modern machines and high-tech devices but never appeals to the masses. It's available not just in Scripture, but in the voices of wise persons who were intimate with God long before we were born. Such age-old wisdom is not found in *traditionalism* (the dead faith of the living), but in vibrant *tradition* (the living faith of the dead). 5)

> "Wisdom includes ordered intimacy with reality."

We hear these wise voices of tradition as we read, listen, converse, and worship faithfully. God gives us the privilege of growing wisdom in our hearts as we ponder and embrace Scripture, especially the Psalms. The Psalms are words of real life, words that intimately frame everyday reality. They should be our foreword for all current news and entertainment, not our tacked-on credits at the end of a day of information overload. Proverbs are great for practical wisdom, while psalms set the stage of our everyday living. The Psalmist doesn't provide infomercials or self-help books. He doesn't offer data. Instead he invites us into a sacred, heart-to-heart network for spiritual wisdom. He reminds us that God's bandwidth is unlimited.

Imagine King David as a God-crushed, God-saved blogger, pouring out his broken heart and trying with music and lyrics to wrap his mind around a forgiving God. "Good and upright is the Lord; therefore he instructs sinners in his ways. He guides the humble in what is right and teaches them his way." (Ps. 25:8-9). That's wisdom. The setting is human humility. The participants are the fallen people of a good and upright God. The medium is intimate. The purpose is learning and following the way of the Lord.

Conclusion

Our challenge in the information age is to ensure that we don't reduce wisdom, especially spiritual wisdom, to mere information. Wisdom is deeper, more trenchant. We become wise through intimacy with God, listening to others in God's world, pondering, praying, worshiping, and living faithfully in Christian community. Such ancient practices orient us to reality. They define what it means to learn and to teach wisely. Then, like Sister Hubbard, we are less likely to be confused about who and whose we are.

Endnotes

[1] *Where the Heart Is*. Los Angeles: Twentieth Century Fox, 2000, motion picture.

[2] T.S. Eliot, *The Complete Poems and Plays: 1909-1950* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc, 1962), 96.

[3] Madeleine L'Engle, *The Rock that is Higher* (Wheaton: Harold Shaw, 1993), 135.

[4] St. Anselm, "Meditation on Human Redemption," *Anselm of Canterbury: Volume One*, ed. and trans. Jasper Hopkins and Herbert Richardson, (Toronto: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1974), 137.

[V] Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Vindication of Tradition* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984), 65.

From my window

Tomatoes and the Salsa of the Earth

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I gaze at my garden from my window and see a burst of color. Huge tomato plants are doubled over by the vibrant, red tomatoes growing all over the burdened stems. The garden is bursting with goodness and new life. When will I find the time to harvest all those tomatoes? It doesn't seem that long ago when I came home from school after a PD day in April and decided the little tomato seedlings needed to be separated into larger pots. I can hardly believe it, but each seed has germinated and turned into a beautiful little plant complete with an entire network of roots. As a gardener, I know how easy it is to damage those little leaves and roots.

Gardening is much like education. In gardening, each year is different. Success depends on the hardiness of the plants and the weather. In education, each year at school is different. In a garden, the plants work together, the marigolds edging the garden to keep away predators with the odors they dispel. Educators, too, work together as a community. No teacher can work in isolation.

So how do we go about tending the garden that is education? For instance, how does your school tackle curriculum? Do its educators wrestle with vision when planning curriculum? Are we asking those essential questions when developing our units? What does the Word of God have to say about how we develop a "Christian mind" in our students?

Teachable moments

I recently had a great math class with my resource group. I was introducing circumference and knew it would be confusing, so I tried to make the lesson as interactive as possible. "Let's try to measure around our round table with a ruler," I said to my students, before asking them: "Why doesn't this work?" After I explained "pi" to them, one student was curious how this formula came into existence. I asked her, "What do you think?" Soon we got to the bigger question, *how did we get math?* If God created math, but we didn't have numbers yet as we do now, how did Adam and Eve count the animals? When did the numbers come in? Such questions remind us how intricate God's world is!

We must use those teachable moments when students are asking deep questions to delve into God's amazing kingdom structures. We must remember the tiny tomato plants with their intricate root systems; like the roots of a plant, our students' minds absorb the information, thoughts and ideas with which we present them. We must challenge them on a daily basis to be stewardly, to be honest, to be faithful, to be a good friend to those who need a friend, and to be servants of God. Those roots have to hold up our students when they are faced with the realities of the non-Christian perspective reflected in the world around them.

Worldview moments

I was reminded of the importance of teaching worldview in a book study on *How Now Shall we Live* by Charles Colson and Nancy Pearcey. Colson says, "Teachers should recognize the moral and spiritual drama taking place in their students' souls, helping them see how that same drama is the stuff of history and literature and philosophy." (337) Our students are confronted with all kinds of modern-day challenges, and we have to equip them with the vision to strengthen their roots in Christ. We, the teachers — the folks they see as role models — develop the roots. Students notice the car you drive, the lifestyle you choose, and the choices you make. Further, they question these choices. We need to live and move and breathe our worldview in order to impart it to our students.

We need to wrestle with this worldview in the classroom from JK to grade 12 and on into college and university. There are practical ways to do this. For instance, when students notice that Johnny is sad in the morning when his grandmother drops him off for kindergarten, there is an opportunity to talk about grief and death. When a student asks, "How come Jenn needs an extra teacher to help her talk?" such a question provides the perfect opportunity to discuss with the class the challenges of learning disabilities and how each child can be a helper to Jenn. In this way, our worldview spills into our daily life experiences at school and at home. God has created each person to be unique, and the classroom should be a community of visionary teachers and students.

My tomatoes end up in a fantastic salsa, which, to tell you the truth, entails a tremendous amount of work. But nothing beats sitting by the wood stove on a cold winter night and enjoying some chips and salsa. To get to this point, the garden needs to be tilled and planted and weeded and watered and, sometimes, even sung to. How much more must we do this for our students, with God's Word as our guide? Our students, with the truth "carved on their foreheads," will go forth boldly into the world to find their calling. Like tending tomatoes, the hard work of the educator, after time, bears fruit.

One grade 12 student commented upon departing from Christian high school: "When I enter the work force and go into the world, I want to be a Christian leader so that I may lead others to Christ." What wonderful words of wisdom. Our students are becoming the "salsa" of the earth, and our schools must be a beacon of light in the wilderness around us.

Marking for the Christian Perspective in a Science Fair Project

by Jennifer Chiang and Gary Chiang

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The year was 1993 and our son's grade 7/8 class at the local Christian school had just completed showing their projects for the school's Science and Hobby Fair. While viewing the displays, we could appreciate the learning and fun, and even the hard work and stress that each project had generated.

Now, at the close of the evening that marked the end of an extensive teaching unit, the projects were being dismantled to be taken home, to be kept as a memento or placed into the garbage or recycling bin. You could feel the collective sigh of relief from all involved. Yet as parents we also thought it a shame the students could not take their projects to a regional level, as is done for the publicly-funded educational system.

A different outcome

That was our son's experience. But two years later, it was not to be so for our daughter. As parents, we could make a difference, especially since we were biology professors at Redeemer College, Ontario's only privately-funded Reformed Christian university. On my wife's initiative, we elicited the help of Henry Brouwer, our colleague in chemistry, who had contacts with the Ontario Alliance of Christian Schools, and we initiated the first Ontario Christian Schools Science Fair. Since then, we have not looked back. The fair has taken on massive proportions and, we hope, increased the level of science awareness in our schools. It continues to generate support and enthusiasm each year that it is run. In April 2009, we held our eighth fair involving more than 300 students who displayed close to 200 projects. As usual, it was an amazing event.

Criteria for judging

Anyone who has participated in our fair is aware of one unique component. We judge for Christian perspective in science! Not only are the students required to be competent at using the scientific method and reporting their results; they also need to consider how their Christian faith influences the science they do. And they are given marks for this effort. The Christian Perspective in Science makes our fair truly Christian. Public schools, on the other hand, are not permitted to bring Christianity into their science, but failing to do so has resulted in placing another religion at the foundation of their scienctific endavor.

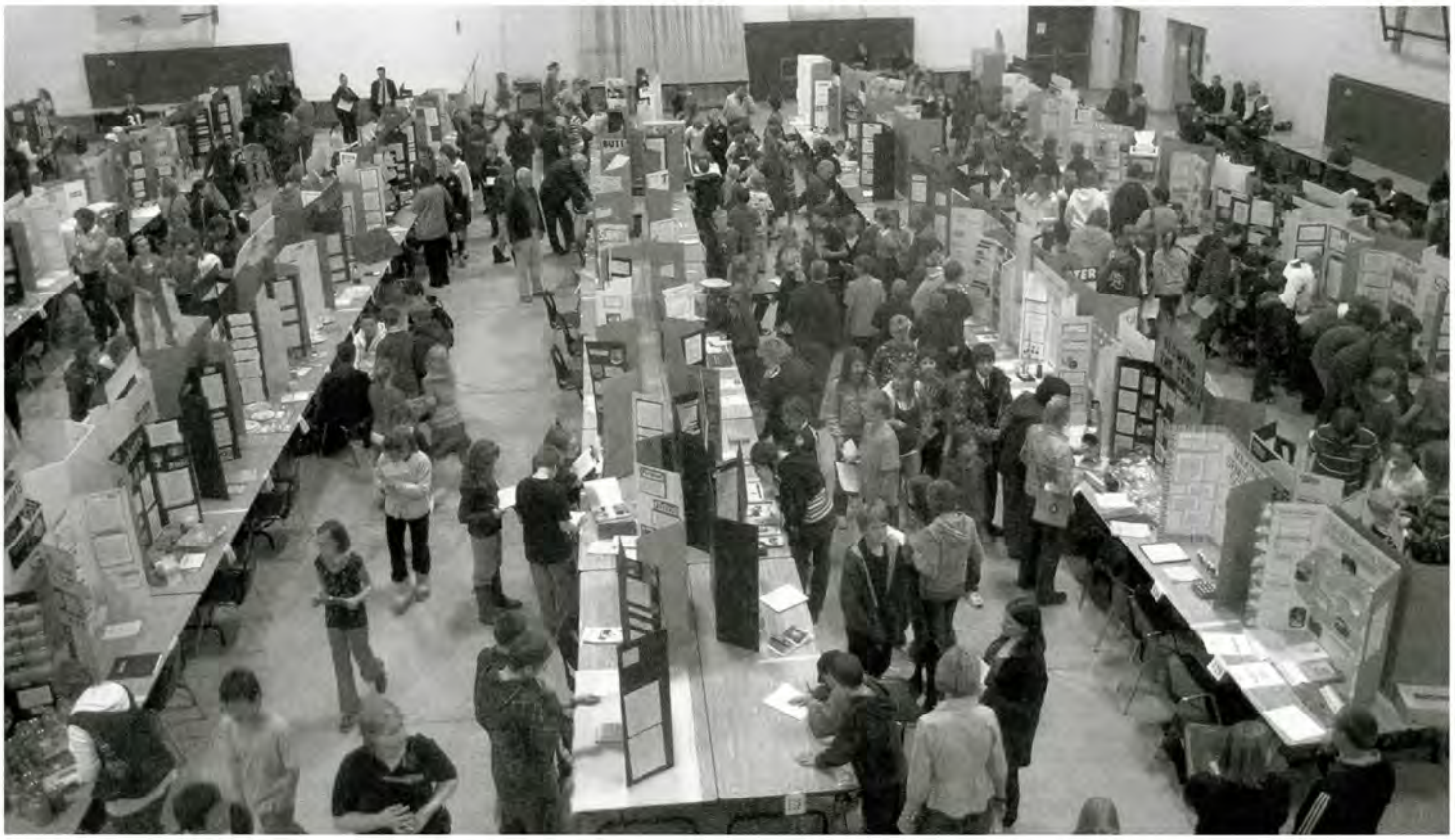
Nathan Katerberg and Evelyn White

Proponents of this religion believe that all we see in the universe around us are the chance events of physical forces working over millions of years. This religious foundation of science has its own dogmas reflecting a faith that can only see the world as billions of years old and humans as very complex animals. When these popular scientific theories are the only theories allowed to be discussed in the science classroom, they can stifle the intellect and impede science education. They can even deter Christians from enjoying science, for they impose a totally secular ideology on the origins of the world and humankind. We believe that training students to make connections between the faith they have been taught and the findings they have made helps to overcome conflicts between true faith and sound science.

A new award

But how do you judge for Christian perspective? Initially, to keep things as simple as possible, we decided to be vague and to let the judges judge for themselves. To this end, we separated the Christian perspective category into good, very good and excellent. This approach was fruitful, and the attention to Christian perspective was overwhelmingly well received. It also led to one unexpected development. In subsequent fairs students began to include on their display a separate paragraph describing their own Christian perspective. These statements were a joy to read, and by the fourth fair it became apparent that a totally separate award should be given for the Christian perspective statement. How was this to be accomplished?

We enlisted the help of a volunteer knowledgeable in faith and science to choose the most impressive Christian perspective statement. This volunteer, Evelyn White, did a marvelous job of whittling down a field of about 50 statements to three winners. Her knowledge and sensitivity to connecting science and faith stems from



her collaborations with Dr. Arthur Custance, whose research and writings encouraged a Christian approach to science. To acknowledge Evelyn's willing and valued contribution, we called this award the Arthur Custance Award for Christian Perspective in Science. The number of Christian perspective statements quickly increased beyond the scope of a single judge. We have since created a judging form used by a set of volunteer judges to assess Christian perspective in the science fair project. This form has undergone a number of changes, and currently the evaluation includes the entire project, not just the Christian perspective statement.

More refinement

Although this work is still in progress, we now have an idea what a Christian perspective in science ought to be. First, it is not evolution versus creationism. Some atheists may place their faith totally in evolution, but many Christians also believe in an ancient earth, and that evolution was God's method of creating. Second, a Christian perspective in science is not the ability to quote Scripture. Some biblical references may be appropriate for the project, but students need to address a Christian perspective "within" the science, in addition to placing a Christian perspective on to the science. Third, the Christian perspective means more than a Christian doing the science. What this "more" might be grows clearer with each fair. The perfect Christian perspective may be largely a matter of opinion; yet, directing students to undertake the process of articulating this perspective is, in fact, a goal unto itself. Moreover, it trains the student to appreciate that in whatever we do, our Lord and Savior is a part of the effort.

We have come a long way from including a Christian perspective category in the first set of judging forms, to creating a separate set of judges and prizes for Christian perspective. We would be delighted to exchange our experiences with other educators who also feel led to encourage a Christian approach to science.

And what of our daughter, whose project was entered by her school for our first Ontario Christian Schools Science Fair? Out of the 95 entries, Vanessa received the trophy for the third best science project. We were, and still are, very proud parents.

Additional notes:

In addition to regular teaching duties, Jennifer runs a science education program for elementary and high school students, and Gary explores development and egg production in blood-feeding insects. Gary has also authored books on a Christian approach to evolution.

Evelyn White is the Curator of the Arthur Custance On-line Library (www.custance .org), and the editor-in-chief of Doorway Publications, the publishing arm of the Arthur Custance Centre for Christianity and Science. She is also the sponsor of the Custance Awards.

Money for Nothing and Wisdom for Free

or You Gotta Fight For Your Right to Insurance

by Jan Kaarsvlam

Jan Kaarsvlam has applied for the position of CEJ Editor. He envisions a new era for CEJ, one in which all Christian schoolteachers would receive the journal free of charge. The journal would be paid for with money earned through the windmill project. The idea is that the journal would install windmills on the playground of every Christian school. The journal would then sell electricity to power companies. Kaarsvlam would also like to change the journal to a graphic novel format and institute columns that would reprint sections of Calvin's Institutes and The Hitchhikers' Guide to the Galaxy — side-by-side. He is convinced there is a lot to learn that way. The CEJ Board is said to be considering his application.

Amanda Stufflebean, Bedlam's new director of development, was at the center of the hurricane raging in the staffroom. She represented Bedlam Christian High School's first foray into professional fundraising, and she had been on the job for one year. In the same year, Bedlam's faculty had agreed to forego any raise because of the recession. This accident of timing helped stir passion.

Jon Kleinhut, one of the faculty's more outspoken critics of the previous year's contract negotiations, leaned across the table toward Gord Winkle, who had just helped himself to a large piece of chocolate cake. "What a waste of money!" he said. "What an absolute waste of money!"

Gord got a panicked look on his face and managed to choke down the huge bit he had just taken. "Oh, come on, Jon. It isn't a waste. It is just some chocolate cake. It's O'Brainargh's birthday today."

"I'm not talking about your cake, you Ninny! I am talking about this Stifflebum... Stoufflebarn?... Stinkerblink? What's her name?"

Kleinhut had just taken another bite, and now he spoke through a shower of crumbs. "Schtuffleblahn!"

"Right. That Stufflebean woman. She is the biggest waste of money at Bedlam." Gord again choked down another huge bite. "I don't know, Jon. I heard that Bedlam received about $50,000 more in donations last year than in any previous year. Sounds to me like Amanda did pretty well."

Kleinhut barked a sharp laugh. "Give me a break! Her salary and benefits come in around $70,000 a year. It's simple math, Gord. Thanks to Ms. Stufflebean, Bedlam actually has $20,000 less to work with than it would have had."

Winkle looked stunned, then sad, then oblivious, as he turned once again to his cake. Cal VanderMeer, who sat at the other end of the table, heard Kleinhut's comment and felt compelled to respond. "You know, Jon, she did raise $50,000 in the teeth of the worst recession in two to three decades."

"That doesn't change the math, does it?" asked English teacher Christina Lopez. "The school still lost money for the year. And our salaries have been frozen. I finished my master's degree last spring, but so what? I don't make a penny more than last year. And Amanda makes more money than every teacher at this school. Even more than you, Cal, and you've been here for over 20 years. I don't like to complain, but I'm with Jon on this one. I see no wisdom in paying a development director who, at best, covers her own costs through her fundraising."

Cal thought for a minute, then continued. "It is her first year. Maybe she is making contacts that will be able to make a bigger commitment to our school in years to come. Maybe she is increasing our goodwill among the community by being out there."

"Just tell me this, Cal," said Kleinhut, who had the look in his eye that he often got when he had already made an unassailable rhetorical comment of profound genius in his own mind, and now just had to say it out loud: "How much goodwill do you give to someone who comes around hitting you up for money?"

"My question," put in Christina again, "is 'What community is she speaking to?' If we want more students and dollars, we need to expand our notion of community to include more than just people from the one or two denominations that founded this school. It seems to me that would be the better part of wisdom."

"Wisdom?" Kleinhut rolled his eyes. "Trust me, Lopez, when it comes to finances around here, nobody displays much wisdom. Right here at Bedlam, a school of only 520 students, we have a principal, a vice principal, three counselors, an administrative assistant, four other secretaries, and a development director. That's eight people employed in administration, and we have only thirty teachers on staff. If that's not top-heavy, I don't know what is. No wonder the school board can't afford to give us a cost-of-living adjustment."

Math teacher Jane VanderAsch piped up, "That's nothing compared to some school systems. I have a friend in Michigan whose high school is part of a K-12 system — two elementary schools and one high school about our size. In their system, each elementary school has a principal, assistant principal, and two secretaries. The high school has a principal, vice principal, a full-time athletic director, a part-time dean of student life, and three secretaries." Jane leaned in, a predatory gleam in her eye. "But here's the real kicker. On top of all that, the school system has a superintendent, a development director, an admissions director, and three more secretaries. Now if that's not a system full of fat, I don't know what is. But you know all those administrators are going to protect their own turf. So who suffers? The

teachers. My friend's school is inflating class sizes and reducing staff. They've also had to pay more and more of their health insurance costs."

It was at this point that Rex Kane, Bedlam's unpredictable gym teacher, who sat on the couch across the room, looked up from an old copy of *Mad* magazine he was reading. "I happened to overhear your conversation while I was meditating here. Several of you have brought up the word wisdom. Here's what I think would be wise: I think we should unionize!"

Rex started stomping a steady beat with his foot, chanting, "Hey, hey! Ho, ho! Stufflebean has got to go! Hey, hey! Ho, ho! Stufflebean has got to go!"

Kleinhut started laughing and he joined in. Gord Winkle gave his two friends a big thumbs up, but he refused to join, as doing so would prevent him from getting a second piece of cake. Meanwhile, Rex, while still chanting, had grabbed a permanent marker from the drawer by the phone and wrote the word UNION on the back of his 3rd period P.E. quiz. He climbed onto his chair, holding the sign above his head in his best imitation of Sally Fields in the climactic scene of *Norma Rae*. As he chanted, the door to the lounge swung open behind him and Amanda Stufflebean entered, smiling, her empty coffee mug in hand. A wave of silence washed across the room but missed Rex, who had failed to see her entrance.

"Hey, hey! Ho, ho! Stufflebean has got to go!" he shouted. His voice slowed and grew quieter as he noticed he was chanting alone to a room of stunned faces. "Hey. . . hey . . . ho . . .," he slowly turned to find Amanda staring at him, her face an odd mixture of anger, humiliation, and bewilderment.

"Um," said Kane, "Hello Amanda. Of course, you are wondering what that was a moment ago... Um, see, Winkle here was telling me that you are considering taking a trip to Italy this summer, and I was just suggesting that you really ought to take that trip."

"I don't think I'll be taking any trips soon," said the development director. "The economy has hit my husband's company pretty badly. We even had to put his boat up for sale."

The staff room fell silent for a moment. Christina looked as if she was about to say something confrontational, so Cal Vandermeer jumped in first. "Amanda, we don't get to see you in the staff room much. What brings you down here?"

Ms. Stufflebean smiled. "I'm glad you asked, Cal. I was just hanging up this poster. We are starting Bedlam Christian's new capital campaign next week, and it would be really great if, as I go out to meet with donors, I could tell them the faculty was behind this campaign one hundred percent. So we are asking if you would each consider donating something to the campaign. It doesn't have to be much, just a ten or a twenty, so the donors know there is faculty buy-in. Say, what is the matter with Jon?"

Kleinhut was rapidly turning bright red. He looked as though either his blood vessels would burst or steam would soon erupt from his ears. He hurried from the room.

"Don't mind him," said Cal Vandermeer with a wry smile, "He just has trouble swallowing things, sometimes."

Query

Wanted:
Teachers Who Are Flexible,Humble and Caring

Tena Siebenga-Valstar (tvalstar@telus.net) is currently living in Calgary, Alberta, in "an in-between space," waiting on the Lord's direction. She is also supporting her husband by commuting with him to serve in a part-time ministry position in Central Alberta.

Staying on task

Question #1:

In my teacher-aiding placement, students are constantly being pulled out of the class for various reasons, and, as a result, the students who already have learning disabilities are struggling to keep on task with the homework and lessons in which they are being instructed in their regular classroom. My question for you is: How can you keep the students that are always being pulled out of the classroom for speech therapy or for the resource room on task with the things that you are teaching in the classroom?

Response:

Students that compose our classroom come with their own abilities, challenges and strategies to handle the difficulties they face in learning. As Christian educators, we believe God created each person special with his or her own gifts. The school community wants to provide the resources and help for students who face challenges in their learning, and that is evident in the information you provided. It is difficult to schedule these resources for individual students or groups of students when these resources are provided by someone on staff, let alone when the services are provided by someone such as a speech therapist who comes into the school from the community.

The person who has to be the most flexible is the classroom teacher. Rather than having the principal or school office personnel determine the schedule when resources are to be provided, it is beneficial if teachers meet together to work out the schedule. To accommodate the students for whom the services are provided, first consideration should be given to the students. The teacher's want and needs should be secondary.

Sometimes it takes a while to determine a schedule that works for everyone. Scheduling physical education classes and music classes involve room assignments and, thus, the entire schedule of the school. It may mean that not every class can begin their day with devotions and Bible followed by one of the core subjects. For a number of years my grade three students who needed extra resource help could begin the day with devotions and Bible while the rest of the students started their day with activity centers where students worked at their own pace. We then had devotions before or after the morning break.

The reality of the classroom is not that every child will complete all assignments in the same way. To help students meet their potential, we have to differentiate instruction, which means that not every student in the classroom must complete the same tasks as his or her fellow students. Those with learning disabilities need accommodations as to length and depth of assignments. Sometimes it must be determined if the assignment given to the rest of the class is even appropriate for this particular student. If the information is necessary, could the student learn it in a different way, or could it be incorporated into the learning task with which the resource teacher is working? The most effective use of resource program dollars occurs when there is coordination and cooperation between the provider of the resource program and the classroom teachers. Therefore I encourage you to get to know that person and work as effectively as you can for the sake of your students who require the extra resources. This will help create less stress both in your life and that of your students.

What about stubborn parents?

Question #2

What is the best way to deal with parents who claim they are right, and you (the teacher) are wrong? How do we as teachers deal with their stubborn attitude?

Response:

First of all, admit that we all tend to believe that our ideas or ways of doing things are correct. We all have a hard time admitting that we may be wrong. That is just our sinful selfish nature.

I am thinking this question must have arisen following a confrontation of some kind. Often it is necessary for the teacher to distance herself from the confrontation. Pray for wisdom and the ability to see both sides for the sake of the child, because, ultimately, both the teacher and the parents want the best for the child. After a short time, call the parents and ask for another meeting with them to work out the situation. Remember you can be responsible only for *your* actions. You cannot change the other party in any situation. That is something they must do. Pray that God will use you as a healing instrument for the sake of the child.

Come to the meeting with an attitude of learning from the parents. What do they see as the problem? How long has it persisted? What have they done at home to deal with it? Maybe you can agree to try the strategy that is effective at home in the classroom as well. In all confrontations it is important for us to listen

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to the other party, to affirm them, to find the areas on which you agree and then move ahead from there. Examine the way you have handled the previous situation. Is there a possibility that you need to ask forgiveness for any action? Sometimes our pride gets in the way and we take a defensive posture.

There are times when people who feel that they have been listened to will demonstrate a change in attitude. There are also times when, after discussion, you will agree to disagree. I have had to learn that parents usually know their child best when it comes to behaviors that are prevalent over a long period of time. At the same time educators have been trained in their field, and there are areas where their expertise sheds light on a situation of which the parents may be unaware.

In the long run, we have to put things in perspective, realize that this is one situation among many we will face in our teaching career, adopt a humble attitude, and pray for God's grace to allow us to proceed into each day — doing the best we can in his name and for the sake of his children.

Making up for the home

Question #3

How can a teacher help, prepare, and steer a child in the right direction when that child's home life is not very stable? What are some ways to incorporate caring into the classroom for children who lack a nurturing home life? How would a teacher prepare students for home life difficulties?

Response:

The ideal in the Christian school situation is that the home, school and church work together to nurture the children God has placed in our care. Since we live in a broken world, the picture you have painted is one that teachers face from time to time. Ordinarily we cannot change the home situation unless we have evidence that it is unsafe for the child. At that point we are obligated to contact the authorities.

Teachers can help a child in the situation you mentioned by providing a safe, caring classroom atmosphere where the child experiences love from the teacher and fellow classmates. All must demonstrate a level of tolerance and understanding and, at the same time, establish boundaries so that the child learns appropriate behavior to live in the classroom community.

If you are aware that the child receives a lot of negative language at home, be aware of the language you use and incorporate positive feedback in as many situations as possible. Teach and demonstrate that the child is loved even though his or her actions may not be appropriate. Explain this to the child when and if a reprimand is necessary. Practice love and forgiveness in the classroom. Apologize when necessary and pray with the students for God's help in following his ways.

Pair the child with a mature student who demonstrates Christ-like behavior and whose modeling will bless the less fortunate child. Observe the child to determine what he needs. Teach life skills which will benefit the child as well as other students by incorporating them into the curriculum. If possible find a loving mom of one of the other children who would be willing to invite the child to her home to play with her children. In this way the less fortunate child experiences a loving family atmosphere and gains an understanding of how other families function.

When adults have been asked which teacher influenced them the most, they often refer to the teacher with whom they had a caring, accepting, loving relationship. From this I conclude that it is your Christ-like example which will have the greatest impact on this child and will give the insight and strength to move forward. God bless you in the task.

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Al Boerema asks the panel to consider affirmation 6 in 12 Affirmations: Reformed Christian Schooling for the 21st Century. This affirmation, filled with hope, states that the "Christian school curriculum is designed to address real problems, and its students are prepared to generate real products." Discuss some examples and the challenges of implementing this important affirmation.

April 30, 2009

Pamela Adams starts the discussion:

Hi everyone:

Responding to this question is a bit difficult because many of us were taught not to address certain topics in the classroom. Now we are told to address real problems, and real problems step into the areas we were told to stay away from. Right now the marriage issue is big in Iowa because they are allowing a marriage between people of the same gender. Should we speak about this? Yes, we should. All of life's problems will challenge our students when they become adults. Some students will just go along with the dominant culture, but many will carefully consider these problems in the light of Scripture. At least I hope so, provided they are given a chance in their schoolrooms to address real life issues, not phony ones. Of course, such discussions need to be age appropriate. Middle school teachers will be addressing many issues while kindergarten teachers will address only a few.

Pam Adams

May 12, 2009

Christian Altena responds:

Greetings all!

Real problems and real products can sometimes lead to a real mess.

Don't get me wrong. I'm a big fan of reality — the greater part of my day is spent therein — but I wonder how to overcome some of the cultural, structural, and temporal barriers to actually realizing this affirmation. Most of our Christian schools engage in a variety of real tasks directed at real problems: food drives, child-sponsorships, Kingdom Building Days, 30 Hour Famines, mission trips, and the like. These are often "one-offs" with very little connection to anything else that is going on in the school. Food drives, then, become a way to cull your cabinet of green beans rather than being part of a larger discussion in Social Studies, Economics, or Government about the causes of, and cures for, poverty.

Are our schools structured to make a true pursuit of "real" ends possible? The bell's going to ring after 43 minutes, the state/provincial standards have to be met, and I have to start the new unit this Monday in order to cover everything before the College Board test. Additionally, discussing real problems in the classroom often sparks great learning, but care must be taken. Students can become alienated and agitated by these conversations. Some students don't believe global warming is a real problem; for others, affirmative action policies practiced by some universities are an injustice worthy of a sit-in. The student struggling with issues of sexual identity may not agree that the high school classroom is the best place to have an edifying discussion of homosexuality.

After all this, I think we have to do what we can, given our limitations....

Keeping it "real" from finally-warm Chicago,

Christian

May 13, 2009

Tony Kamphuis adds:

Hi everyone:

The problem isn't always whether we should discuss real problems; it is more often a problem of having to decide which real problems to discuss. What our students think are real problems may not be considered real problems to the curriculum designer and the curriculum deliverer. Dealing with real problems in high schools can lead to real problems for the teacher. Relationships are a big issue for teenagers, but what are you to say about family relationships when you have a variety of "families" represented in the classrooms? Parents seem exceptionally sensitive to having their decisions and priorities called up for examination; and, after all, who is the teacher to decide that their arrangement is an example of a "real problem"?

I like the cited affirmation, but it also calls to mind what Catherine the Great said to Voltaire, who had no trouble proposing great ideas on paper. Catherine told him, "Yes, but you write

It's Not Always Easy to Discuss "Real" Issues

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on paper, and I write on human skin, which is ever more ticklish!" I could see myself writing about discussing real problems in an essay or on a list — after all, we want to keep it real in the classroom, and we want to be genuine — but when it comes time to tackle real problems in class, the teacher had better be deft, nuanced, good humored and in a position of great trust with the parents, students and administrators. Otherwise the next real problem up for discussion may be what to do with that trouble-making teacher!

Tony Kamphuis

May 15, 2009

Jolene Velthuizen continues the discussion:

Hello everyone!

This affirmation, stated without explanation, makes me wonder what is meant by the terms "real problems and real products." And how is the simple statement of addressing real problems and creating real products actually put into practice from Kindergarten to High School?

Does teaching Economic Literacy fall into the category of addressing real problems and creating real products? After being trained and equipped by the Powell Center of Economic Literacy, I have maintained a Mini-Economy in my classroom where students apply for jobs, are paid for their jobs, and can use that second grade currency to purchase items at our second grade store. In this way I am creating a relevant example for teaching about goods and services, resources, opportunity, cost, saving, donating, and even tougher concepts like loans and rent. I believe this model of real life economics is an example of "addressing real problems and creating real products." It has a lot to do with relevance, doesn't it?

Fellow panel contributors, your statements above reminded me of Tim Steward, the former principal of Rehoboth Christian School and author of *Children At Promise*. Tim often emphasized that our teaching should be soaked with the three Rs of rigor, relevance, and relationship. Addressing real problems in our classrooms and creating real products will hopefully stir up a sense of relevance for our students. Might it also contribute to healthy relationships?

Jolene Velthuizen

May 26, 2009

Bruce Wergeland sums up:

I am quickly realizing, after 17 years in this profession, that one of the fundamental strengths of Christian education is that our school communities possess an intrinsic freedom to discuss the truth of our human existence, condition and culture. In my classroom, anything that is age appropriate is on the table. My students appreciate the opportunities that they have to be honest, transparent and often politically incorrect. We discuss everything from divorce to eternity, and sometimes it gets messy. Authentic learning in the classroom demands a collective dynamic, which includes the brokenness of failure, alienation and despair, but also the anticipation of completion, friendship and understanding.

When we recognize the fragility of our own lives and our individual limitations for learning, we are dealing with real problems: one student wonders if he will return next year because his single-parent family does not have the financial resources. Another has difficulty focusing on school work because his father is in and out of the hospital. And the last one tries her best to be a part of the class even with her broken English. Real problems naturally emerge when the members of our classroom realize their own frustrations and difficulties in a community that is expected to make progress and to succeed.

If my focus as a teacher is production, then I will remain oblivious to the problems that impair a student's ability to learn, the ones that constantly betray their inadequacies. My students need to know that their concerns and fears can be directly or indirectly discussed in our classroom, and that I have experienced brokenness in my own life. It is not the curriculum that generates these real problems, but the difficult life experiences that we bring into the classroom as we wrestle with the curriculum. I don't need to focus on the current events in the media — unemployment, ethnic conflict, intolerance, and religious conflict — to survey and assess the difficult issues of our culture because I see them daily in the attitudes and lives of my own students.

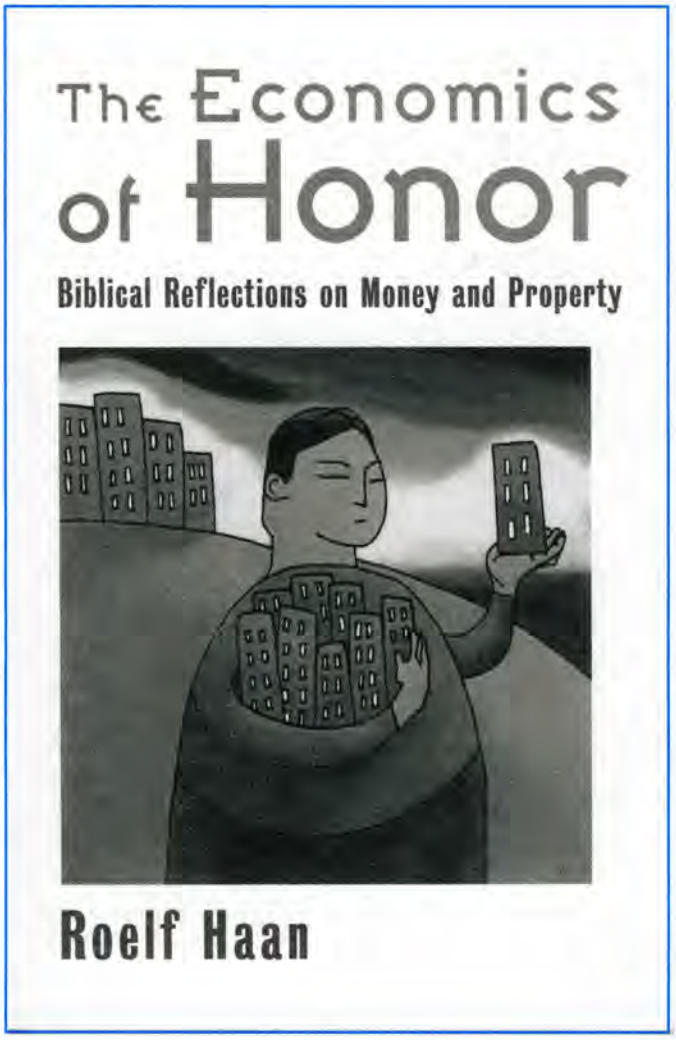
In my classroom, it is usually the curriculum schedule that is the greatest obstacle for addressing the real problems.

Bruce

Roelf Haan, *The Economics of Honor: Biblical Reflections on Money and Property* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 136pp. + xii.

Ryan O'Dowd is assistant professor of theology at Redeemer University College in Ancaster, Ontario, and director of the Paideia Centre for Public Theology.

In *The Economics of Honor* Roelf Haan provides an economic reading of the Bible in order to issue a prophetic call to rethink our relationship to the world, its people and its resources. Having ministered in Latin America, and serving as the chair of the board of Solidaridad (the InterChurch Foundation for Action in Latin America), Haan shows from first-hand experience how the injustices of the Southern Hemisphere have largely been the result of a Western capitalist economy with its rapid growth away from the biblical models of justice, mercy, compassion, prayer and faith, the virtues which the church is called to embrace in its mission to the world. He pursues the "spiritual meaning of our economic life," reflections by which he aims to "broaden insight into our modern society [with a] focus on the place of the Christian community."



The book has over 20 short chapters organized into four sections: The Risk of the Other, Economic Development, Signposts, and Justice and Expectation. Haan's voice joins these chapters into a loose narrative, one which works faithfully within the Reformed understanding of the biblical story from creation and fall, to redemption and new creation. To guide us in our reflections, Haan develops the biblical image of the "city" as it figures centrally in Eden, Babel, Sodom, Canaan, Jerusalem and the New Jerusalem in Revelation. Each location provides a backdrop for the biblical narrative on human economic development and the divine redemption of our sinful, overly ambitious injustices. This city image allows the book to move naturally between the Bible, theology, economics and history.

Imaginative insight

The theological development of the book is its real strength. In the first two sections, which deal primarily with Old Testament texts, Haan shows how our cultural relationship to society, goods and community have been a matter of sin and corruption from the earliest civilization. The last two sections branch out into numerous biblical texts which he uses to encourage us to think creatively about responsible economic participation in our surroundings. Yet in this way, the book is not, strictly speaking, theological interpretation, biblical exegesis or economic theory. Rather, the book draws lightly from a wide range of disciplines as it seeks to arouse our Christian concern for the world — an informed, but pastoral genre perfect for church study groups.

As the book progresses, Haan seems to find his voice, adding deeper levels of economic critique and reflection with each biblical text he explores. There are many creative insights. Pointing out two of them helps us understand just what Haan has and has not achieved in this book. First, Haan warns us not to be drawn into the abstract "war against poverty" (p. 127). Poor people are not an abstraction, they are not always victims, and they will always be with us. Our Christian calling is not to eliminate ideas, but rather to uphold the humanity of all economic partners and to encourage a growth in community participation. Haan does not, however, begin to suggest how we engage major corporations, governments or the global market that increase poverty around the world. Second, commenting on Jeremiah 29:5-7, Haan encourages us to do at least three things in our response to our economic sys-

tems: First we are to build houses (crucial contributions to the health of the city). Next, we are to seek its welfare and peace, and to pray for it (p. 128f). This is helpful advice, but Haan's book does not venture into how we could begin to do these things.

Theological limitations

A close examination of the biblical passages leads to a variety of conclusions. His exegesis is not always close to the biblical text and he does not always make consistent appeals to biblical scholarship. For this reason Haan sometimes unnecessarily limits the potential in the Old Testament, either by failing to give attention to other possible readings or else by missing their larger contexts. For example, contemporary scholarship on Genesis 4 and the fifth commandment or the Sabbath laws would have supported and deepened Haan's reading of those texts. In other cases, I think he overlooks the clear ways generosity and mercy are central to parts of Genesis, legal texts and prophets like Amos. Haan also overlooks texts which critique distorted economics such as Deuteronomy 15, Numbers 36 and other portions of Isaiah 40-66.

That said, his readings of these biblical passages are often fresh and point unmistakably to a Christian author who is intent on hearing God speak into our broken world through Holy Scripture. Indeed, his readings of these biblical texts are rarely out of line with their most common interpretations, and they draw the reader to hear them in light of God's plan to redeem a fallen world. His expositions of New Testament texts, especially in the gospels, are often enlightening and prophetic. One clear example is his reading of "bread" "food" and "yeast," especially with relation to the feeding of the masses. In Matthew 5 and Luke 14 he observes that the feeding evokes more than food, but also the word of God in revelation and the faith and outpouring expected of the Christian community (pp. 51-3).

Strong economic insights

I am not equipped to provide a close critique of the economic theories, though they are in keeping with the views of other respected evangelical scholars writing from theological or philosophical perspectives (J. Chaplin, O. O'Donovan, C.J.H. Wright). Readers are also helped by the way Haan draws important scholars like Emmanuel Levinas, Jacques Ellul and Martin Buber into the conversation. As a result Haan winds his way through the history of economic and technological development exposing the roots of corruption, hoarding and progress, which have always been a part of a fallen world.

There is one place where I clearly do not follow Haan. He suggests that our concern for the poor arises not from theology and "holy writ," but from our love for our neighbor (xii): we do not need to be covered with "Christian icing" to do justice. I would think these go hand in hand and that he has made a false dilemma. Our love for God and his Word enable and enrich our love for neighbor. The epilogue – an excerpt from John Maynard Keynes – is supposed to confirm his point. Whether it does or not, it is a provocative addition to the book.

In the end, an economics of honor is one committed to loving God and our neighbor. We do this primarily by upholding our neighbor's ability to remain a productive member of the economic system. Haan thus joins other important Christian voices attending to our economic realities. This book is a fine addition to church libraries and Christian homes.

Listening for God in Contemporary Fiction

Susan Felch and Gary Schmidt, editors, *The Emmaus Readers: Listening for God in Contemporary Fiction*. Brewster, Massachusetts: Paraclete Press. (www.paracletepress.com) 2008, 208 pages.Reviewed by Steve J. Van Der Weele, Calvin College (Emeritus)

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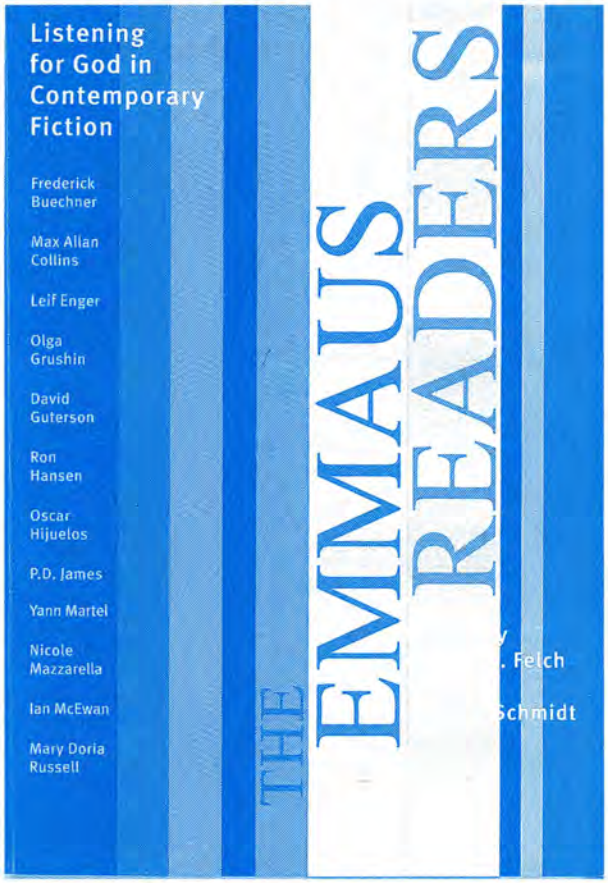
The anthology *The Emmaus Readers* consists of thirteen essays on as many contemporary novels, namely, the following: *Children of Men, The Sparrow, The Children of God, Snow Falling on Cedars, Mariette in Ecstasy, The Heavy Silence, Road to Perdition, Peace Like a River, Life of Pi, Atonement, Godric, Mr. Ives' Christmas, the Dream Life of Sukhanov.* These essays have been compiled, on the initiative of the Paraclete Press, by a group of Calvin College teachers and a Calvin librarian who get together with some regularity to discuss contemporary fiction. And the focus of their discussion, as the title indicates, is to discern the religious issues which the novelists address. Each essayist distills the wisdom of the group's deliberations on a given novel. In addition, each essayist has provided a set of study guides for his or her assigned novel, along with a list of related novels. The four-section arrangement of the anthology is based on appropriate lines from the hymn "When Peace Like a River Attendeth My Way...."



The novelists contrive narratives which invite our response. They deal with significant religious issues. What would it be like for us to live in a childless society — as some societies are attempting to do? (*Children of Men*) How does Pi, in a battle for survival on a raft with a tiger as a fellow passenger, come to reject his agnosticism? (*The Life of Pi*). Whose account of Godric's quest for sainthood is more authentic — Reynold's — Godric's church-appointed biographer — or Godric's own often self-deprecating account of his life — the tension between his love of God and his proneness to errant adventures? Do you approve or disapprove of the way Mariette disturbs the placid, routine-bound rigid discipline of her convent by her mystical sallies, arousing the envy and even hatred of her superiors? (*Mariette in Ecstasy*)? Can you live into the alteration of Dottie, from a woman motivated by fear and vulnerable to manipulation, whose virtues one might call "the minor virtues," into a woman who eventually permits some light into her soul, some generosity of spirit, some awakening to a flowering amaryllis, some thawing that lifts the heavy silences which have marked her life? (*This Heavy Silence*)

And how successful do you find David Guterson's presentation of a world of wrenching dilemmas and painful ambiguities? (*Snow Falling on Cedars*)

More than entertainment

These novelists confront us with the high drama of life — the mystery, the contradictions, with characters who are searching for their summum bonum — not always in the right place. They confront the reader with narratives and plots which enable him or her to gain a new appreciation for the significance of life, its deep meaning, its grandeur and sublimity. And, of course, its fallenness. Life without grace, we get to see, as Christopher Fry has one of his characters describe it, "...mildew, verdigris, rust, woodrot," or

as Shakespeare's Hamlet experiences it, "a rank unweeded garden."

To quote Christopher Fry again — his character Doto — "It seems [man] has a soul as well as his other troubles."

I once challenged novelist William Gass at a conference when he contended that one should no longer expect novelists to be a guide to living. "Isn't it enough that we entertain?" I replied that we are already amusing ourselves to death, and that we want our novelists to be wise, not just clever or entertaining. The essayists of this anthology have chosen wise novelists. The authors cope with the wide range of human experience, motivation, characterization. They deal with forces that shape us — biology, the environment, inherent dispositions, relationships. They deal with the quest of human beings for acceptance, but also with the temptation to manipulation. They deal with folks who struggle with a quest to seek transcendence but also seek revenge. They give us characters who are truly saints but in whom (as in *Godric*) the sinfulness competes robustly with the saintliness.

Open narratives

It must be said that these are modern novels. Their authors do not ordinarily assume the role of an omniscient narrator who controls all the actions and thoughts of his or her characters. The characters themselves seem to drive the story more than their narrative creators do — though, of course, finally the action and characterization are filtered through the mind and art of the novelist. Nor are they so much novels with well-made plots, with tidy beginnings, middles, and ends. They are more like open-ended narratives, although their authors do not shun implying moral judgments.

These titles are, for the most part, familiar ones, and many readers have discussed them in their own book clubs, exploring the deep meanings which give significance to the novels. Still, this book can serve many useful purposes.

For one thing, a good book is worth reading more than once; even the synopses which the authors provide will help to retrieve the experience of a given book. And the study questions will help prepare you for next Tuesday's test. And for some, the essays can serve as a reading list for more than a year — it comes to one book per month. The essayists are good readers, and good listeners. And they believe that stories matter.

I hear rumors that Volume II of *The Emmaus Readers* has been published. Attention to that will have to wait for a later day.

Writing from Deep Within

James Boyd White, *Living Speech: the Empire of Force.* Princeton, New Jersey: 2006. Princeton University Press. 236 pages.
Reviewed by Jill Buehler (jill.buehler@trnty.edu), Secondary English Education major at Trinity Christian College

James Boyd White's *Living Speech* is a cry for writers to question the manner in which they write. Are their words real and original? Do they come from deep within the writer and touch deep within the reader? If not, how can this be done? And how can we teach it? White answers these questions in *Living Speech*, a book not only for writers, but also for teachers of writers. He explains what is wrong with hackneyed, clichéd forms of speech and addresses how these writing issues can be solved.

White discusses the need for writing to be a force of its own. He begins by explaining the empire of force, a term he takes from a quotation by Simone Weil, which says, "No one can love and be just who does not understand the empire of force." The empire of force is "the ideology, the way of imagining the world and oneself and others within it" (White 2). White believes that the empire of force has a presence and power in the mind of each of its agents. He explains that "the empire exists in other forms, in ordinary life and politics, throughout our lives, in fact — whenever we find ourselves denying each other's full humanity in the way we speak and think" (White 5). How, then, are we to respect and understand the empire of force? The author believes that this means that we recognize the humanity of another person; he explains this in the chapters which follow.

White first directs us to a practice of Trappists and Quakers which invites us to think about silence and speech. These practices "depend upon and make real a sense of the deep value of silence itself, of a life without spoken words" (White 13). He explains that "a life of silence would teach us how pointless and empty almost everything we say is" (13). Quakers only interrupt

this silence when someone feels that they simply must speak, and their words are given great attention. According to White, this silence is necessary for all meaningful expression. He lists examples such as rests in music and words printed on a page. His goal is that we do not fall into empty, clichéd speech of slogans and formulas, which he calls dead language. Rather, he wants us to value real speech that is deeply meant. White explains that real speech is one that comes "from a place of inner silence, directed to a similar place in its audience" (15). He continues to clarify how this is done.

Avoid formulaic speech

Instead of speech that trivializes human experience, White says that we want speech from the silence within. In order to achieve this, He explains that we are to value speech, for this is what it means to be human, to claim meaning for our lives and experience (White 41). How do we resist this formulated speech? The author points us to why we are formulaic in the first place. Our habits of speech and writing come from our early years and how we were taught. He gives an example of a young boy's writing which is full of clichés, empty, and without composition. Then he gives a second example, in which the boy has written in a real way about his experience, in which he is engaged in the writing. White explains that the first boy has fallen into the empty and rigid patterns of speech that are dead, whereas the second boy has written a passage of significance to him. He says that a piece of the second sort is authentic; as we read it, we find ourselves liking the boy and caring about what happens to him.

This is the speech we are to aim for. An essential part of learning how to write "is learning to think oneself to the point where one actually has something valuable to say or do" (67). Then we are to say what we mean. White says that a good way to assign this in a school setting is to give questions in which there is no right answer, a question which does not "call for a performance of the kind the student has been trained to make; rather, in their interest, originality, and difficulty they suggest very different possibilities toward which he might direct his energies" (69). The hope in creating these assignments is that "the student can discover that he has something to say that he can mean, something he can say in his own way; that he has, that he can give himself, experience worthy of the attention of another; that he can have interests and values and a style of his own" (71).

White next discusses the desire for meaning in writing. He says that there are three kinds of meaning. First is the desire for a kind of intelligibility, a desire for formal expectations. Second is a social desire in which we desire valuable relations with other people in the world. Third is the desire to imagine the world and ourselves in it. In order for a work to succeed, it must do well in all three dimensions. The author explains that "good work with form would be of little value without a connection to the larger issue of the way in which the world is imagined, and vice versa; neither are really conceivable without significant connection to another mind" (White 109).

Authentic writing

White challenges writers to write in a way that values human existence instead of dehumanizing it. He commands writers to write from a place of inner silence to a place of inner silence within the reader. And what is the effect? Readers take the challenge. His questions left me wondering if my own work was "living." His questions also challenged me in the educational field. I left the book wanting to be a better writer and a better teacher, more thoughtful and more deliberate in teaching writing strategies to my students. How am I teaching my students to value living speech and what does that look like? White answers these questions in *Living Speech*.

Specifically, I believe that White's idea of an open-ended questions is vital for teachers. A student's written work should not look the same as someone else's. If it is coming from a place of inner silence, each work should stand out as a particular student's work. Different styles of writing and manners of approach should be celebrated in the classroom. Teachers should allow some leeway for students whose writing style runs against the expected norm.

White also emphasizes the connection between the reader and the audience. This also left me thinking as a teacher. For whom are my students writing? Certainly their audience should be more than me, the teacher. Their goal should be to please an intended audience, not the teacher. Of course the student would need to meet the expectations of the assignment, but the student's voice should still stand out. Teachers can share White's examples with students, specifically the two boys' writing samples. This shows students that they do not need to write what they think the teacher wants them to write. In order for a piece of writing to be meaningful at all, to value human existence, it should be from the student's own experience; the student should have something to say. All students do have something to say, given that the teacher prompts them to think about it. Assignments should take White's goals into mind; the writing is expected to have form, connect to the world, and connect to the reader. Without any of these, the writing and the assignment are dead, without purpose, insignificant, and wasted. White's *Living Speech* is a great resource for writers and teachers of any kind.