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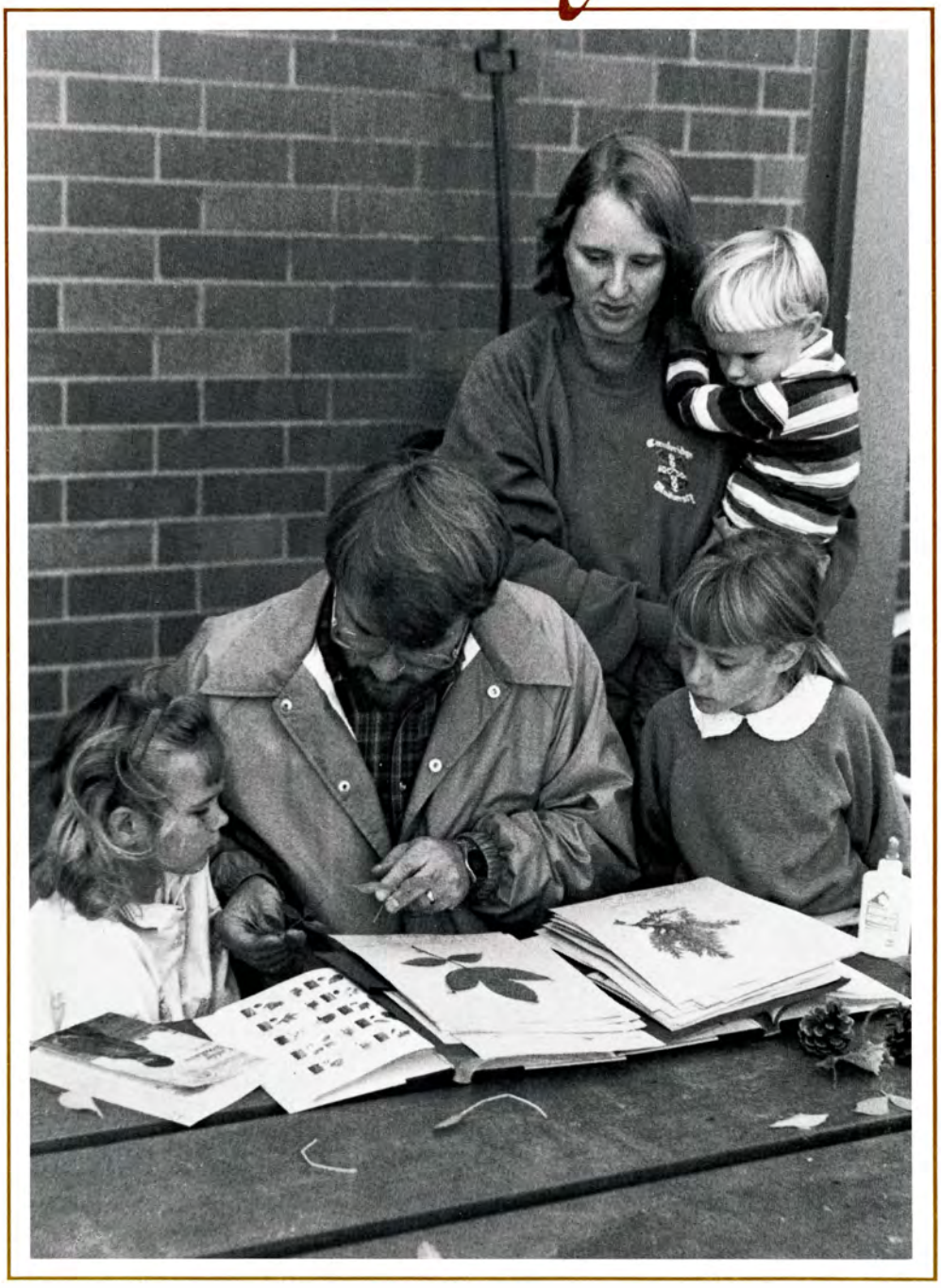


Nontraditional Ways of Teaching

—by LORNA VAN GILST

TEACHING AGAINST THE GRAIN

"I'm not a traditional teacher." I heard this remark from three teachers all within the same week. All three explained that they ask students to keep response journals, to develop projects, and to interact in small groups.

What these three mean, I suspect, is that they are unconventional in their methods. But even unconventional teachers may hold a traditional view of the role of students.

This year, as a full-time student again for the first time in twenty-five years, I find myself looking at teaching from the other side of the desk. I consider my instructors traditional if they teach in such a way that my grade is determined by what I can memorize of the information they dispense in class. Perhaps my criterion sounds simplistic, but it really hinges on whether teachers believe students are recipients of their knowledge or co-learners with them.

Lectures, straight rows that face the teacher, and teacher-designed assignments quite naturally fit with the traditional student-as-recipient view, whereas response journals, discussion circles, and varied assignments for members of the class tend to occur when teachers consider themselves co-learners with their students.

Particular methods don't really place a teacher in one camp or the other. The crux of the matter is the teacher's view of both the student's and the teacher's roles. Though many teachers declare themselves untraditional, the traditional student-as-recipient view continues to thrive. Appearing on bookstore shelves in the United States this year are E. B. Hirsch's volumes titled *What Every First Grader Should Know* and *What Every Second Grader Should Know,* putting students on track for Hirsch's "What Literate Americans Know" list of 5000 items in the appendix of his 1987 volume, *Cultural Literacy*. Now, according to Hirsch, parents and teachers can make sure they are covering the right material. Now they can assure their children's success—from a book, indexed and alphabetized. A conscientious teacher can present one or two items a day and check them off as the students master the facts about Stephen Foster, Pan, parts of speech, Paul Revere. . . .

If I were a second grade teacher I would be tempted to buy a copy just to see if my students measured up, and to quietly fill in the deficiencies before they got tested. Besides, the books are attractive and interesting, and Hirsch does have a point: people who are familiar with a substantial body of information can relate to many more people.

I like substance in education. But I think Hirsch operates on a wrong premise. Hirsch assumes that children exist for the future good of the state —that they go to school so that some day they can improve the economy and develop policy for the government. Hirsch doesn't seem to know about the call to serve the King of kings, the call to be living sacrifices to God. Earthbound citizens serve themselves. Kingdom citizens seek to serve God and others.

Teaching in a Christian school does not exempt us from confusing the two. If we could somehow compile a list of 5000 things one needs to know to be a culturally literate member of God's kingdom, we could see our task more definitively. Christian Schools International could distribute *What Every Child in God's Kingdom Needs to Know:* Abraham, covenant, Creation, cultural mandate, dirty books to avoid, effects of drugs, John 3:16, Lord's Prayer, Sermon on the Mount. Study committees could review the list every few years to maintain awareness of current issues and to revise the lists as necessary.

Christian educators would probably disagree quite fervently about certain items on the list, or those omitted, but publishing lists is relatively easy. Memorizing them is harder, of course. Understanding the concepts is even more difficult. But, living out a kingdom vision is more than we can manage on our own.

Some schools have taken bold steps to design curricula that model such living. In previous issues of *CEJ* we have featured schools such as Covenant Christian in Seattle, Washington, and Potter's House in Grand Rapids, Michigan, both founded with the idea that students are active citizens in God's kingdom. Covenant Christian, now with fifty students in its eighth year of existence, centers its curriculum around major integrated units such as a study of plants, of animals, of earth and space. Dawn Treader Christian School in Paterson, New Jersey, and Mustard Seed School in Hoboken, New Jersey, particularly reflect the

unique cultures of their communities. At Dawn Treader, a school where every child attends on partial scholarship, every family and every teacher takes turns cleaning the school, and parents sign up for specific ways to serve, to instill ownership in the school. The parent-teacher organization has a seat on the school board, as do the teachers and the students. Academically excellent, the school has a fairly structured first and second grade format, but at third grade students adjust quickly to the open classroom. United in prayer, the school community has committed itself to reach out to each other and to others in their community.

Mount Evelyn Christian School in Australia (see next article), established in 1973 and now serving 370 students in K-12, is a school that might at one time have been called traditional but is now committed to a radically untraditional approach in order to live out their vision for serving in Christ's kingdom.

I mention only a few schools here, but at various places throughout the world, Christian school staffs or individuals are committing themselves to break from the tradition of teaching for the earthly system to teaching for the kingdom of God. Sometimes they do so at great risk. Doug Blomberg of Mount Evelyn says some families have withdrawn because they prefer a more traditional form of education. Also, some colleges and universities refuse to give credit for the school's Christian Social Perspectives course. But graduates tend to be better prepared for university study, and they are almost unanimously grateful for the way their school has modeled Christ-centered learning for kingdom service.

The Mount Evelyn school serves as a unique model because it was established as a traditional school and has made a commitment to change its approach. Like Mount Evelyn, most of us can't start from scratch. Most of us grew up deeply ingrained in traditional education, and for many of us, it seemed to work—at least it got us into successful teaching careers, probably within traditional classrooms. Maybe straight rows best serve the students we have in the class; that is an issue we have to consider. But maybe some of us teach that way because we like to be in charge, to control classrooms full of students, and their parents. Maybe we take offense with parents who choose to homeschool because we want them to need us.

We who teach had better cast aside the tradition of thinking we control the thoughts of a class, or even that we must teach the way we did last year. We had better pray daily for the grace to submit our well-worked plans to Christ's lordship. Christ may be calling us to renew and refocus our vision. And that may call for untraditional ways to teach. **LVG**

The Lesson

Then Jesus took his disciples up the mountain and gathering around him, he taught them saying:

"Blessed are the meek,
Blessed are they that mourn.
Blessed are the merciful.
Blessed are they that thirst for justice.
Blessed are you when persecuted.
Blessed are you who suffer.
Be glad and rejoice for your reward is great in heaven.
Remember what I am telling you."

Then Simon Peter said, "Do we have to write this down?"
And Andrew said, "Are we supposed to know this?"
And Philip said, "Will we have a test on it?"
And Bartholomew said, "Do we have to turn this in?"
And John said, "The other disciples didn't have to learn this."
And Matthew said, "When do we get out of here?"
And Judas said, "What does this have to do with real life?"
And James said, "Do I get credit for this?"
And the other disciples likewise.

Then one of the Pharisees who was present asked to see Jesus' lesson plan and inquired of Jesus his terminal objectives in the cognitive domain, as well as his anticipatory set, modeling, and closure.

And Jesus wept.

—Author Unknown

The Integral Curriculum

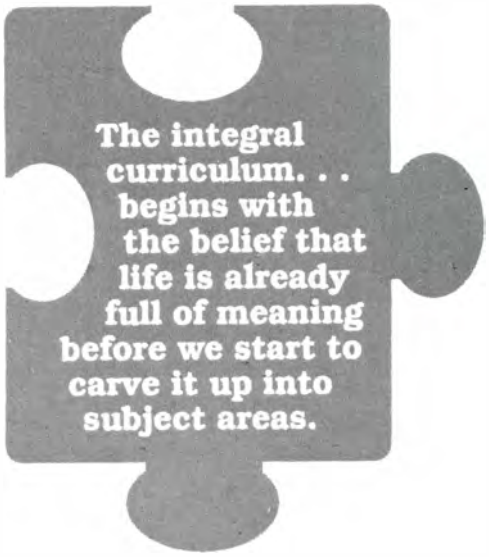
—by DOUGLAS BLOMBERG

Mount Evelyn Christian School has adopted what it describes as an integral Christian curriculum as its preferred model. The word *integral* may well be a jargon word; it may well be used carelessly on occasion, but it represents an attempt to say in education terms just what it is that we hope might be distinctive about our curriculum.

The word *integral* is related to words like *integrity,* meaning "wholeness, soundness, uprightness," to the mathematical term *integer*, which describes a whole number, to *integrate*, which means to "combine parts into a whole." It means "whole or complete, necessary to the completeness of a whole." In our usage, it reminds us that the whole world is God's world, that Christ is the sovereign Lord of all things, and that serving him is a matter for the whole of life, not just for a part of it. It is thus the educational outworking of the vision of life confessed in our creed.

The traditional model for the school curriculum was built around subjects and skills. It assumed that those who were to be educated for the professions or for genteel life needed a thorough grounding in the classics and other relevant academic disciplines. Those who were to take their place as part of the work force needed certain basic skills as well as sound moral training so that they might be honest, diligent, and productive workers.

In the present century, as universal schooling became a goal and then something of a reality in industrialized nations, educationists began to realize that this narrowly cultural or vocational approach tended to be alienating and frustrating for those who were in school compulsorily and without any necessarily high motivation. The abstraction and fragmentation of the traditional curriculum, which seemed also to restrict human freedom, began to give way in many schools to an integrated approach, which attempted to make school more interesting by combining various subjects and skills in more meaningful groupings or themes. The integrated approach still assumed, however, that the academic disciplines together with the skills provided the basic way of understanding "the meaning of life, the universe, and everything." This was because of the persistent belief that rationality or a rational method (typified by science) was the only sure route to knowledge; this was true even of the so-called father of progressive education, John Dewey.



The integral curriculum, however, begins with the belief that life is already full of meaning before we start to carve it up into subject areas, and that this fullness of meaning is found in Jesus Christ and can only be approached through him. Any human analysis of the world or acting on it is not the source of meaning but only a response to the meaning that is already there. An integral curriculum does not denounce the academic disciplines as such, but it does not give them the dominant role in establishing the content and structure of the curriculum. Nor by the same token does it consider the interests of the child to be the appropriate determinant of curriculum content, though it will seek to be child-oriented.

Even curriculum structure cannot be regarded as a religiously neutral issue. A curriculum represents a conscious ordering of the world for the purpose of teaching and learning: it sets out a course to be run. Just as horses on a track are guided by the rails rather than being left to career willy-nilly across an open field, a school curriculum decrees the orderly and meaningful way in which teachers and students are to proceed.

A curriculum is thus founded on certain assumptions about the source and character of order and meaning. The subject-centered and the integrated curricula share a common assumption, namely, that rationality is the key. We begin with the confession that all things hold together in Jesus Christ. Whereas an integrated curriculum attempts to bring the parts derived by analysis together into a whole, an integral curriculum begins with the given wholeness.

Now, children cannot study the whole world at once. They will have to focus on "chunks" of creation, but this is a different matter entirely from focussing on the products of academic disciplines, whether these be "pure" or integrated around themes. It is the

difference between having a slice of chocolate cake and eating the flour or the cocoa, let alone the amino acids or carbohydrates. The slice is representative of the whole cake; when I eat it, I can feel confident that I know what the cake tastes like. I could not feel the same confidence if I consumed in succession each of the ingredients.

It could be said that this analogy is seriously flawed. The cake is already an integration of ingredients. But the meaning of the cake as such cannot be derived by summing these several ingredients, any more than the meaning of the life of a person can be derived from adding together his or her biological, emotional, social, and spiritual functioning. Tasting the flour can certainly tell us about the character of flour, but it can at best hint at the character of chocolate sponge.

Our contention is that God has created, either directly or mediately through human hands, a diversity of things that function in varieties of ways. Whereas the academic disciplines focus in general on the abstracted ways of functioning, our ordinary experience of creation is of the things themselves in their complex interrelations. Of course the ways of functioning as much as the things themselves are created by God, but our primary experience of them is in the functioning of those things themselves, not in isolation from these things.

This should make clearer what we understand by *concrete* experience, in which concrete denotes "a thing as opposed to a quality" (Concise Oxford Dictionary). Concrete experience is experience of whole or entities rather than of functions in abstraction. This should also warn us that concrete experience is not restricted to the physical, material, or sensible world; for in Christian perspective, things function aesthetically, ethically, and confessionally just as really as they function spatially, physically, biotically, and sensorily. An emphasis on concrete experience thus does not imply always doing things with one's hands or getting outside and moving about. Sitting and listening to music or reading a book can be just as concrete as visiting the zoo or panning for gold if it is experience of a whole thing. It just happens to be a concrete aesthetic or linguistic experience rather than a concrete physical experience. To limit the concrete to the material (an artificial designation in any case, as all things function in the material world) is to accept a materialistic rather than a Christian view of life. Concrete experience is thus *holistic* experience, to use a term now much in vogue, and similar in meaning to *integral*.

The integral curriculum will seek to respect the creational structures as they are given. Starting with the whole, we would indeed seek to open up the child the great richness of functioning of the area under study. But the integral curriculum starts at the other end of this process than the subject-centered or integrated models do. It begins with the symphony rather than the parts of each instrument, with the melody rather than the individual notes.

PRACTICE

The way in which we seek to implement this approach can be illustrated in part by describing the roles played by the various teachers at Mount Evelyn. From Year Prep to Year Ten, the class teacher is in immediate control of curriculum implementation at each level. She is the coordinator and focus of the learning experiences of her pupils for the year and is expected to maintain an overarching and comprehensive perspective on the unit of study. The curriculum is not developed at the whim of an individual, of course. Taking her place within a larger team, she will, however, lead the team at her level. At its best, a collegial or communal approach to the class program develops, with class and specialist teachers contributing their insights and expertise to the fleshing out of a coherent program growing out of a central direction, the particular "chunk" of creation under study. The class teacher also provides a focus for pastoral care and oversight of individual students.

At primary level, specialists include art, music, physical education, and remedial teachers, for example, and will also draw upon the contributions of parents wherever this is possible. At middle secondary level, the specialists presently include science, art/craft, English/drama, physical education, and mathematics teachers. Teacher librarians naturally make a significant contribution in all sections of the school.

The Grade 8 program, for example, starts with units on agriculture and manufacturing. The English teacher oversees an investigative journalism project, in which groups of students select a product and study its growth, processing, and marketing. The science teacher assists in the analysis of products and the testing of materials. The art and craft teachers establish a production line, and over a few days a factory setting is simulated, mass producing an item—usually a toy—which is then sold at the local shopping center and to the school community. Some industrial relations problems usually arise in this context!

Other examples include the use of novels with themes exploring issues arising from the unit; the construction of puppets involving a study of bodily proportions; the writing of a script exploring human relationships; the breeding of white mice in a unit on the human body; and the general introduction of library skills in cooperation with the teacher and in the context of a unit.

At senior secondary level, a more differentiated subject structure has been developed, though with a compulsory core component intended not only to deepen Christian perspective in itself, but also to promote a more coherent reflection on the other areas being studied. This subject specialization is not merely a recognition of the demands of the Higher School Certificate but also a response to different developmental needs and potential of the students.

This overview should illustrate that it is not subject- or discipline-oriented studies in themselves that are criticized, but the relative importance assigned to these in determining overall curriculum structure and content.

Not everything that happens in our school lives up to the ideal of the integral curriculum. Nor is this ideal of integrality itself perfect, infallible, above dispute. Nonetheless, we need to talk about what we think we are doing in order to see whether we are indeed doing it and to review whether we still

want to try to do it. It is important for any school to articulate its guiding principles and presuppositions for these same reasons.

FOUR DIMENSIONS

I would like to focus in more detail on four dimensions of the integral curriculum. The first concerns the integrality of religious perspective; the second, the integrality of creation; the third, the integrality of the person; and the fourth, the integrality of knowledge (cognition). I will outline the principles involved and give some examples of how we attempt to implement these at different levels and in relation to different areas of study.

RELIGION

We confess in our Educational Creed that human life in its entirety is religion. This somewhat quaint way of putting it, rather than simply saying that human life is religious, is meant to indicate that *religious* is not just one of the things we can say about life—an adjective like *political* or *artistic*, so that you can say of a person, "Oh, he's religious," as though some people are not—but that life *equals* religion. Life is coterminous with and saturated by religion.

So in our curriculum first and foremost we want to stress and impress upon children that serving God is a full-time affair. We do not want any division between the so-called sacred and secular parts of the curriculum. No, nothing at all can legitimately be isolated from the central issue of which God one will serve, though some things will indeed seem more remote and less crucial than others. To attempt to make a part of life stand on its own independent of God is indeed the essence of idolatry.

The integral curriculum in its first dimension stands opposed to a dualistic curriculum. Christ is the Lord of all life and culture, and he calls his people to a ministry of reformation and transformation, not because they are capable of building the kingdom of God on earth, but because he has accomplished the mighty act of reconciliation in his death and resurrection and ascension to the throne of glory.

For this reason, no area of life can be excluded at the outset from consideration in the school curriculum, There will of course be many principial and practical reasons influencing the selection of content and approach, but no facet of life is *a priori* off limits because the Gospel has no relevance to it. A school is not made Christian by excluding D.H. Lawrence or evolution; it is the way in which these things are approached that will be the litmus test.

Mathematics offers a good example. Now, mathematics doesn't look like a religious issue at all. We are often asked, "How can you talk about a Christian approach to teaching mathematics? Isn't 2 + 2 = 4 simply true, whatever your religion?"

This question already assumes a secularized view of the world. It assumes that reality can be sliced up into pieces and that the meaning of each of these pieces is self-contained, self-explanatory. But it cannot. It assumes that truth involves a simple statement of fact, rather than the person of Jesus Christ. But it does not.

Nothing has its meaning in itself. The very question about 2 + 2 = 4 assumes a knowledge of the English language and of the functioning of certain mathematical terms within it; it assumes most probably a number system of base 10, but at least no less than base 5. It assumes that one is talking about fairly well-defined if not abstracted areas, and not about two male and two female rabbits kept together as pets for a few months or two drops plus two drops of water or two aspirin in two milliliters of water. It has made a statement which is certainly relatively true into an absolute, as though it guarantees its own meaning. And the Trinity certainly confounds our systems of mathematics!

Eventually, if one traces out all the things that are assumed by the simple mathematical statement, one gets involved in issues of an overtly religious character, not to mention ethical, political, and philosophical considerations that are perhaps more easily recognized as religious in character. Mathematics is a valuable and powerful tool, but it is a limited and focused way of looking at the world: its meaning can only be understood in relation to other dimensions of the world. To claim that mathematics is true in and of itself is not only logically false it is also unfaithful to our Father on whom all things depend.

We do not suggest tracing out all the assumptions in every math setting, but a curriculum structure that accepts the interconnections and interdependence in reality, rather than artificially cutting one area off from another, will make the integral religious character of life more obvious more often. One is then able to confront children with the fundamental religious choices that form the basis of life and thus to bring a biblical perspective to bear on even the most abstracted parts of the curriculum. Being in the deepest sense more meaningful, it will have more relevance and motivational power for the student. This practice of the confession that the lordship of Christ and the response of faith makes a difference to everything must be the hallmark and the touchstone of any school that dares to call itself Christian.

Questions

We are also reminded by this example of the importance of regaining the power of asking the questions and then of ensuring that we ask the right ones. You may be familiar with the story of Deep Thought, the computer in *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*, which had worked through aeons to answer the question concerning the meaning of life, the universe, and everything. When the mortals who had been bred and educated for

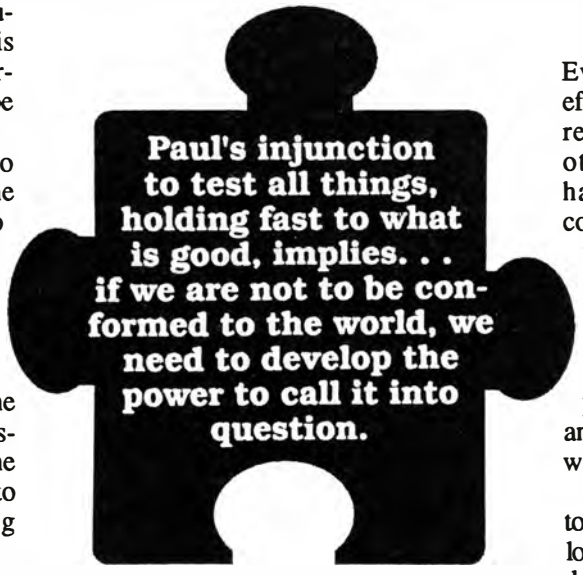
the task were finally called to receive the answer, they were told they were not going to like it: "42" intoned the machine. It was right; they didn't like it. Deep Thought then informed them that they certainly had the right answer, but what they needed to do now was to work out the right question. Not to worry, the penultimate computer would design the ultimate computer to formulate the question, the strength of this computer being that it would incorporate organic life. Its name was to be Earth.

The point I wish this myth to emphasize is that of learning to ask the right questions. Socrates and Plato recognized it, but I have more than a hunch that Jesus did as well. Look at the numerous times he refused to answer the question that had been put to him and gave the answer to a more basic one instead. Or indeed, the number of times he answered a question with a question. And consider the guidance John gave in his first letter to those Christians who were being troubled by the Gnostic heretics.

If I might quote from an early handbook in the *Man: A Course of Study* package: "Students need many opportunities to ask questions throughout the lessons. Learning to formulate questions is often as important and difficult as finding answers to other people's questions." Plato was so persuaded of the importance of the question that he argued that the answer was always implicit in it. As Paulo Freire reminds us, posing questions to reality is always the first step towards being able to change it. Paul's injunction to test all things, holding fast to what is good, implies the same thing: if we are not to be conformed to the world, we need to develop the power to call it into question.

In *The Transforming Vision*, Walsh and Middleton suggest four questions that I think we may profitably add to our armory when we are addressing the issue of religious perspective. The response to these questions identifies a person's or a community's faith commitment:

1. Who am I? (What is the nature, task and purpose of human beings?)
2. Where am I? (What is the nature of the world and universe I live in?)
3. What's wrong? (What is the basic problem or obstacle that keeps me from attaining fulfillment? How do I understand evil?)
4. What is the remedy? (How is it possible to overcome this hindrance to my fulfillment? How do I find salvation?)



In the development of curriculum units and in the teaching of children, these questions can be used to focus our attention on the fundamental choices. Together, of course, they imply a response to the most basic question of all: Who (or what) is God?

The notion of a biblical perspective implies that the whole revelation of Scripture in its integral unity be brought to bear on an area of study. We can only do this if we are steeped in Scripture, our thoughts being led captive by Christ. One helpful way of surveying the sweep of Scripture, however, is in terms of the creation, fall, redemption motif.

- What is God's intention for the particular area of creation that we are studying? What does it mean to treat these creatures with integrity, that is, in accordance with their God-given calling in life?
- How has this purpose been distorted by the effects of sin, as reflected in human idolatry and the outworkings of God's Word of judgement? Has this part of creation been severed from its interconnections with the rest so that it is thought to stand on its own as an absolute?
- What are the avenues by which we may hope to bring healing and reconciliation? In what ways does the gospel impel us to action so that the Lord's shalom might be at least partially restored, on the basis of Christ's mighty work of redemption?

I would not pretend that Mount Evelyn has developed a curriculum to effectively implement this objective, in relation to mathematics or to many other aspects of schooling. But we have been stressing that it is this concern for a biblical perspective on all that we are doing that must be the hallmark of a Christian school. However interesting, rich, and varied our teaching and learning might otherwise be, without such a perspective we are no more than what any good state or independent school would aspire to be.

We have taken interim steps toward our goal. In the first place, we look for opportunities within a unit to develop mathematical skills. In the Grade 8 unit on Using Time: Leisure, for example, we use graphing, mapping, basic trigonometry, compass work, and estimation skills in preparation for the "survival camp." In the Grade 5 Ancient Times unit, we look at some of the contributions to the development of mathematics made by the Babylonians, Egyptians, and Greeks and try to place these within their religious context. Grade 3 will make bread in their Plants unit and learn to use weights and measures in following recipes; they will use graphs of rainfall and sunshine in the Weather unit. Grade 4 calculate trees per hectare and heights of trees in the Forests unit; they work with direction and distance in Maps and Mapmaking and practice their skills in an orienting exercise. We will introduce certain statistical techniques in the Senior School as a means of analyzing survey results gathered for Christian Social Perspectives, rather than merely introducing these in abstraction. Other statistical procedures are an integral part of the Grade 7 unit comparing various cultures.

The steps to an integral curriculum, at any level of the school, can be

gradual; in terms of accustoming people to innovations—whether parents, teachers or pupils—it is obviously advantageous to proceed in this manner.

In selecting a mathematics program that would be applied (if arguably not concrete) and also individualized, we chose S.M.P. (The School Mathematics Project, Cambridge, U.P., 1979) for years 3 to 8. Schools like Mountain District and Ringwood have since chosen Rigby Maths for similar reasons. Any program still needs to be supplemented by small group and whole class teaching, of course. Again, this is not the attainment of our goal, but a step in that direction. Our curriculum development work will, over the next few years, focus more on this objective. Change will be reformational rather than revolutionary.

CREATION

God has created a rich and diverse world, but it owes its existence to him alone and has its coherence in his Son. There is one world, and the source of its meaning cannot be found within any one part of it, but only in him who created it. It is an ordered, structured world, but this order comes not from any principle inherent in it, but from the creative fiat of God.

We can sometimes underestimate the significance of the first chapter of Genesis. Becoming concerned with an evolutionistic view of origins, we focus on this chapter for what it tells us about what happened at the beginning. With this restriction, we can then all too easily fall into an evolutionistic view of the course of human history since then. We regard the cultural work of man not as a response to the creational order under the impetus of the cultural mandate, but as mere accidents of chance with no abiding status. We restrict the meaning of creation to the so-called "natural world." When we are out in the bush we extol the wonders of God's creation, rarely thinking to do so in the classroom, the kitchen, or the concert hall. The "creation science" groups of various kinds do not concern themselves with economic or political science, but only with the "natural sciences."

When we speak of the integrality of creation, we wish to stress that everything that exists is creaturely, excepting only God himself. We know that Paul speaks of marriage as one of those things God created to be received with thanksgiving (1 Tim. 4:3-4), and he speaks similarly of the state authorities as established and instituted by God (Rom. 13: 1-2). Wherever he and the other authors of Scripture enjoin masters and slaves, parents and children, citizens and rulers to act in particular ways toward one another, they do so on the basic assumption that the way in which human affairs are to be regulated is not merely a matter of human convention but is a response to God's creational purposes for such relationships. The creation account is foundational to this understanding, pointing as it does to the boundaries that God has established between one kind of creature and another, each with its own particular calling in the economy of creation.

An integral curriculum seeks to open up to the child the rich diversity of this one creation, in relation both to the variety of structures that God has established, directly and also mediately by the hand of humankind, and to the variety of ways of functioning, in its physical, biological, emotional, cultural, economic, aesthetic, linguistic, ethical, political, and belief dimensions. It will not focus narrowly on one or a few of these entities or aspects nor will it attempt to collapse this richness into one or two categories, thus suggesting that "Here!" or "There!" is to be found the meaning of life.

Against Reductionism

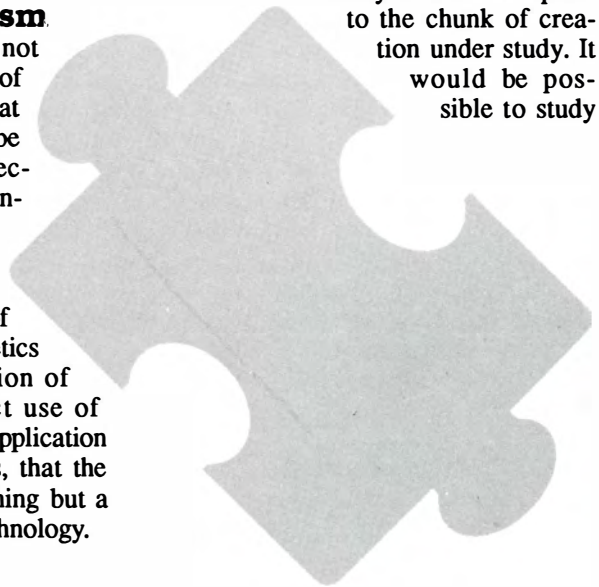
Such a curriculum will not accept a reductionistic view of the world, which assumes that the truth about politics can be found in the analysis of election statistics or that the meaning of war can be captured in body counts and kill ratios, that the pursuit of justice is nothing but the outworking of the class struggle, that aesthetics is nothing but the expression of personal taste, that correct use of language is nothing but the application of logical grammatical rules, that the maintenance of peace is nothing but a matter of finding the right technology.

I am not suggesting that this is a description of how a subject-centered curriculum operates. Each of the previous examples is, however, drawn from actual approaches to the areas mentioned and the rigid subject specialist who is more interested in *teaching his subject to the child* than in *teaching the child the subject* can indeed approach such an extreme. I heard one science specialist confess just the other day that it had taken him a long time to be weaned of the belief that science was the most reliable and most important route to understanding the world. He had previously been content merely to concentrate on his science and let the other areas of life take care of themselves.

To substitute for an integral view of creation one that focuses on the so-called natural world is to fall into the trap of scientism, which is but one more example of an idol which promises the way to truth and ends by reducing and distorting God's world so that God himself is hidden from sight.

Recognizing that creatures are called to be servants, an integral curriculum will show how the areas of creation are intended to serve one another as they serve their God and how any area of creation that attempts to dominate rather than serve has assumed the guise of an idol. It will seek to avoid the impression that one entity or aspect of the world is more real, more true or more important than another.

In the selection of learning processes, therefore, we attend to the diversity of sides or aspects to the chunk of creation under study. It would be possible to study



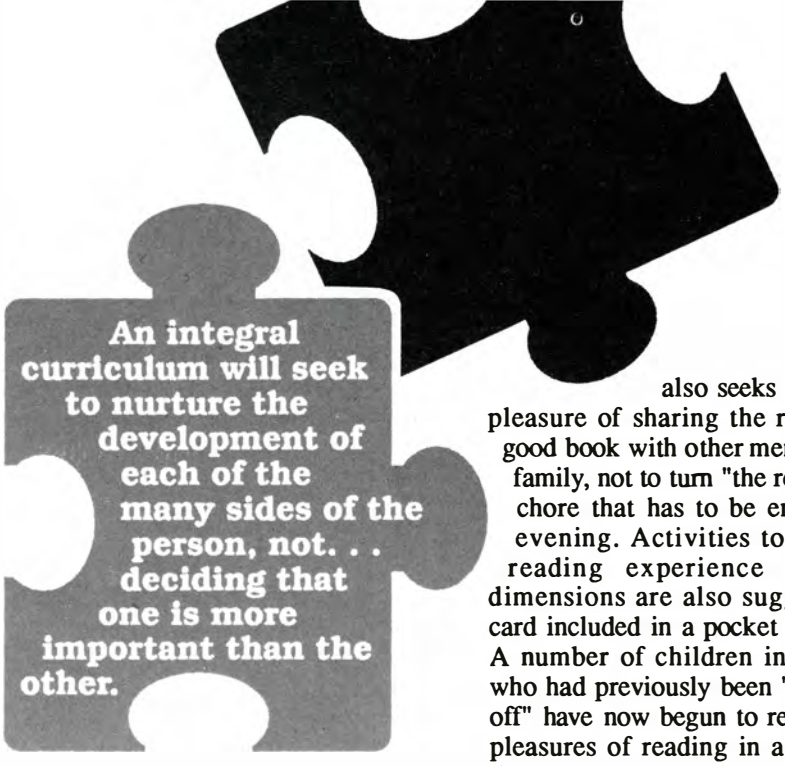
the heavens in purely physical terms, for example, using the methodology and results of the natural sciences as our key and perhaps supplementing this with marvel at the achievements of space technology. To do this would be to overlook that the heavens declare the glory of God, that they indeed evoke a confessional response, that they ought to remind us with Scripture's guidance that the children of Abraham are as numerous as the stars in the sky.

Now, if you are skeptical about such an approach, seeing it as a spiritualistic imposition on natural phenomena, I suggest you read C.S. Lewis' little book *The Abolition of Man*. B.F. Skinner rightly recognizes this as a classic defense of the freedom and dignity of humankind, which Lewis of course understands as having origin in the God whom man images.

To confess that the whole world is God's creation is to imply something about the lingual, economic, social, aesthetic, and ethical dimensions of the world as well. It is to believe that they also owe their existence and character to the Lord God and that there are legitimate and illegitimate ways of responding here as in other areas of life. Children must be led to see the normative nature of these aspects of experience and that their responses in these areas are also to be attuned to the Spirit of God.

PERSON

And now to the third feature of an integral curriculum: it will seek to nurture the development of each of the many sides of the person. Biblically, we know that what it means to be human cannot be defined in terms of rationality or of feeling, nor in terms of morality or economic productivity. We will not split the human being into parts, deciding that one is more important than the other. Our nurture will address the whole person, physiologically, emotionally, intellectually, aesthetically, morally, socially, culturally and not the least as a believer, though we will be shifting the focus of our attention from one occasion to the next. Our curriculum will thus seek to utilize a range of ways of coming to know the world, not relying solely or heavily on a particular method or technique. We will recognize also the diversity of gifts that the Lord has given to his people individually and communally and will seek to complement a broad and rich human functioning with attention to the development of specialized abilities.



Many reading schemes for the primary school are based on the assumption that an analytically determined core vocabulary used to construct simple sentences reinforced by repetition is the best way for a child to learn to read. Certainly, such schemes are now much more interestingly and attractively presented than the earlier "Run, Dick, run" readers, but they still suffer from abstractness and artificiality. Reading reduced to a skill to be mastered overlooks the distinctive character of language in literature.

We have developed an approach that seeks to supplement what we regard as one of the better reading schemes—it was at the time we purchased it—with good quality children's picture books. Written and illustrated specifically so children might experience the joy of good reading, rather than to teach them the skill of reading, these books have a creative, aesthetic, and literary integrity that captures the child's imagination and comes much closer to addressing the child as a whole person, who feels, fantasizes, hopes, and believes as well as merely thinks. This "sharing with" program also seeks to retain the pleasure of sharing the reading of a good book with other members of the family, not to turn "the reader" into a chore that has to be endured each evening. Activities to extend the reading experience into other dimensions are also suggested on a card included in a pocket in the book. A number of children in our school who had previously been "turned right off" have now begun to rediscover the pleasures of reading in a meaningful literary context. The same is even true for some parents!

Another feature that springs from this attempt to recognize the diversity of ways to know the creation is our emphasis on out-of-school learning experiences. Excursions are a significant part of the program at all levels and extended camps of up to three weeks are a feature from Year 5 on. These trips are to farms and the city, the gold fields and the beach, the desert and the bush. Work experience programs are conducted for students in Years 8, 10, and 11 for a fortnight at each level (see sidebar on page 12).

This third element of the integral curriculum obviously dovetails with the two discussed earlier. The unity and coherence of human life rests in the fact that human life is religion and that all modes of functioning are thus religious at root. No one aspect of functioning ought to be favored over any other if one is concerned with the full development of the human person. This is not to suggest that the school takes on the total responsibility for the nurture of the child or that other institutions such as the family, the church, and sporting clubs do not each have a crucial and special role to play in the child's education. The school has in fact taken care not to encroach on areas considered to be the province of the family or the church. There are very few "extracurricular" activities: if anything is considered worth doing, it finds its place within the curriculum rather than as an adjunct to it.

COGNITIVE

And thus to our fourth and final point: the integrality of knowledge. Scripture teaches us that knowledge of the world cannot be gained by abstract contemplation according to the Greek model of theorizing. Certainly, we can use abstract logical thought coupled with empirical investigation to describe the recurring regularities of creation, but we can do so only at the cost of knowledge of the individual and the particular. And the decisions and actions of daily life occur within this realm of concrete experience. Our everyday knowledge is of things, animals, plants, persons, institutions, acts, events, and their interrelations, i.e., of whole things in their many-sided functioning. Theoretical principles may fruitfully inform our decision-making only insofar as we have learned how to integrate them into our concrete experience. This implies that the focus of the curriculum must be such experience, rather than an abstracted academic realm developed in isolation from it.

Knowledge is a way of describing the relationship between the person-in-community, the world and God. To "know" is to be able to place things properly under the law of God, not in relation to abstract principles, but in the context of the dynamic holding together of all things by the Spirit and the Word. It is to be able to see the interconnections that exist between things in the fabric of creation. It is thus a growing fabric within the mind, heart, body, and soul of the person, reflecting also the many sides of his humanness. It can be gained only by acting on and into the world. And it is necessarily religious in character because it is rooted in the relationship of the self to God.

The integral curriculum embodies a holistic view of knowledge. There is a tendency to think that the basic academic facts and skills are what are important to success in the work force and ought to be the prime focus of schooling. However, the most prominent reason given for dismissal of people from organizations or refusal to promote them is not that they lack competence but that "they can't get on with people." In other words, social knowing is accorded the highest priority.

Our approach to schooling similarly values this social competence. In many respects part of the hidden curriculum, it springs from a commitment to Christian community rather than from the desire that people get along in the world. Nonetheless, it involves the recognition that working cooperatively in groups is one of the normative tasks that face people in life and that schooling should foster the ability to do this.

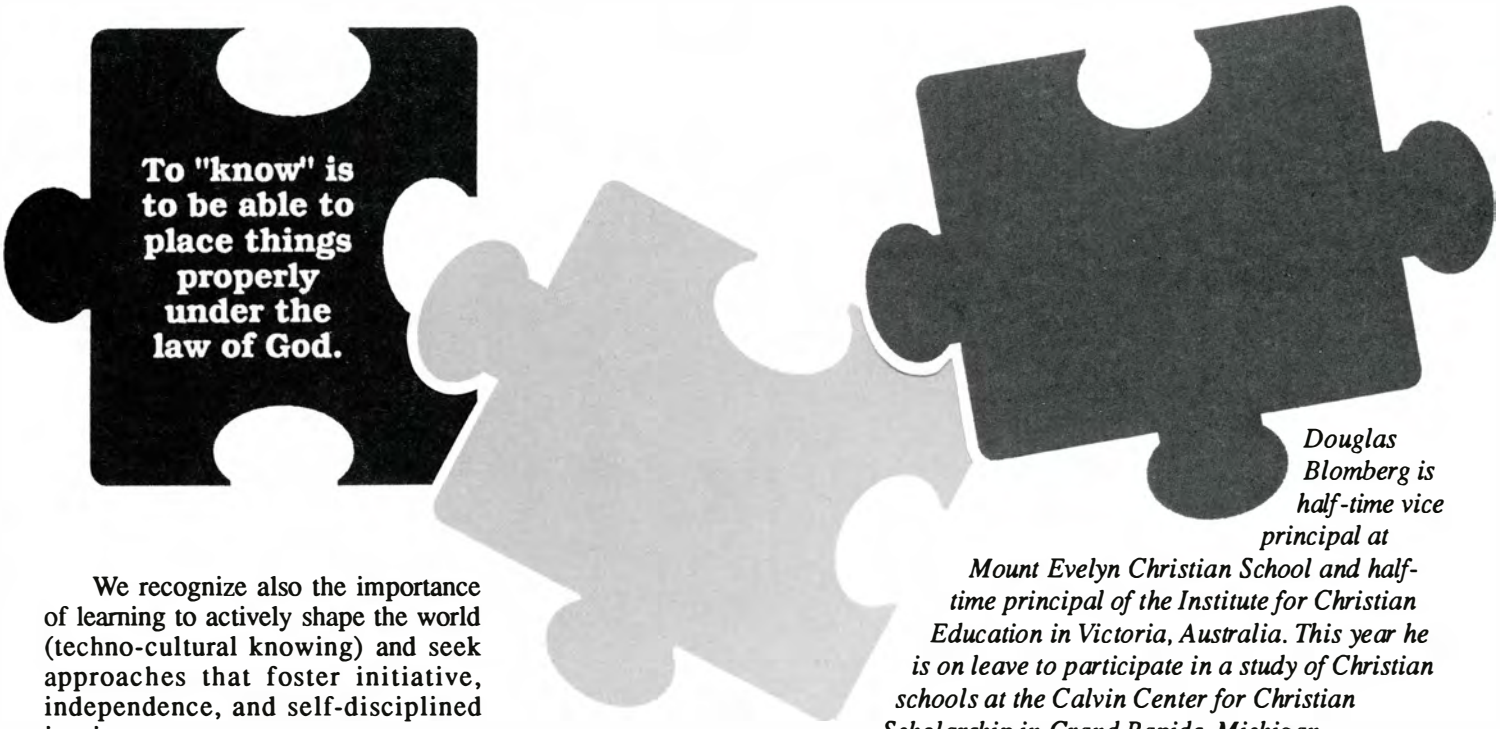
Aboriginal Studies

No doubt one of the most exciting ventures of the school has been the development of an Aboriginal Studies program. Aboriginals are studied in units at Grade Prep and Grade 5/6 levels and again in Year 11, but the focus of this program is the Year 10 unit extending over two of our mini-terms. And at the heart of this unit is the three-week trip to the Centre [Central Australia]. Many schools make this sort of trip. What is special about the Mount Evelyn Christian School trip is the quality of contact that has been established with Aboriginal people, to the extent that the group has for the past few years spent a few days as the guests of the Warlpiri people at Yuendumu, and some of these people have made the long trek south to visit their "southern camp."

A significant element contributing to this has been the study of the Warlpiri language by Years 9 and 10. The decision to study this language, rather than a number of other more usual alternatives, was a result of the commitment to an integral approach. It is worth noting that the decision was reached after a lengthy consideration of the school's foreign language policy by a committee consisting of parents, teachers, and board members. It came after a number of years of relative failure in the foreign language program, where French and then Indonesian had been taught, with some appeal to the more academic students but with little relevance to others because of lack of connection with anything else that was happening in the school program or in their own lives. (Children also now learn some Japanese language in Grade 5/6 when they are studying Japan.)

When an Aboriginal Studies program was first considered, a search began for a way of dealing with this as concretely as possible. This was because of a basic pedagogical principle that had been accepted by the school, that in concrete experience one comes in contact most broadly and fully with that which is being studied in a way that evokes the broadest range of responses from students. When we realized that the original inhabitants of the Melbourne area had disappeared or had been removed virtually without trace, the search for contact with Aboriginals further afield began, leading eventually to Central Australia and the purchase of a school coach [bus] so that an educational tour could be conducted without the constraints normally imposed by commercial transportation.

Aboriginal culture is, of course, a rich field for the study of religion, given the relatively holistic character of Aboriginal life. Children learn to respect the integrity of Warlpiri culture and also confront the special problems facing Aboriginal Christians. This brings into focus many questions about the proper relationship between Christianity and any given culture, particularly the relationship between the Gospel and European-Australian culture. Nor can one avoid addressing significant questions of justice arising from they way Aboriginals have been treated in the past and the way in which they are treated at present.



We recognize also the importance of learning to actively shape the world (techno-cultural knowing) and seek approaches that foster initiative, independence, and self-disciplined inquiry.

Undergirding a person's knowledge of the world is a religious heart commitment. Such commitment cannot be coerced; we must respect the integrity and responsible freedom of God's image-bearers as God respected that of Adam and Eve in the Garden. At the same time, it is important to continually call children to commit themselves wholeheartedly to God and to the tasks to which he calls them. Knowledge is not neutral, but will be directed either to the service of the Lord of all or to the service of an idolatrous substitute.

Our curriculum will seek to lead children to present their whole selves as living sacrifices to God. Worshipping him is not merely a matter of knowing the right doctrine or of having the right feelings. It is a matter of acting out our spiritual commitment in bodies transformed by the renewal of our minds and hearts. Our children must therefore be exposed to real life contexts if their learning is to prepare them for discipleship in the real world.

The development of a Christian perspective on life is to equip us to be God's people in God's world, not for our own self-satisfaction, but as servants of him and of those who are lost. **CEJ**

Douglas Blomberg is half-time vice principal at Mount Evelyn Christian School and half-time principal of the Institute for Christian Education in Victoria, Australia. This year he is on leave to participate in a study of Christian schools at the Calvin Center for Christian Scholarship in Grand Rapids, Michigan.

"They are conflicts I have chosen"

(from a conversation with Madeleine L'Engle)

After her presence has reminded me
of everything I thought I should forget,
I walk through cold dark to home
and a pair of red mittens, waiting to be mended.

And I sigh.

Because, of course, I have not forgotten.

And there is nothing artistic in mending mittens.

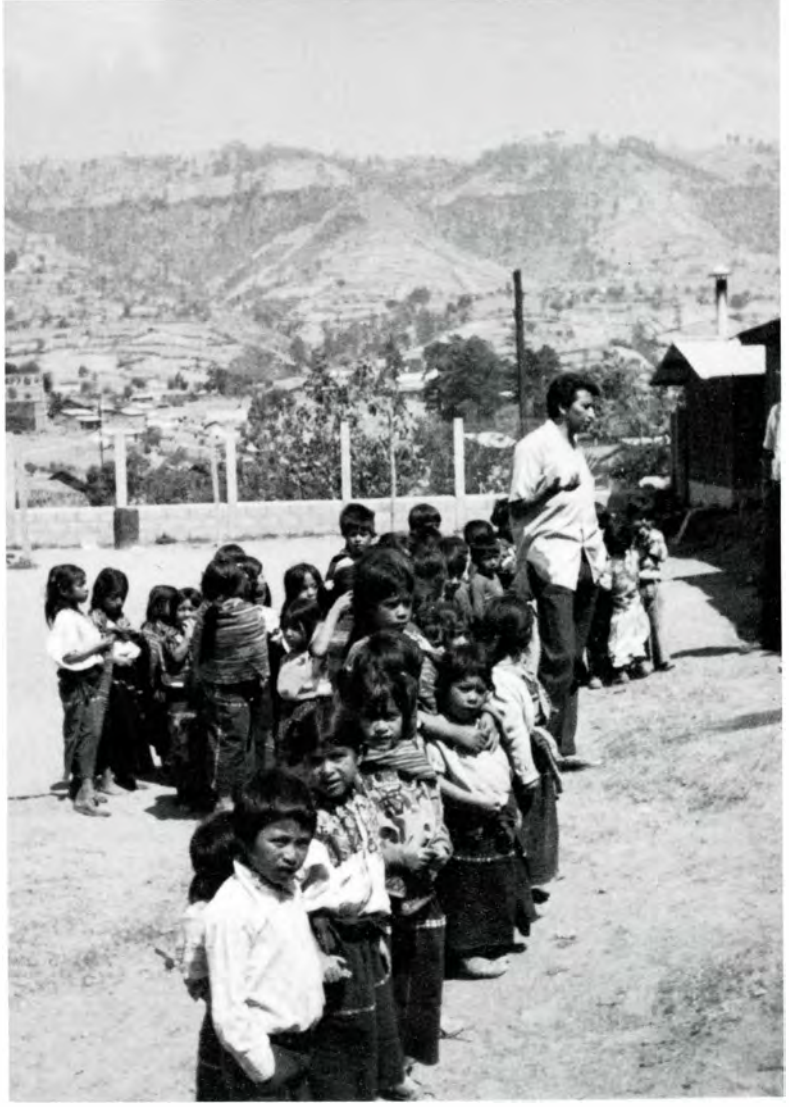
Except that these are Mickey Mouse mittens,
and that's alliteration;
they are red as a winter cardinal,
and that's a simile;
they fit hands that I cherish,
which must be symbolic.

And my clumsy needle tugging the thread
is really the incarnation of love, which, after all, is art.

—LAURA APOL OBBINK

—by TOM SORENS

"Pase Adelante!"



To travel two thousand miles or so straight south from Michigan takes you to Honduras, Central America. Christian Reformed World Missions has been working in Honduras some twenty years to develop the Christian Reformed Church of Honduras. Christian educators might be surprised to know that families in Reformed communities have started establishing Christian schools in Honduras and are giving a uniquely interesting shape to their programs. Maybe it's not surprising at all that it is happening on our mission field. The Gospel is Good News educationally as well.

In Honduras, when a person approaches the open door of an acquaintance's house, the invitation rings out: "Pase adelante!" Come in! Step forward! To look at the emerging Christian school system in Honduras is to see an open door for a formative influence on the part of the North American Reformed educational community. Do you hear the invitation?

The likelihood that children of poor families in Catacamas, Honduras, will be finishing their formal education at the sixth grade means that integrating vocational training into the primary school program is not just an extra. The aim is to give children the skills they need to get good jobs, to succeed in gardening and farming, and to raise a healthy, well-clothed family in the future. The property of the "Luz y Verdad" ("Light and Truth") School in Catacamas is large enough to have the children work in agricultural plots, gardens, and a small carpentry shop and to learn sewing and cooking.

This feature of Christian schooling in Honduras—the integration of vocational training and academic competence—will also be a focus on the secondary level, at the Polytechnical High School in Tegucigalpa, Honduras' capital city. Students from seventh grade and up will be trained in electrical service installation, carpentry, and electronics and will be able to specialize in certain areas in the later high school years. Since the high school will be on the same site as the Christian Reformed Seminary's main office, another distinctive aspect to the school's program will be easily implemented: the basic leadership training/ pastoral program and biblical and doctrinal courses will be provided along with regular academic studies. The aim is to challenge and to equip our Honduran young people for more effective participation in church and evangelistic activities even as they become valuable future employees or owners of small businesses.

There is another idea about Christian education in Honduras that will come to bear soon both in Catacamas and in Tegucigalpa. A school building that is the place for teaching children and youth during the day is too valuable a resource to be idle during the late afternoon and evening hours. The off-hours are devoted to serving Christian and community youth and adults who work during the day and want to study or learn new skills in the evening. This keeps the program close to the real needs of the work-a-day world in Honduras. It builds up skills and gives biblical background to people who understand learning as life-long, whether as church, as worker, or in some other capacity.

The conviction that guides these efforts is that not only biblical/doctrinal classes, but also regular academic and even vocational training all find their proper framework for learning under the lordship of Christ. With this conviction comes the determination to aim for and achieve an education that gives children and youth everything they need to eventually overcome their poverty, armed with employable skills. They will do so having been made new creatures by the saving power of Christ, equipped for life-long service unto him.

Our Honduran brothers and sisters have some concrete needs to meet in following their vision for Christian schools. Although that's not their main purpose, they are thereby breaking new ground educationally from the standpoint of our own Christian schools. We may not be accustomed to seeing vocational education integrated into the curriculum or to seeing the school serve working youth and adults during off-hours. Therein lies the attractiveness of this movement for participation by educators from the North.

Our missionaries in Honduras have been watching with keen interest as this work toward providing solid Christian education has been unfolding over the past three years. As missionaries we are happy to see this emerging Christian school movement picking up steam. We have also noted with gratitude that the schools in Catacamas and Tegucigalpa have attracted the support of World Wide Christian Schools in terms of their building needs. Compassion International has decided to sponsor thirty poor children in Catacamas and give them scholarships. Our experience has been that the commitment on the part of our brothers and the response on the part of the community have consistently exceeded our expectations.

Maybe we should have expected these Honduran Christian schools to make strong strides forward. This has been one of the strong points of Christian Reformed World Missions in comparison with other missionary agencies, as seen for example in the Dominican Republic. Indeed, throughout mission history, educational ministries have had a more central importance than is commonly remembered.

Certainly, for us in Honduras as well as in the wider mission enterprise, our experience as missionaries strongly supports the case for a relationship to be established between North American Reformed educators and third world Christian schools—in this case —with those of the Christian Reformed Church of Honduras. The task of guiding and shaping the direction of these schools exceeds our missionaries' available time and capabilities. We don't want to fail to serve our Honduran brothers and sisters in what they have begun as Reformed people and on their own initiative. Have we been dreaming too small in terms of how willing to get involved Reformed educators would be?

To flesh out what "getting involved" means requires us to step out of our situation of a long, sturdy tradition and a more highly developed school network into the situation of an *emerging* school system. In this situation everything is brand new. The newness of it all makes it difficult for the Hondurans to prioritize their needs. At the minimum, a partial list would include the need to plan and direct a series of workshops for teachers; the need to obtain, develop, and know how to use Christian teaching materials; and the need to design supervisory or administrative strategies involved in running a school.

However, in general terms, a more pervasive need is that of being able to take advantage of the accumulated wisdom born of the experience of Reformed educators in other latitudes. The particulars of the work of Christian education are important, but giving biblical direction and exercising formative Christian influence begins the moment an educator starts talking out of his or her experience of relating Christ's claims to the work of Christian education.

Communicating biblical wisdom about educating covenant children and youth, even if in faltering Spanish or with the aid of a translator, already begins the process of forming a solid tradition of education and is heartily welcomed by our Honduran brothers and sisters. They respond not simply to eloquence, but to the sustained willingness of people to be involved in their venture. To date, that kind of willingness from North Americans has shown itself in the form of work teams who have come to hoist block and wood into place to construct buildings on the mission field. Educators willing to participate in the work of thinking Christianly so as to fashion a perspective on Christian schooling would receive a similarly hearty welcome.

The door is open for educators willing to relate to Honduran Christian schools in a formative way. Once through the door and connected with the Reformed part of God's growing family in Honduras, one can work toward a Christian witness in terms of the wider issues of education on a national level in Honduras. The governmental climate in this nation of five million favors the presentation of solid alternative approaches to educating its nation's youth. Witness the fact that this year the Ministry of Education came close to setting up an A.C.E. (Accelerated Christian Education) school as a pilot project. Although opposing opinions prevailed and the school came to life as a private instead of a public school, the incident stands as an example of Honduras's search for eduational approaches to prepare their children for the future. The way for a Christian perspective to be communicated is also open in terms of contacts with government officials, an increasing number of whom are evangelicals and who need support as they relate their faith to their responsibilities in the area of education.

Admittedly, the picture of a possible Christian witness in the area of education and addressed to education as a whole in Honduras is sketchy and distant. It deserves mention, however, because the Reformed educational community in particular is probably capable of wrestling with these deeper issues in a culturally sensitive and philosophically insightful way.

The effort on the part of our Honduran brothers and sisters to begin Christian schools is driven by a large vision of Christ and his importance for education in their specific context. Although it is a context-specific effort, it is not thereby closed to us whose educational experience has been different. Just the opposite is true. Especially as a new and developing venture in Christian education, it much rather presents us with an open door. It is an opportunity to put our hard-won educational insights at the service of Honduran Christians in a mutually enriching relationship. **CEJ**

Tom Sorens is the director of leadership training at the seminary operated by the Christian Reformed Church in Honduras.

—by CHERIE AND STEVE HOLTROP

HOMESCHOOLING—

A Lifestyle of Learning

Homeschooling!?
I've heard of that.
Isn't it illegal?
Why would you want to do that?
Well, what exactly do you do with your kids all day?
What about socialization?

These are some of the most common questions we get from friends, relatives, and Steve's graduate student peers in his education program at the University of Iowa. We'd like to structure this article around these sorts of well-meaning questions.

Why would we want to homeschool our kids?

We started thinking about homeschooling while living in Iowa City —where there are about forty homeschooling families—during a one-year leave of absence Steve took from teaching at a Christian high school. We were thinking about our oldest daughter, Rachel, who's now eight years old. (We also have a five-year-old daughter and a two-year-old son.) We were thinking about how fast the years since her birth had gone, but also about how small she was and how unready both she and we were for her to start school in the fall. That was three years ago, and she hasn't gone to school yet. Why not? First, she was small; she was off the bottom of the charts for normal five-year-old's height and weight. Born two months premature, she just never caught up. So we thought we'd hold her back for a year. As Cherie recalls now, "I just never saw a time when I thought someone else could teach her more or better or when her time would be better spent elsewhere."

Second, Steve had been studying language development and the varying effects of home, neighborhood, and school on linguistic growth, finding to his horror that almost all kids can communicate quite well as preschoolers, but many regress severely when

they start school. Two studies that really stand out on this score are Gordon Wells' report on his extensive Bristol Study, *The Meaning Makers* (dozens of kids, ages two on up, wore microphones for years), and Shirley Brice Heath's *Ways with Words*, a ten-year study of different socioeconomic groups' language learning as used in the Piedmont Carolinas.

Meanwhile, Cherie was studying with great interest the relatively new and obscure field of homeschooling. Several of her close friends in Iowa City were doing homeschooling and gave her many materials to peruse. Sources of these materials ranged from people who called themselves unschoolers and rejected the rigidity and compartmentalizing they saw in institutionalized schooling, to very "religious" homeschoolers who rejected what they saw as the lack of structure in modern schooling. She read everything from John Holt's books, which seem to advocate totally child-centered, child-determined curricula, K-12 (and beyond), to Our Lady of Victory's extremely traditional program, which requires home-schooling parents to dress their children in uniforms every day (and even to send in a picture of the uniformed child), do hours of drills, mail in attendance records, give grades including F's, and set up a home classroom according to the program's dictates. Though John Holt is not advocating specifically Christian homeschooling, we feel, after sampling dozens of authors and catalogues, more comfortable with Holt's philosophy and approaches than with any of the others.

Third—and the biggest reason we started homeschooling and have stuck with it—is the philosophy of education we and our fellow Iowa City Home Learners can put into practice every day. Unlike so many public and Christian school teachers who are frustrated by wanting a more open, exploratory, and flexible curriculum, but are hampered by necessary and real class sizes, schedules, logistics, and widely differing interests and rates of learning in one classroom—all largely beyond their control—we can allow a totally absorbed, tongue-pointing-out-of-the-corner-of-her-mouth kid to continue an art project as long as she needs to, to hang upside down from her bedroom loft ladder as she contemplates fractions for the first time in her life, and to refuse to read aloud until she is comfortable doing so and then to explode into her newfound gifts, gobbling up everything with print on it.

We could actually do what educational theories like whole language, writing process, scaffolding, and discovery learning were advocating: provide a rich, cultural, aesthetic, literary environment and simply let our children interact with it when, how, and where they saw fit as we constantly threw new experiences and suggestions their way. We could almost just sit back and watch as low child-to-adult ratios, collaborative learning, individual learning styles, interaction of subjects and of faith in learning, and student ownership of learning all happened naturally. Thus a math challenge might rise at 10:00 p.m.; or an entire day from breakfast to bedtime might involve some made-up regal drama or a reenactment of a recently experienced community theatre event like *The Music Man*, complete with elaborate home-made costumes. Often Cherie and the girls will spend hours researching in World Book and other books a topic that they ran into in their story reading. (But one thing we took out of the environment of learning five years ago was the TV. And with it went, we assume, much wasted time, hyperactivity, and materialism.)

Although Steve is still less politically than philosophically in favor of what we're doing, it has been a golden opportunity for him to put into practice the very methods and philosophies he has been studying in his doctoral program in education. It has been a practicum every semester and a way to test theories and duplicate results. Steve has felt like a participant observer/researcher in every class. In fact, several of his classes required finding young children and trying various one-on-one language exercises with them or taping and analyzing their language and its development. Steve would have used his own children for these assignments anyway, but we could go beyond brief touchdowns into our children's intellectual lives, seeing instead the entire picture, knowing exactly what they knew and often why and how.

Why homeschool when there are excellent schools available?

This question is really part of the first one, but it gets at our allegiance to Christian or public schooling as institutions to be believed in. In northwest Iowa, Christian Schools International schools are available, and homeschooling was perceived by some people to be a rejection of what CSI stands for. They ask, "How can you not support our Christian schools?"

And in Iowa City the public schools are seen as a strong force for social improvement worth supporting. Americans believe in schools. Since Thomas Jefferson's time we have sought to avoid social problems and an unenlightened populace through universal schooling. National problems such as civil rights and Sputnik hysteria are attacked primarily by using the schools with programs like busing and greater emphasis on math and science. The jury is still out on programs like Head Start, for example, which was designed actually to raise the IQ's of disadvantaged inner city youngsters and, more recently, on the national problem of AIDS, which we automatically and probably logically want to deal with in the schools. Yet some states are mandating AIDS education even for children in the primary grades.

In most of these cases, however, students' individual needs and situations should dictate what is taught and when, more-so than does a blanket decree covering both rural kids from traditional families as well as inner city teens from broken homes. Of course, we want our kids to know about social ills such as poverty, drugs, and AIDS, as well as a myriad of other issues such as nuclear war, the Holocaust, global warming, homosexuality, child abuse, and civil religion. But we parents can decide better than anyone else when and how to bring these things up. And for now, we feel we are or can become adequately informed on any issue our children need to know about (modeling!). Or we'll learn with them and maybe even from them.

We're not libertarians, devoid of social contexts and responsibilities in our thinking. But we don't tap into what often sounds like an Orwellian central

control of these things or a Huxleyian vision of cadres of blue-, olive-, and khaki-clad youngsters interacting only with people their exact same age. We believe in education, and the need for schools. But a painter would paint his own house; so why go *in loco parentis* when the parents are available, willing, and able to do the job themselves? As our local home-schooling brochure says, we do not reject the schools. We just don't need them. Parks ought to exist even if some folks have big yards.

We fear that many non-public schools do exist as rejection of the public school and thus become susceptible to being called segregation academies or at least elitist. And to be sure, some homeschoolers—often, unfortunately, the *Christian* homeschoolers—seem to be rejecting the establishment. In fact, many Christian homeschooling programs commercially available and Christian correspondence schools want to make education *more* rigid, structured, and disciplined than it already is—another twist on "back to basics," even though this country never had only the "basics." Nor has the world ever seen another educational system that does so much for so many, including for students of the very countries we most enviously contrast ourselves with.

So, to improve education in this country we don't need more hours and days of the same thing; rather we need to improve even more and do even more for even more people. Steve's not living out a professional conflict of interest and turning his back on the situation by homeschooling his own kids. Rather, he does for himself what he can while at the same time teaching future teachers to do for other parents what they cannot or choose not to do. We don't say homeschooling is for everyone. But all families *can* strive for a lifestyle of learning, whether their kids go to school or not.

Well, what do we actually do?

We are members of Iowa City Home Learners, a support group of fifteen families committed to a lifestyle of learning. We toyed with the tag "unstructured" to differentiate ourselves from the other group in town: Christian Home Educators Fellowship. They're more into daily schedules and Christian textbooks (though we do peruse A Beka and other Christian suppliers' catalogues); whereas our group, almost entirely made up of Christians as well, stresses the joy of discovery and the curiosity and creativity God has given each of us. Sure, there's sin and depravity, any parent knows that, but there's also grace, redemption, and renewal. We stress the latter in our educational experiences. Moreover, since all of life is responding to God, learning, discovery, and growth are life-long responses that require readiness and openness and flexibility. The Spirit works in mysterious ways, and a lifestyle of receptivity allows us to be ready for God's calls any time and anywhere. Further, we do live structured lives and constantly look for ways to discipline ourselves and our children in discipleship.

We encourage, model, and applaud creative play since it can lead to further creativity, inventiveness, and wisdom in problem solving later in life. We believe that giving children time to be creative is one of the most important things we can do. For example, if children use a blanket not only as a bed covering but also as a house, ghost costume, picnic blanket, folded-up jumping pad, theater curtain, kitchen floor sled, matchbox car highway, and baby doll sling carrier, think of all the problem solving and possibility thinking they're learning and practicing.

We also make a big effort to listen to our children instead of just telling them things all the time. Our style is child-centered but not in the self-centered sort of way. Instead, our program is child-centered just as good medicine must be patient-centered and car maintenance must be car-centered. Our children drive our curriculum, not the other way around. So, we don't teach something just because it is on a list for a certain grade. We don't rush out to fix something that isn't broken. Still, we find that much of what most first grade teachers cover in a year is what most first graders are ready for and interested in. We don't force anything, but by the end of the year it still happens.

We do lots of family outings to museums, farms, airports, campgrounds, locks and dams, and libraries. As members of a homeschooling group our children participate in art classes, dance classes, a reading/writing group, plays the children write, picnics, tours of museums, science experiments, and special drama productions for school children at the university.

And of course we also read to the kids dozens of hours each week and try to provide lots of interesting materials for them to work with daily: workbooks (they insist!), math games (including computer math games Steve has written for them), blank books in which to write and illustrate their own stories or journals, science materials, and hundreds of books on all subjects including a new set of encyclopedias to replace our eleven-year-old set. We've also jointly made a wall-to-wall alphabet chart, a banner of thirten pieces of computer paper, and similar number, color, and time charts. The older two children receive nature magazines, which fascinate them and provide additional posters to cover our walls.

What about adequate socialization?

We find this question curious because the intellectual, moral, and creative development of children are purportedly the most important reasons for schooling's existence. Americans shy away from even mentioning socialization in education because it sounds so, well, socialistic. But we find that, as a last resort, concerned and well-meaning friends bring up socialization after they have exhausted the intellectual, moral, and creative arguments—on which they usually agree with us, at least philosophically.

But despite the *Brave New World* images that come to mind, we usually admit that we do socialize. All of life is socialization, and the case could be made, and has been, that the *only* things schools really do is socialize the younger generation to the attitudes and customs of the older generation. Anyway, we provide for our children plenty of exposure to other people. We live in a courtyard of twenty-eight apartments overflowing with young children from dozens of countries. (There are over twenty such courtyards in just a few acres of student family housing.) In

addition to attending all the homeschoolers' classes and social functions mentioned above, our children attend Sunday School, Brownies and Daisies, and art, gymnastics, and ballet classes that include schooled as well as homeschooled kids. Moreover, they visit nursing homes and participate in our church's turn at the community free lunch program and home meal deliveries.

But the real clincher is that nowhere else in life—other than in schools—do people gang up according to age. None of Cherie's friends is thirty-one years old. And in graduate school Steve's classmates and even the undergraduates he teaches vary widely in age. Some of his students are older than he, and one of his professors is his age. It's really only quite recently in the world's history, and even quite recently in America's young history alone, that we've started segregating children by age. We think that interaction with other people of all ages is important; and for children especially, mature, adult role models are preferable to same-age gangs of people who are less than mature and not necessarily good role models.

Is homeschooling legal?

Every state is different. In Iowa until a few months ago homeschooling was handled, or mishandled, under the truancy law. District attorneys eager to show some convictions in an election year could drag homeschoolers to court. But in some western states, we understand, homeschooling has historically been deemed a great help to an educational system that found it impossible to bring all the outlying children together under one roof. Hence, some states actually pay people to homeschool!

But many midwestern states with their top educational rankings can make life tough on homeschoolers, even unofficially. One neighbor girl threatened to sue our five-year-old daughter because she didn't go to school. And then no one legally had to go until age seven in Iowa! (Now Iowa says age six. Though kindergarten is universal, most states don't require children to go to school until age six or seven.) Until Iowa's recent homeschooling law recognized that homeschoolers exist and offered some means of interaction between homeschoolers and local school districts, Iowa was one of the worst states for homeschoolers. Today, the attitude seems to be that, if parents want to forego the excellent institutions of education available to their children and supply the time, flexibility, commitment, and money needed to do the job themselves, the state will put up with homeschooling and no longer allow eager D.A.'s to chase productive, taxpaying families to neighboring states.

Our district's favorite plan seems to be what they call dual enrollment. The school district can say our kid is enrolled, and therefore they get over $3000 from the state to educate her. She then is eligible to participate in any classes she wants, especially the group- or team-oriented ones like P.E. and band, but also art and any special events like field trips. Additionally, the district hires a part-time teacher who visits homeschoolers' homes on a regular basis, providing access to district media and other materials, such as curriculum guides, and offering help of various kinds whenever requested to do so. Most of the families of our local group of homeschoolers are signing up for the dual enrollment plan this year. The other group of homeschoolers in town is quite suspicious of this arrangement and assumes the teacher would be primarily an evaluator or a censor checking up on them rather than a resource person with access to materials parents couldn't normally get on their own.

How long do we plan to continue homeschooling?

We don't know. We've never planned to homeschool for more than a year at a time. And our kids have to be in on the decision. Many homeschooled kids want to try school when they get to be adolescents. Others are more grateful than ever to avoid high school's potential pitfalls. We love the famous story about the homeschooled kids who got into Harvard with no previous formal schooling. Right now college seems like a really good idea for our kids. High school would be fine with us too. But for now, with Steve's very flexible schedule as a dissertation-writing doctoral student and Cherie's commitment to being an at-home mom and the wealth of local educational resources, the active support group that shares our philosophy, and a bearable legal situation, it looks as though we'll continue homeschooling for another year or two.

But, who knows? Maybe three years from now we'll have a TV, two incomes, and three kids in school who would rather die than read anything. But we doubt it. And no matter what, we'll never give up our lifestyle of learning. **CEJ**

Cherie and Steve Holtrop live in Iowa City, where Steve is completing a Ph.D. at the University of Iowa.

—by H. K. ZOEKLICHT

"Friday Treat"

The gang was all there on this Friday noon. Ginny Traansma was busy peeling a ripe orange, trying hard to keep her fingers from getting too "juiced up," as she called it, for that would make her smell like an orange tree for the rest of the day. At least that's what her students said.

Ren Abbot and Matt De Wit lounged near the coffee pot, making their annual hamburger bet on who would take the Rose Bowl. "Rabbit," as usual, was trying to convince his skeptical colleague of the Big Ten's superiority.

Rick Cole and Lucy Den Denker sat by the center table, a map of the British Isles spread out before them, excitement on their faces as they planned the itinerary for next summer's student tour they hoped to put together.

Susan Katje and Jenny Snip, at the other end of the table, indulged in their Friday treat: a game of Scrabble.

And John Vroom? Oh yes, he was there. John had promised Dr. Vette that he'd indulge in a jelly roll no more than once a week, and Friday was his treat day. There he sat on the "Vroom chair," raking his eyes hungrily across the almost-forbidden fruit in his hand before his gustatory lust would launch a double-jawed attack.

"I blew it! I blew it!" With that self-deprecating announcement, Steve Vander Prikkel burst into the room.

"Yes, you're blowing in a lot of cold air, if you ask me," snapped Snip the secretary, without looking up from the Scrabble board. "I'd thank you to close the door behind you."

Steve obliged, then found a seat by Ginny, unbuttoned his white lab jacket, heaved a huge sigh, and reached for a carrot stick from the relish tray, this Friday's special treat for the faculty. Ginny, folding the orange peels into a napkin, looked at her troubled colleague. "What did you blow—a lab experiment or something, Steve?"

"Yes, you might call it that," responded the biology teacher wryly. "Hey, listen people—I've got a confession to make."

John Vroom's jaws, poised to clamp down on the delectable pastry now halfway into his mouth, froze at the word *confession.* Vroom, who, with his fondness for confessions, should've been a priest, did not want to miss a word to come, though he now looked a bit like a male toad with its throat puffed out. But all eyes were on Steve.

"I'm asking you to listen because I need to know what you think." Steve's brown eyes shifted around the room; he saw that he had their attention. "You know, this may sound stupid, but it just occurred to me after my advanced biology lab that I've been going at it all wrong! Here I've been trying to teach them the facts; you know—of the structure and reproduction and growth and development of living organisms. I talk about biotics and mitosis and biosynthesis, and all that stuff. And now, after more than twenty years of inspiring a few and confounding the many, I say to myself, You big dummy! You've been trying to induct your students into the facts and mysteries and marvels of life through the text book, through the print and charts and graphics on a page. Even the lab work we do is text-oriented, for Pete's sake."

"So?" came the puzzled response from Matt; and John Vroom, not hearing the kind of confession that had the power to delay his craving for instant gratification, snapped his jaws shut as though they were on a spring. The sweet preserves suddenly oozed out in both directions, down John's gullet and down his chin. Still, none in the room took note of Vroom's untidy Friday feast.

"So," retorted Steve, chomping on his carrot stick, "that's the wrong starting point! The best way to get somebody to appreciate Banff National Park is not by giving a text on the history and the geological background of the place, right? The point is, you begin with what's real to the kids, what they know or want to know. And in my subject that could be all kinds of issues of interest, concern, and controversy; like birth control, birth defects, complexion problems, weight problems, pollution problems, cancer, AIDS, and even the whole issue of evolution that's tearing Christians apart."

Steve, relieved by venting his frustration and wound up at the same time by his new discovery, walked to the fridge, took out the pitcher of cold water, and poured himself a glass. He turned back to his colleagues: "Well, what do you think? Am I making any sense to you?"

Susan Katje, having lost her game to Jenny again, responded archly, "Steve, you're old enough to remember the sixties, so why do you want to repeat them? The best learning comes through books, not through students' expressing themselves on pimples and pregnancy." And with that, the sour-faced, strait-laced librarian gathered up her Scrabble stuff and made her exit.

But Steve's question still hung in the air, and Lucy was eager for the opening. "I think you're on to something, Steve, and I don't care whether it's the sixties or the nineties. Scottie in the second grade is learning about waste disposal. They went to landfills and recycling centers and other places. And would you believe that he knows more about what's good to put in the trash and what isn't than I do? Not only that, he polices it—he cares about it. I'm sure he will have a life-long interest in responsible waste management. And he didn't get it from a book, but he's already looking for stuff to read about it. And that's the point I think Steve is getting at."

That's why in English we don't start out with the grammar book," Rick Cole chimed in, "but we begin by looking at and listening to the way language is used in this country, including

the hallways and locker rooms of this school."

"Yeah," beamed Vander Prikkel, "and that's why Matt here could start his class in physics or chemistry with Hiroshima or the use of chemical warfare. And John could begin his Bible doctrine class with the controversy about Genesis or women in office. And maybe I could come into his class and talk about the fossil story and its implications. Hey, this could get pretty exciting!"

John groaned, in response to both Steve's ideas and to the heartburn flaring up when he too quickly ingested such foods as jelly rolls.

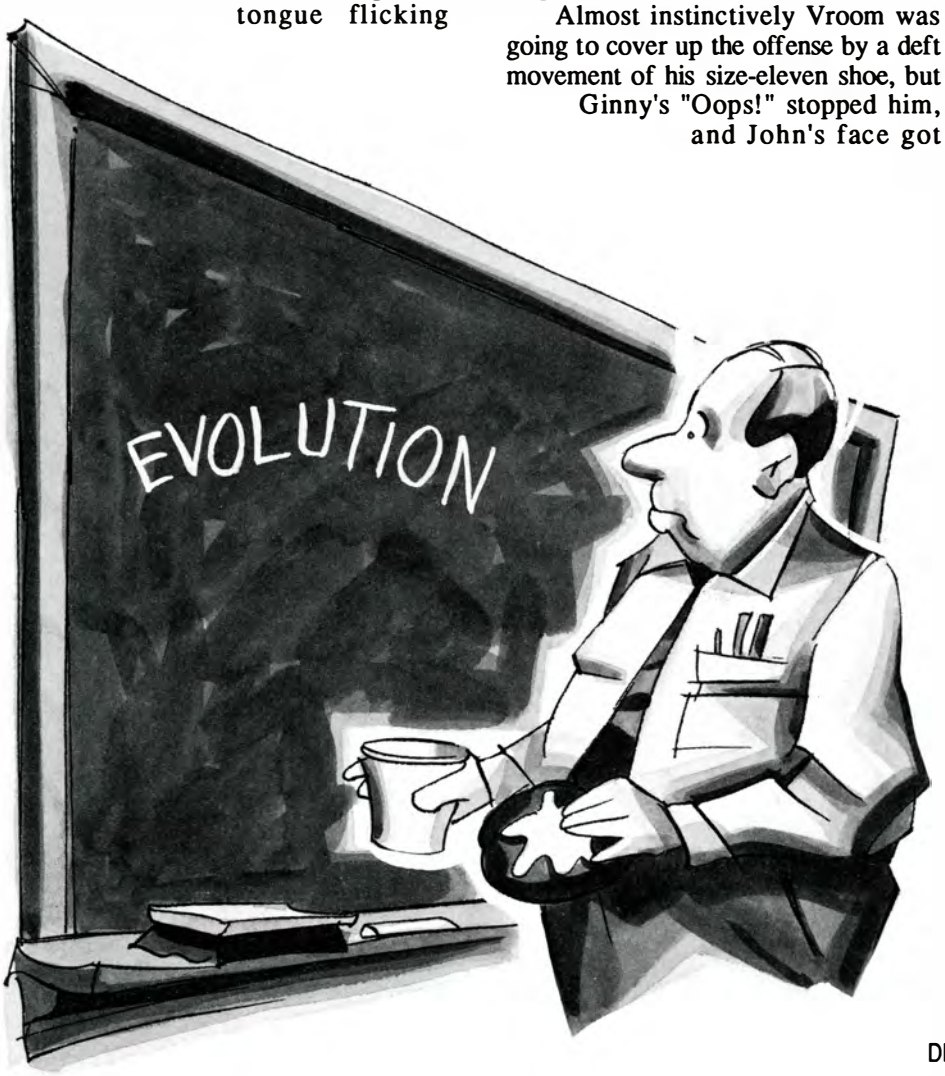
"Phooey on your fossils! The word is forbidden in my classroom. Sometimes I catch a foolish student whispering the word—referring to me of course—but he never makes that mistake twice, I promise you."

John licked his lips, his tongue flicking from side to side in eager pursuit of remnants, unaware of the treasure that, obliging the law of gravity, had slowly slid down the gully in the middle of the chin and now, out of tongue's reach, was poised to plop on Vroom's new Stafford all-silk tie. Fascinated, the Asylum crew watched.

But John had more to say. "And let me remind you, Steve, this is a Christian school, a 'school met de Bijbel,' as the Dutch called it. And the Bible doesn't talk about evolution, and not about female preachers either. So don't go introducing those unbiblical ideas to our students. I, for one, won't stand for it. Read Mark 9:42 and think again. I think you should drop your whole cockeyed idea, that's what I think."

For emphasis John leaned forward momentarily, causing the errant jelly to miss the tie and land neatly at John's feet, a bright red blob on a beige carpet.

Almost instinctively Vroom was going to cover up the offense by a deft movement of his size-eleven shoe, but Ginny's "Oops!" stopped him, and John's face got redder as Ginny stooped down and, with a quick swipe of the napkin, picked up what John ruefully thought should have been in his stomach.



Matt DeWit ended the high drama. "Well, Steve, I don't think you should drop anything. I'm doing something with that myself now and again, but more incidentally than systematically, you know. We can probably all do more of it."

"Hey, you people are no doubt way ahead of me, but sometimes you have to make your own discoveries in teaching before it'll make a difference. I just want to kick myself for taking so long." Steve reached for another carrot stick.

Rick Cole began to fold the British map, while he queried, "So, what are you going to do different Monday, Steve?"

"I'm going to have a good time figuring that out this weekend. I'll keep you posted," smiled Vander Prikkel.

The bell signaled the end of noon break just as Esther Carpenter strode into the lounge. She headed straight for John Vroom, who quickly covered the offending stain on the floor with his shoe.

"John, you're not forgetting about tomorrow, are you?" Omni's principal smiled brightly at the Bible teacher.

John stared back in confusion. "Uh, uh, tomorrow?" What was she talking about? He remembered that he and Minnie were planning to polish the silverware tomorrow and maybe update their stamp collection, but that didn't involve Carpenter.

"Yes, I sent in your and my registrations a week ago. Remember that Servant Seminary is hosting a seminar for area Bible and Church School teachers on handling controversies in the classroom?"

John's face collapsed like a heap of ashes. He dropped his chin, and his jowl sagged as though his cheeks had sprung a leak.

Pretending not to notice, Dr. Carpenter walked back to the door, then turned around and again smiled brightly in Vroom's direction: "See you there promptly at nine o'clock, John."

CEJ

—by GLORIA GORIS STRONKS

Are These the Schools We Wanted?

"You are going to study Christian schools? How wonderful!" The young woman I was having lunch with thought for a moment. "I wish you could find a way for schools to be structured so that children like mine would not feel as separate from society as I felt. You see, I was always with Christian Reformed kids. I went to church and to school with the same kids and rarely played with anyone else. In fact, when I was a second grader I went to Brownies and felt completely out of place. I wondered whether going there was something a Christian should do. As an adult, I have had difficulty learning to socialize with people outside of my own group. My own children are in a Christian school now, but I want them to feel part of our society so that they can work and play with different groups of people. Will you be studying how the lack of diversity in our schools affects our children's learning and living?"

"A study of Christian schools? I have waited such a long time for this." The teacher who was speaking had just completed a very busy school year. "The one thing our Christian schools need more than anything else is time for professional preparation and planning. We are trying so hard to change from a junior high concept to a middle school concept, and there just isn't time for the staff to plan for interdisciplinary units or for advisor-advisee groups. We know we ought to use our summers for such preparation, but most of our staff need to paint houses in order to supplement their income. They have school-age children, and the rising cost of tuition hurts us as much as anyone else—maybe more. The board says there simply isn't money to pay teachers for planning time during the summer because we are building an addition onto the school. Be sure to study the problem of time and resources for professional development."

"We hear so often that the church is part of the problem with Christian schools." The minister went on, "Our problem is that we are very concerned with evangelism. But it is difficult, on the one hand, to try to encourage newcomers to be part of your church community and, on the other hand, to quickly tell them that they must send their children to the Christian school. The two things work against each other. Your study will not be of help unless you talk about Christian schooling and evangelism."

The kinds of Christian schools we serve have been part of the North American scene for more than one hundred years. The people who started the schools lived in a world very different from the one we know. Society in North America has changed, and that change has brought with it different concerns and different ways of thinking about what a Christian school ought to be. What does it mean to teach with a truly Christian perspective at a time when children and young people are surrounded by electronic media? Basic truths do not change; but how do we help our students understand what it means to live as responsive disciples of Jesus Christ at a time of increased individualism, severe environmental problems, widening gaps between rich and poor, changing family structures, and disturbing public and private immorality?

A team of educators from Australia, Canada, and the U.S. has been appointed to the Calvin Center for Christian Scholarship (CCCS) with the assigned task of studying such questions. The six scholars are Douglas Blomberg from the Institute for Christian Education in Australia; Peter DeBoer and Gloria Goris Stronks from Calvin College in Michigan; Robert Koole from Edmonton Christian High School in Alberta; Harro Van Brummelen from Trinity Western University in Vancouver, B.C.; and Steven Vryhof from the University of Chicago.

The team decided to begin the study by asking teachers and administrators what *they* thought were the questions that needed to be addressed. A total of nineteen speakers who were teachers, administrators, and parents from across North America were invited to a conference at Calvin College June 27–28. They were each asked to address the question, What is one concern that faces your Christian school community right now? The conference was open to anyone who was interested, and the presentations led to stimulating discussions by the sixty participants.

Doug Blomberg opened the conference with an overview of a distinctive approach to Christian curriculum. Bert Witvoet, editor of *Calvinist Contact* spoke about "The Christian school in a time of weightlessness." He described the results of his interviews with young Canadian adults who had attended Christian schools during their earlier years. It was encouraging to hear that many of the young adults who have gone through the school system have come out with mostly positive feelings about the schools and with great respect for the teachers. But it was disturbing to hear that in their schools it was not "cool" to talk about one's faith in a personal way. Do we assume too much about the faith life of students in Christian schools? Have we carefully

Members of the team (from left) are: Steven Vryhof, Doug Blomberg, Gloria Stronks, Peter De Boer, Harro Van Brummelen, and Robert Koole.

considered the importance of a school climate that will nurture a deepening and maturing of faith in our children and young people?

Readers of *CEJ* who are interested in reading more about this study will find it reported in the March 15, 1991, issue of *Calvinist Contact* (no. 2251) in an editorial titled, "Will the next generation choose Christian day schools?" and an article titled, "Young adults speak out on the Christian schools."

Other topics brought to our attention included the mission of Christian schools and how it relates to curriculum development: What is Christian education? What makes our schools distinctive? How do we define our identity in the context of the current discussions in education? How might we organize and articulate our curriculum in ways that are in keeping with our vision? Who designs and implements curricula in the Christian schools? How can the curricular and extracurricular programs be used to develop an understanding of the need for justice in our society?

Some of the participants presented staff needs: What kind of leadership is needed in Christian schools? What keeps leadership from being as effective as it might be? What about staff development so that teachers and principals will understand what it means to be professional?

Others pointed out our need to be concerned with the climate of the schools: How can we help students learn to celebrate diversity in the schools we presently serve? What kind of school structure is needed for a climate of responsive discipleship? What about teacher-student relations in such a climate?

And the perceptions of parents were brought to our attention: How can we help parents become actively involved in their children's education at every level of schooling? When family structures have changed so much, is it still possible to speak of the church, the home, and the school working together to provide the education our children need? Should Christian high schools work toward providing more advanced placement courses? How does that fit with the caring atmosphere that is part of a school working toward helping students learn to live as responsive disciples of Jesus Christ?

Representatives from the education faculties of a number of Christian colleges were present to listen to the presentations and discussions. Many of the participants said that such discussions are essential, and conferences like this on a regular basis are important to the life of the schools. The CCCS team, in particular, benefitted greatly from these interactions.

So, where does the team go from here? We plan to spend the coming year studying these questions along with others; talking with teachers, principals, philosophers, ministers, parents, and board members; visiting schools; and attending Christian school conferences. We welcome letters telling us of your particular concerns about Christian schooling. We particularly would like to have you send us vignettes describing successful instructional events or strategies, a community-promoting practice, a faculty seminar or workshop that has been helpful for your staff, a way of designing or implementing curriculum that you feel is in keeping with the mission of your school, a way of involving parents in the life of the school (particularly at the grade five through twelve levels), a way of increasing diversity in your school community, or any other promising practice or happening in your school community.

A description of a "moment of learning" when a student suddenly understood a concept would be wonderful, or a humorous description of an incident when misunderstanding occurred. We also would like to have vignettes concerning unfortunate happenings that break down community in schools or that are not in keeping with what we have said our schools are about.

One of the products of our team efforts will be a book, and, in order to make the book as real and as effective as possible, we must use real-life stories. We will disguise them, of course, because our intention is to be of help to the schools we serve.

Send these descriptions to: Gloria Goris Stronks, Calvin Center for Christian Studies, Calvin College, Grand Rapids, MI, 49546 or call the center at (616) 957-6049.

If you are in the Grand Rapids area, drop in and chat with the team. We need to hear from you. Our hope is that through our combined efforts the results of the study will provide direction and inspiration for the schools that claim our interest and energy. **CEJ**

Gloria Goris Stronks is coordinator of the current study of Christian school issues at the Calvin Center for Christian Scholarship in Grand Rapids, Michigan.

—by CAROL M. REGTS

WHO HAS THE POWER?

LET'S ADMIT IT,

giving up any of our power as teachers can be a very frightening prospect when we face the daily unknown of middle schoolers' behavior and emotions, on those days when we feel insecure and begin already afraid of losing control, of having lost power and not being respected.

Most of us educators tend to define traditional and non-traditional differences in terms of pedagogical methods: worksheets versus whole pieces of writing, straight-row silent work versus cooperative learning, or weekly objective tests versus student-chosen projects. Yet all of us, being the good teachers we are, whether we consider ourselves traditional or non-traditional, have used each of these and a variety of other methods. In fact, good teaching involves knowing when, how, and with what students to use which method. One quality I have noticed, which can make some of us seem traditional and others non-traditional, is how we choose to define, control, and apply power in the classrooms. Our choice of a power balance, in fact, demonstrates whether we Christian educators truly dare to teach our students to use power radically as they build God's revolutionary kingdom in the secular world.

Take a moment to define the power picture in your school: How much power or what types of power rest with the board, administrator, teachers, parents, students? Especially focus on what power the students have, what power they think they have, and what power they need to have. I think that, although we Reformed Christian educators talk a good game about student-centered education, we are sometimes unwilling to back up our talk with action in all realms of student needs, particularly the realm of power. Let's admit it, giving up any of our power as teachers can be a very frightening prospect when we face the daily unknown of middle schoolers' behavior and emotions, on those days when we feel insecure and begin already afraid of losing control, of having lost power and not being respected. We know firsthand how at one moment students can seem mature and responsible, but the next they can be willful, childish, and sullen to us and their peers.

Can a middle school classroom operate without always being teacher-powered, with students sharing power? I think it can. Indeed, I think we must develop a balance, a sharing of power, if we are going to be true to our goal of developing young men and women who can think responsibly and solve the unforeseeable problems in a society that is ever-changing, who can serve one another in compassionate relationships without losing that sense of uniqueness God has placed in them. By teaching the skills to handle power in a Christ-like, constructive fashion, we empower them to help us build as well as support classroom structures of power in balance rather than power in conflict.

I am suggesting not an unstructured or "open" classroom, where students have free reign, but one where teacher uses power to set and reinforce clear expectations for student behavior and attitude in such a way that students are encouraged to participate willingly and joyfully in the community of the classroom and are encouraged to want to share responsibility for the process and products of learning. One way to engage students in defining the power balance in your classroom and school is to work together setting up a system of classroom rules and consequences following a democratic approach with its built-in checks and balances. The students function as a sort of Congress, the teacher as President, and the principal, able to declare any rule unconstitutional, as the Supreme Court. Students learn parameters, design ways of working together, and disengage from completely relying on authority figures to make decisions for them.

Such an approach also avoids the traditional understanding of rule and punishment, which often leads us to use power inappropriately, making students obey out of fear rather than from having invested themselves. Although it may seem safer to keep our students powerless, the result of forcing obedience—in terms of *having* to rather than *wanting* to—is that students become afraid and angry. And, when not feeling empowered to change

their circumstances, students will seek safety in allowing learning to happen to them instead of searching it out for themselves. Or they will seek ways to wrest power away from teachers in order to feel powerful.

I am not saying we deliberately use our power this way; indeed, we care for our students and want them to be happy, responsible young women and men. Yet, from conversations with many students, I believe feelings of fear, anger, and powerlessness construct a large part of the reality of our traditional school system no matter how compassionate we are, no matter how many choices we think we are providing students within our classroom assignments or school organizations.

One way to change this "powerful teacher versus powerless student" situation and to draw students out of apathy, anger, or fear into independence and constructive applications of their power is to change how we apply punishment and reward. But to do that I am convinced that we must challenge a belief held integral to being a student in a Christian school: "They're supposed to be good. You can't reward students for doing what they should do." Of course, the flip side of that assumption is "Don't let them get away with anything. If you give them an inch, they'll take a mile. Punish them if they're bad. They know what they're supposed to do."

I'm not sure when or how these assumptions became so firmly entrenched in our homes and schools, but they are fundamental to how we teach, how we use our power to discipline, and how we model Christian responsibility to our students. But do these beliefs fit what Scripture tells us and integrate what psychology has taught us about shaping human behavior?

Think a moment about why teachers cling to the power in our classrooms. Perhaps we feel it is our right or it makes us feel good. Think about why any of us should be "good" and about who defines the concepts of "good" and "bad." As Christian educators, we take power and an understanding of good and bad from Scripture, but how do we apply and pass that knowledge on to our students? We tend to focus on John Calvin's principle of total depravity: Because we and our students are born innately evil, we expect bad behavior and we fear it. We fear that setting up a system based on making students feel good for what they do or don't do will not be powerful enough to change that deep-down badness. In hopes of eradicating the bad, we check for mistakes on papers, for errors in argument, for misdeeds. We think that if we can find what is wrong, then we can fix it. We use grading scales that focus on the distance from failing and leave a narrow margin for success. It is our own type of Inquisition where we punish to save the soul, thinking we inspire our students to succeed, but sowing fear and anger instead of hope and a desire to explore.

If we accept the premise that humans are goal-directed and that their goals are shaped by their innate needs and by society's demands, we must examine how the society of our school is shaping students' needs or goals, how it uses its power to identify what is important. We can determine what we teach about power by looking at the

systems of punishment for misconduct; most move in deliberate escalation from a teacher's warning or mild rebuke all the way to expulsion. How many students are directly and indirectly affected by this system and why? On the flip side, I think most of us would find it much more difficult to define as careful and progressive a plan for supporting loving, community-centered behavior from students beyond a "Student of the Month" award given to one of a few rigorously evaluated students.

Most use of power, whether inadvertent or deliberate, is focused on negatives, and we hope students will focus their power on avoiding the negatives. However, because each of us does what gives us the most tangible recognition, even if it is negative recognition, we teachers should realize our students will repeat the behavior to which we give the most attention. If we punish bad behavior but don't reward good behavior, the bad will persist. In fact, we have developed systems where we nurture more creativity in not getting caught than in buoyantly living out God's creative purposes.

Students too often see only the narrow limitations and rules established to keep their power in check, filling the power vacuum and their need for recognition by operating under the belief that might makes right, and they just need to hang in there until they have the power. For, as psychologists Babcock and Keepers suggest in *Raising Kids O.K.* (1976),

> When we overpower our children, we teach them that power is the key to life. Power is more important than what makes sense, than new or different ways of thinking. We also teach them more about rigid adherence to rules and obeying us, than about thinking. That kind of structure works if we intend to continue solving new problems for our children, and if we intend to guarantee them a world which functions according to our rules, and which does not change. (146)

If you have any doubt about what students learn about power hierarchies, think of how eighth graders rule seventh graders, how seventh graders lord it over sixth graders. I express a hope that we can dare to establish systems in which we negotiate with our students and help them to identify and draw on the "God image" in them, in which we recognize them as persons able to use power competently and in a lovingly controlled fashion.

To accomplish these goals, we must begin to trust more actively in God's power to shape students' behavior, and in his grace, which frees us from sin and justification by works.

The way [God's] kingdom is going to be built is by students challenging the world's way of living. Arguing, consequently, is a price we pay for students who think for themselves and feel good about themselves.

If God's primary use of power in this life is grace-full, encourages delight in his world, and transfers his power to us by allowing us prayerfully to search out his will, then we too must model that use of power. We know from experiments like Skinner's that behavior changes as a result of concrete random reinforcement, a balance between negative and positive reinforcement with an emphasis on the positive. Modeling God's mercy rather than human legalism, we must devise systems of both unconditional and conditional positive recognition whereby students are freed from power struggles to desire behaving for good. As the Ten Commandments are our rules, so they are also rules ultimately fulfilled by love, the love Christ shows to us, which thereby frees us. We educators must discuss how we can show love to free our children, empowering them to take control of and enjoy their lives and to free us teachers to teach individuals and enjoy our lives.

This is not a matter of just praising our students with an extra "Good job" or "Good try." We must be more specific in our praise and in our demands in order to help them feel safer and enabled to negotiate, clearly and directly, with us and with their peers. The first step to accomplishing that is to translate our insecurities and our needs for a personal minimal comfort level into knowing what lines we need to draw to protect ourselves as teachers and our students within the classroom so that we ensure learning can take place, that our students want it to take place. We must decide what areas are not negotiable—and each teacher will make different choices. However, we cannot retain all the power; we must also determine what we can negotiate with our students, empowering them to think and choose for themselves.

Part of establishing rules in a community where we help students want to behave properly and transfer control of their behavior to them is to phrase our rules in positives rather than negatives, do-ables versus punishables. Notice how much of the New Testament focuses on reframing the Ten Commandments from "Thou shalt not" into "Love God with all of your being and your neighbor as yourself." Jesus provides us with this beautifully simple rule, with plenty of freedom and with an acknowledgement of our needs in relationship to others. Although it seems so elementary that we should be expected to know it, he says it anyway, says it in many ways over and over again. He leaves nothing to chance. In the same way, we cannot expect that students know what they are supposed to do unless we have told them clearly and simply. We must be careful that we do not unjustly punish behavior we have never defined as non-negotiable because we expected our students to know. More difficult but just as

important is not to punish behavior that, from our students' perspective, is not defiant, but is an honest mistake from exploring ways to live freely yet responsibly.

Some of us, for example, cannot abide students talking in our rooms. Yet we know that middle schoolers have great socialization needs that we must meet within our classroom. How can we balance two equally valid needs? I have had the most success with setting blocks of time or specific situations where everyone must be quiet and then blocks where there is the freedom to talk, with students able to negotiate for more time as long as my needs are also met. It is a matter of entering into a contract with them where they must be actively learning rather than passively allowing others to think for them.

In fact, we must be particularly careful not to reward passive conformity. Conformity, the quiet, meek girl doing her work as assigned, makes our lives easier. Yet it is not what God wants from his people. The way his kingdom is going to be built is by students challenging the world's way of living. Arguing, consequently, is a price we pay for students who think for themselves and feel good about themselves, for students learning how to determine for themselves what is good and bad, right and wrong, and acting on that knowledge. We can enable our students to use their power appropriately when we model how and when to argue toward a mutual understanding —even if it's agreeing to disagree.

It is that mutual agreement that marks a true contract where together teacher and student or student and student reach a decision to neutralize power disputes. Sometimes, however, we need help establishing a contract. As teachers, we use principals, counselors, and parents. Students also need to learn to use community resources to solve problems. Middle schoolers often bring into the classroom conflicts between themselves as, for example, when Lisa storms in because her best friend Mary has agreed to go with Jon even though Mary knows Lisa likes him. Mary follows close behind, arguing. One way to deal with this situation in a way that models how power disputes affect community, and one way to remove the teacher as judge and jury is to have the two disputing students sit in chairs back to back in front of the classroom. First one and then the other explains what she needs to solve the situation. Next, the class brainstorms solutions and votes on the one that they think will meet both Lisa's and Mary's needs as much as possible. The teacher reviews the process and brings closure to the situation by obtaining Lisa's and Mary's commitment to solving the problem. Students thus learn that they have power and can use that power to deal with the negatives in their lives, that they have control or a choice in what happens to them and how they feel about it.

To truly diminish the possibility of power struggles and increase the success of our negotiations, we must reveal our humanity and our humility.

We can recognize the integrity of our students' power as well as our own when we structure individual as well as class negotiations using a transactional analysis approach:

1. Here is what I want as a person and as your teacher.
2. What do you want and need as a person, as a student?
3. How can we both get what we want?
4. What will you give up so that you can get most of what you want?
5. What shall I give up so that I can get most of what I want?
6. How do you feel about that?
7. Here's how I feel about it.

(Babcock and Keepers, 139)

Perhaps this is the best way to change a situation from being a power struggle to a negotiation between two people cooperating to solve a problem. Facing angry or scared or just plain unhappy students can be quite threatening, and we may be tempted to solve the problem by using our power inappropriately to impose our decisions. However, we must continually strive to help students work through their negative feelings by helping them find solutions that meet their needs within the framework of the classroom. Most important, when they try to accomplish that, we must recognize and validate their effort.

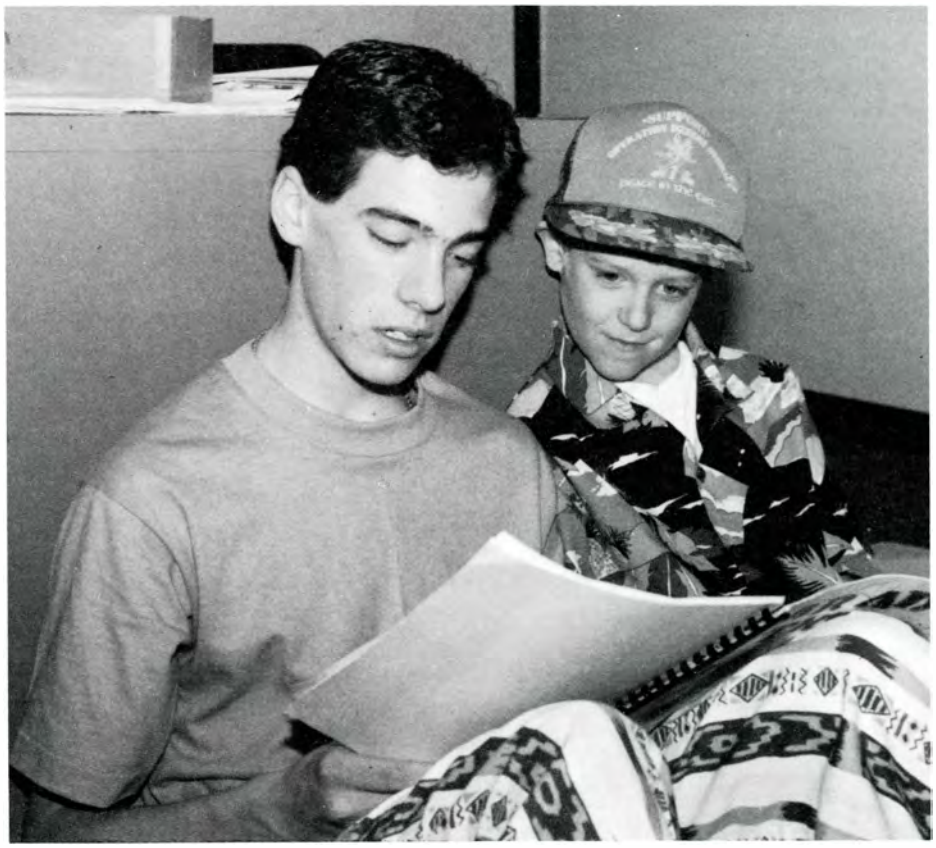
We can define the parameters of negotiations to our students and clearly state our reasons for our decisions. We can be confident we have the power to ensure their compliance in those matters we won't negotiate and offer choices in areas that are negotiable. We can reward them in concrete ways when they comply. But to truly diminish the possibility of power struggles and increase the success of our negotiations, we must reveal our humanity and our humility. Showing our natural vulnerability, accepting our own mistakes and the consequences for making them, and expressing both negative and positive feelings in our classrooms with our students will keep us from defining situations in terms of power. Daring to live and enjoying life as God's sanctified sinners, we encourage our students to want as well as to empower them to live the same God-powered lives. **CEJ**

NOTE: For other ways to balance power in the classroom, read Benjamin Mahle's *Power Teaching: Stay Sane and Enjoy Your Job Even Though You Teach Adolescents* (1989).

Carol M. Regts teaches seventh and eighth grade language arts at Eastern Christian Middle School in Wyckoff, New Jersey.

—by RANDALL HEERES

AUTHOR! AUTHOR!



In a recent publication from the National Council of Teachers of English, Mary Philip of Belleville, Illinois, presented an assignment she has used with great success: high school students collaborating with elementary students to write and illustrate a book. With some modifications, NMC (Northern Michigan Christian) second grade teacher Marilyn Visser and I worked with her students and my sophomore English class. The results were worthwhile in many ways.

To begin, Marilyn paired her students with mine from a list I had provided her. The pairings included aunts and nephews, cousins, and students of similar abilities—the kinds of pairings that are easy to do in a small school.

For about forty minutes one day, my sophomores interviewed their second grade collaborators, discovering their interests, fears, dreams, hobbies, and similar information. These interviews became the basis for the stories my students wrote, stories in which the second graders were the heroes. During the interview process, I photographed each group so that a black-and-white picture could be affixed to the cover of the final manuscript.

The interviews completed, my sophomores periodically wrote and revised their tales for several weeks. Once the drafts were nearly in final form, my class read the stories to their second graders, seeking opinions, both positive and negative. This reading session also allowed the second graders to begin to imagine the illustrations they would like to make for the books.

After final drafts were typed and mechanically exact, my class turned the stories over to their young colleagues, and the illustrating began in earnest.

Several weeks later, when the books were finished, Marilyn bound each one, attached the photographs, and returned the books to her class for final touch-up work.

At last the books were ready, and the two classes shared reading them before breaking for refreshments. Later in the semester, the second graders completed books of their own and visited the high school class to read to their sophomore friends.

From the teachers' point of view, the project was a success. My sophomores learned about writing for a specific audience, about crafting an interesting tale, and about second graders generally. Their self-esteem, too, was enhanced by the delight and appreciation the elementary students showed.

My colleague Marilyn believes the writing project helped her students to see themselves as important people and to become better acquainted with a "big kid," since many of my students were the second graders' heroes. Also, her students had an appreciative and willing audience for their own books later in the semester.

We're ready to take on this book-making project again. It really helps students learn to collaborate, to write clearly, and to appreciate the creativity in others. **CEJ**

The *CEJ* editor encourages more readers to send articles that demonstrate effective interdisciplinary or across-the-grades collaboration. Sharply-focused black-and-white photos with captions are welcome with the articles.

Randall Heeres teaches English at Northern Michigan Christian High School in McBain, Michigan.

Our school is emphasizing parent visitation of classes and more involvement with the parents via written messages and phone calls. Teaching junior high students, I feel this is an infringement on the students. Would you agree?

I am all for parent involvement in the schools, but I do believe the type of participation varies with the grade level. Other than for prospective clientele or special invitations, the parents of middle school or junior high age students need to find other ways than sitting in the classroom to demonstrate interest and concern. Even though not all adolescents are embarrassed by their parents' presence, many are because they are trying to establish some identity apart from the family. The risk of ridicule exists as well. The teasing by peers can threaten social standing and weaken relationships. A recent episode of *The Wonder Years* demonstrated the confusion Kevin felt when his mother took a clerical position in the school office. Awkwardly he asked her, "When we're at school could you not talk to me, look at me, notice me. . . ?" Duplicity compounds adolescent feelings of insecurity.

Parents, however, are often fearful or apprehensive of their son's or daughter's growing up, the search for independence; so they crave input regarding school performance and social development. If the teacher doesn't offer appropriate communication, some parents resort to finding out for themselves. An open house and an introductory letter can create initial rapport, but sustained contact in a way the teacher feels most comfortable with is important. In today's busy world, I find phone calls most difficult; working and/or excessively involved parents may require five or six attempts, which isn't expedient use of my time. Messages left on answering machines can be misinterpreted by student or parent. Not all disappointing work or behavior needs to be reported to parents; at this age kids need a chance to remedy mistakes without parental interference if the offense isn't serious. Notes of commendation given to the student can be duplicated and easily mailed with minimal effort. Students demonstrating knowledge and skills at planned parent days or nights often ease the curiosity and boost pride and morale.

School boards and administrators seek to improve relationships with the home as best they know how, not necessarily with regard to varying developmental needs of students. We as educators need to show how that goal can be met with our expertise at our specific grade level.

Never should our resistance to parent visitation result from fear; nor should our acceptance stem from a desire to convince or "show off." We could be infringing on kids or parents if our motives are not rooted in the right of the student to have the best learning environment and the necessity of parent support and cooperation to assure success. **CEJ**

You are encouraged to send questions on any topic related to the Christian teacher's role and response, regardless of grade level. The editor will solicit responses from additional sources when appropriate.

CONFIDENTIALITY IS ASSURED.

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—by LORNA VAN GILST

Celia and Frank De Vries

A forty-minute ferry ride takes Frank and Celia De Vries from the fast lane of teaching to the tranquil mode of Pender Island, British Columbia. This year, for the first time, they come alone. They unpack the car and climb the thirty-nine shallow stairsteps to their modest weekend home, Sentosa, the Malaysian word for "peace and tranquility."

Christian school teachers are not typical weekenders in lovely island hideaways. But there's nothing typical about Frank and Celia. "I'm a man of contrasts," says Frank. "I like things strong—coffee, cheese, wine, ideas, beliefs." He also likes the delicate things—like tiny limpets in fragile shells, the pink centers of British Columbian Queen Anne's lace, hummingbirds, tea cups, and T.S. Eliot poetry.

"We have lots of fun," says Celia. "It's important to have fun," she adds, "and even be silly sometimes."

Though they have known deep disappointment, these two exude an uncommon joy and zest for living. "We've been influenced by a friend who was dying of cancer," says Frank. "He regretted that he didn't spend more time to *be* rather than to *do*."

Though Frank and Celia have devoted their lives to teaching children, they have learned to cherish the times to "sit and be," too.

That philosophy explains their choice to sometimes sit, watching whales and cruise ships pass through Swanson Channel as the two of them reflect on their many years of caring for children—school children, handicapped children, foster children, adopted children, and biological children.

They hedge at the question "How many children do you have?" They have touched the lives of so many children. Between the births of their first two sons (a year apart) and their last son, now a college freshman, they nurtured seven other children on a long-term basis, adopting three of them. These children represent a variety of nationalities, and several have handicaps.

When Frank and Celia's oldest son met with death at age thirteen, they learned the deepest sorrow parents can know.

Frank was principal of Houston Christian School in British Columbia at the time. He had previously served five years as principal in Wyoming,

Going Their Way With Gladness

Ontario, and, after his three years at Houston, he became principal at Vancouver Christian School for fourteen years.

During the years in Vancouver, Celia took classes and worked for three years at the Early Childhood Development Center. Currently she teaches at Wise Ways Pre-School affiliated with the Lambrick Park Church in Victoria.

"You have to make the most of every opportunity," she says."If the children see a spider on the ground, we stop and watch the spider to see what it carries and where it goes."

Frank encourages the same kind of curiosity in his grade six and grade seven students at Pacific Christian School in Victoria. "I don't use textbooks much any more," says Frank. "I have lots of projects written on slips of paper that the students pick. They draw or do sculpture, or read and report their findings to the class." For grade six social studies a parent comes in to help the students make sushi every year. "Last year some students chose to re-enact a Hindu wedding and then a North American wedding so we could compare the two," says Frank. "They even made clothing that showed the Hindu culture."

"I let the kids decide a lot," he says, "such as when to have a test or how to test. We then go with the majority." But he is quick to add that a teacher needs some experience before feeling confident with this approach. "First you need the students' respect," Frank says, "and you need a caring attitude. You have to model your care. Kids are so smart. They know by your eyes whether you care or not."

One way Frank models his care is by inviting one student at a time to eat lunch and talk with him. On his desk is a toaster, and he offers the student bread and jam that day. The students have the option to skip their turn, but they never do.

Celia and Frank maintain their interest in the care of handicapped children as well as their students. "Handicapped kids have the same needs as other kids," says Frank.

"But they require oodles of patience and lots of imagination," says Celia. "You have to put yourself into even teaching them to eat. Some of them require total care, but the work is heartwarming." Celia glows with warmth even as she talks. She encourages parents of handicapped children to gradually move their children into group homes where they will need to make even more choices of their own. "The handicapped need to give too," she says. "Their families must have their own needs supplied as well."

Sentosa has supplied that need for Frank and Celia. In addition to weekends, they spend summers there. Their small home, perched on rocks ninety feet above the sea, seems to nestle into the peeling, red branches of the madrona (arbutus) trees. The sun shimmers all the way across the channel to the San Juans. "When God designed the world, I think he got stuck on this spot," Frank jokes.

By day the De Vrieses nurture large pots of geraniums and watch bold crows flirt with garter snakes basking on the rocks. Frank and Celia work hard to protect the herbs and flowers from the deer and the deck from the elements, but breathtaking views reward them amply. Many nights they sit by candlelight or lantern light or moonlight with the door open so they can listen to the sounds of the sea.

Then Frank steps to the piano and improvises or recalls some of the dozens of original songs in his little black notebook. On the left-hand page he has typed the Scripture texts that have inspired the song. The song texts are typed on the right. The melodies seem to flow from his fingertips as he and Celia sing.

Nearly every Canadian Christian school student knows Frank's "Tiny Little Spider" song. Some songs he has composed with his students, such as the "Black Hole" song. Students put all their dislikes—prickly pants, cod liver oil, sauerkraut, long underwear, report cards, liver—into the hole far away in space. But the system goes awry, and the hole swallows everything in sight. "Creedal Song," composed in 1969, a musical version of the Apostles' Creed, was given to the Christian Reformed Church as a tribute to the comfort the Christian community offered Frank and Celia at their son's death.

Frank has written four cantatas for use in Christian schools. He includes a variety of instruments, always allowing for adaptations. He wants to help young people know not just a piece of God's story, but the full story of creation, the fall into sin, redemption, and Jesus' commitment to return.

Celia deserves credit, too, for Frank's compositions. Frank's inspiration is spontaneous enough that he has asked her to listen to a new song at 3:30 a.m. or in the middle of meal preparation. Above the time signatures he suggests the song be sung "strongly" or "lazily" or "lively" or even "hoppily"—for the "Hop Frog Song."

Wittingly—and perhaps unwittingly—he breaks some of the rules of musical composition, but not the rules of joyful Christian living.

Travel your way with gladness, Philip told the Ethiopian. "We travel our way with gladness too," say Frank and Celia De Vries. **CEJ**

Lorna Van Gilst, editor of CEJ, is currently on leave from Dordt College to continue graduate work in English education at the University of Iowa in Iowa City.

—by SUSAN VANZANTEN GALLAGHER

Loving Our Neighbor:
Expanding the Literature Curriculum

When the wily expert in Mosaic law asked Jesus, "Who is my neighbor?" the Lord responded with a story. That now famous tale of the man who was set upon by thieves while he was traveling from Jerusalem to Jericho in many ways is a story about overcoming cultural differences. The most amazing aspect of this parable, at least for its Jewish audience, was the fact that the man who stopped to assist the victim was a Samaritan, a member of a reviled society.

We, too, can use stories to help us understand who our neighbor is, to bridge cultural differences. When we and our students read literature, we can learn not only about ourselves, but also about the other human beings with whom we share God's earth. Recent curricular trends incorporating the study of non-Western literature and culture can allow our students to gain perspective on their own social and historical situation as well as to grow in understanding of radically different ways of life. We can better love our neighbors if we know who they are, if we understand some of their unique problems, if we have listened to their voices.

Moving beyond the American and British literature of the traditional curriculum, however, confronts us with many choices. First, it is important that our students learn about the literary traditions of their own society that have been too often excluded from our classrooms: the deep respect for the natural world found in Native American writing, the powerful cries for justice found in the black American tradition, and the neglected voices of many women writers. But in today's global village, in which decisions by powerful Western countries have an increasingly direct effect on the rest of the world, students also need to hear the fears and hopes of people who live far from the North American continent. We all need to be more aware of our role as members of the church universal.

Obviously, we cannot include the entire world in our curriculum. But working within personal and institutional concerns, individual teachers can choose at least one non-traditional national literature to incorporate into their literature curriculum. Schools in California, Texas, and Florida might determine to study the literature of one of our Central or South American neighbors. A school that financially and prayerfully supports an orphanage in India or Korea might choose to read some Asian literature. A teacher who has previously done short-term mission work in Sierra Leone might introduce her class to African literature. Another, who has spent the summer conducting baseball workshops in Haiti with Athletes in Action, might teach some Caribbean literature. Teachers

without international experiences themselves might choose one particular area of the world about which to become better informed.

My own choice, for a variety of personal and professional reasons, has been South Africa. Since committing myself to learning more about this divided country, I have carefully watched the media for news reports; read numerous histories, memoirs, and political essays; consciously sought out those who have visited the country; and read as much South African literature as I could. Part of my own exploration includes encouraging others to learn more about South Africa, so I have taught courses in South African literature several times on the college level and in adult Sunday school.

From those experiences, I offer the following practical suggestions for effectively incorporating an unfamiliar international literature into the classroom.

1) *Provide background information.* Although I believe that all literature is most effectively taught in context, teaching literature from a different country and culture almost demands that we provide our students with an introduction to some of the historical, social, cultural conditions of that country. South African literature, for example, cannot be understood without knowledge of the system of racial classification, the practice of apartheid and the unique history of the Afrikaner people. That factual knowledge will come alive emotionally for students as they hear the voices of the South African people and encounter their agonies and triumphs as communicated through story and images.

2) *Involve the students personally.* Bring in someone from the country you are studying to talk about life there and answer your students' questions. Have the students write journal entries in response to their reading. Encourage them to relate the reading to current events by opening each class with volunteers telling what they have recently read in the paper or seen on television about the country you are studying.

3) *Involve sight and sound.* Show a contemporary film that depicts some of the issues that arise in your literature. *Cry Freedom* speaks eloquently about South Africa; *Romero* or *Missing* would bring home the reality of life in Central and South America visually as well as through story. If applicable, ask some students to report on the impact of the country's music on American contemporary music. Third-world rhythms, social issues, and cross-cultural musicians have become extremely popular in today's socially conscious music world. Listening to and discussing the lyrics of a tape of a popular South African or Caribbean band can raise many of the same issues found in the country's literature.

4) *Choose appropriate works.* Short stories or novels work the best, followed by a few simple lyrical or narrative poems, once the students have become familiar with the country and its issues. Plays, if you can find them, also work well. Look at some college-level anthologies to find appropriate pieces for junior high or high school students. Ask friends in the country to send you suggestions. Talk to someone who teaches this kind of literature on a college level for some suitable suggestions.

Teaching an international literature is a demanding task, for few of us find that our professional education has given us any preparation. When we teach Shakespeare or Hawthorne, it is easy for us to turn to old college notes and our own years of knowledge to provide a beginning point. Yet, despite the additional labor, teaching an international literature can be extremely rewarding. The issues in these struggling countries are so profound that this literature often puts contemporary American writing—with its sometimes trivial concerns with romance, material success, or playful language—to shame. Some of the most vital and vibrant literature today is being produced outside the mainstream Western tradition. Helping our students read about and feel the lives rendered in these works is one way that we can prepare them to be better kingdom servants. **CEJ**

Susan VanZanten Gallagher is professor of English at Calvin College in Grand Rapids, Michigan

South African Literature: Suggestions for the Secondary Student

Paton, Alan. *Cry, the Beloved Country.* Scribers, 1948. Perhaps the best known South African novel. A bit melodramatic and overly simplistic in places, but emotionally very effective. A good introduction to some of the effects of the apartheid system.

Fugard, Athol. *'Master Harold' and the Boys.* Penguin, 1982. A powerful short play concerning the relationship of a white South African boy who has a negligent and irresponsible father, and the strong black man who helps him grow up.

Gordimer, Nadine. "Is There Nowhere Else Where We Can Meet?" "Six Feet of the Country," "A Chip of Glass Ruby." In *Selected Stories.* By Nadine Gordimer. Penguin, 1983. Elegantly but simply written, these stories capture the dilemma of the white South African liberal position. Ms. Gordimer is the 1991 winner of the Nobel Prize in Literature.

Haasbroek, P.J. "Departure." In *A Land Apart: A Contemporary South African Reader.* Ed. J.M. Coetzee and Andre Brink. Penguin, 1986. A gripping story, with an O. Henry twist, about the effects of war on the South African consciousness.

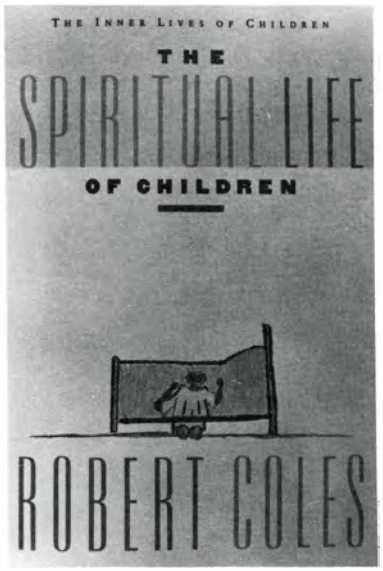
Joubert, Elsa. "Back Yard." In *A Land Apart: A Contemporary South African Reader.* Penguin, 1986. An account of the relationship between an Afrikaner woman and the black women who work as her servants.

Mathabane, Mark. *Kaffer Boy.* NAL, 1986. The autobiography of a black raised in the slums of Soweto, who fought to receive an education and a way out of the slums through his ability as a tennis player. Most of the book concerns his life from ages twelve to eighteen.

Matshoba, Mtutuzeli. "Call Me Not A Man." In *A Land Apart: A Contemporary South African Reader.* Penguin, 1986. A disturbing slice-of-life story about township violence.

Mda, Liseka. "Let Them Eat Pineapples!" In *Sometimes When It Rains.* Pandora Press, 1987. Fiction about life in a rural South African village from the point of view of a woman struggling to hold her family together.

—by STEVE J. VAN DER WEELE



The Spiritual Life of Children

Robert Coles

Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1990. $10.95 pb, $22.95 hardcover.

Reviewed by Raymond Opperwall, retired CRC home missionary, Grand Rapids, Michigan.

President Reagan, when speaking in favor of prayer in public schools, would often picture a school from which God had been banished. We need, he would say, to let God back into the school.

Robert Coles invites another picture of a school. In this picture, God does not enter by permission of the administration or some court. Though the use of God's name has been restricted, and though religious group activities are prohibited, the classroom Coles pictures is full of children with a built-in consciousness of God, a deep watermark of the soul that, though it may be suppressed, denied, or forbidden, cannot be banished.

Although Robert Coles is a psychiatrist by training and profession, he has spent most of the thirty or so years of his professional life as a research field worker. In his latest book, *The Spiritual Life of Children,* Coles reports what he has learned from children all over the world about what they think and feel about God and the devil, heaven and hell, faith and doubt, and how they relate these thoughts and feelings to the range of their human experiences. His subjects are usually from eight to thirteen years of age and include children of Roman Catholic, Protestant, Jewish, Islamic, and, as well, agnostic or atheistic parents. He records these conversations on scores of tapes; the book is largely a narrative account of these conversations.

By means of some simple questions, along with invitations to draw and explain pictures, and with obvious listening skill, Coles evokes answers to such basic faith and life issues as these: Is there a God? How do you picture God? Does God care about you? How do you hear what God wants of you? Does God listen to you when you pray? How does God respond to right and wrong? Does God help you to be good? Why do bad things happen to people who are not at fault? This book, in large part, consists of a series of interviews with children. Coles lets the stories pretty much speak for themselves, and speak they do. Again and again they show children wrestling within the framework of their own experience and vocabulary, with all the tough spiritual issues adults puzzle over. Again and again the dialogue shows how the faith of children comes into play. More than that, it often reveals why children need to struggle with spiritual issues. They commonly wrestle with them in trying to understand the stresses and tough experiences in their own lives. Those experiences and, indeed, their very existence seem to demand a search for meaning.

The expression of that search, of course, is couched in vocabulary that reflects the child's level of maturity. Coles tells the story of a black girl in Mississippi who was asked to draw a picture with herself in it and a picture with God in it. After drawing the first picture she said, "That's me, and the Lord made me. When I grow up my momma says I may not like how he made me, but I must always remember that he did it, and it's his idea. So when I draw the Lord, he'll be a real big man. He has to be to explain the way things are." As Coles puts it, explaining how the children arrive at their perceptions, ". . . they call upon the religious life they have experienced, the spiritual values they have received, as well as other sources of potential explanation."

For Coles to arrive at his conclusions, he has had to reject what he came to see as the Freudian misreading of the place of religion in human nature. His book includes an account of this odyssey. Sigmund Freud, in *The Future of an Illusion,* defined religion as a neurosis from which people need to be delivered—a phenomenon that people will discard when they have been "sensibly brought up." Freud's followers continue to diagnose religious thoughts and feelings in children as a smokescreen for sexuality. When Coles told a colleague about a girl of eight who spoke of her religious concerns, the colleague's comment was, "In a while she will talk with you about her sexual life, and all this religion talk will go away."

Coles, too, in the early days of his practice, as one trained in psychoanalysis, tended to hear only what fit into the professional paradigms. But in his contacts with children, he became aware that the spiritual is not only not a neurosis from which one needs to be delivered but, in fact, often is the perspective-giving strength by which children and adults cope with life's stresses. A Roman Catholic girl who had struggled hard with family and school problems, observed, "The whole big world out there, it's God's worry, and it's mine, I guess, because I belong to him."

In the children who appear in the book we see not blank tablets or empty vessels waiting to be filled. In case after case we are shown children with a

built-in human need to wrestle with God's existence and presence. The structures of beliefs they learn from their families shape the way the children define and work out their needs. For children of Christian parents, the central concept is salvation; for Jewish children it is righteousness; for Islamic children it is the concept of surrender. Interestingly, children of atheistic or agnostic parents show the same God-consciousness and engage in a similar search for meaning; often they struggle with their parents' atheism or agnosticism.

If we take this book seriously, then perhaps the primary challenge for Christian parents, Christian educators, and Christian pastors is not to inform the child about God's existence, but to engage, provoke, develop, and guide the inborn God-consciousness already active in the child. The challenge in evangelism is similar. It is the challenge to make contact with and work on a God-consciousness that may be denied or buried, but which we know is inescapably there in every human being. This provocative book has triggered in me a fresh respect for the human nature of the children we deal with in home, school, and church. It confronts us with seminal insights that have impact far beyond the conclusions the author draws from his observations about children.

Robert Coles is well known for the attention he has drawn elsewhere to the story of Ruby Bridges, the young black girl who found strength from her religious training to cope with the hostility of New Orleaners who fought school desegregation in the 1960s. He has also published a five-volume series entitled "Children in Crisis" as well as *The Moral Life of Children* and *The Political Life of Children.* **CEJ**

NOTICE:

UPDATE ON THE CONDITION OF H. K. ZOEKLICHT:

After returning to the United States from Acapulco, Mexico, where he had become ill, H. K. Zoeklicht, against the advice of his physicians, made an appearance as a speaker at the Midwest Christian Educators annual convention, meeting in South Bend, Indiana. Immediately after his speech the condition of the veteran educator worsened, and he is now receiving treatment at a hospital in El Paso, Texas. Cards may be sent to him in care of the *CEJ* editor.

We invite you to submit manuscripts for the next CEJ issues. Manuscripts should be 600–1200 words in length, typed, double-spaced, with wide margins.

Send all manuscripts to:
Lorna Van Gilst
CEJ Managing Editor
512 N. Gilbert
Iowa City, IA 52245

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Administrators: Partners in the Education Process

MANUSCRIPTS AND BUSINESS MATTERS

Business correspondence concerning subscriptions or membership in the Association should be sent to the business manager. Manuscripts and correspondence concerning articles should be sent to the managing editor or regional editor. Book reviews should be sent to the book editor. Correspondence concerning advertising rates, issue and closing dates, reservations, advertising copy, and art should be sent to the production editor.

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