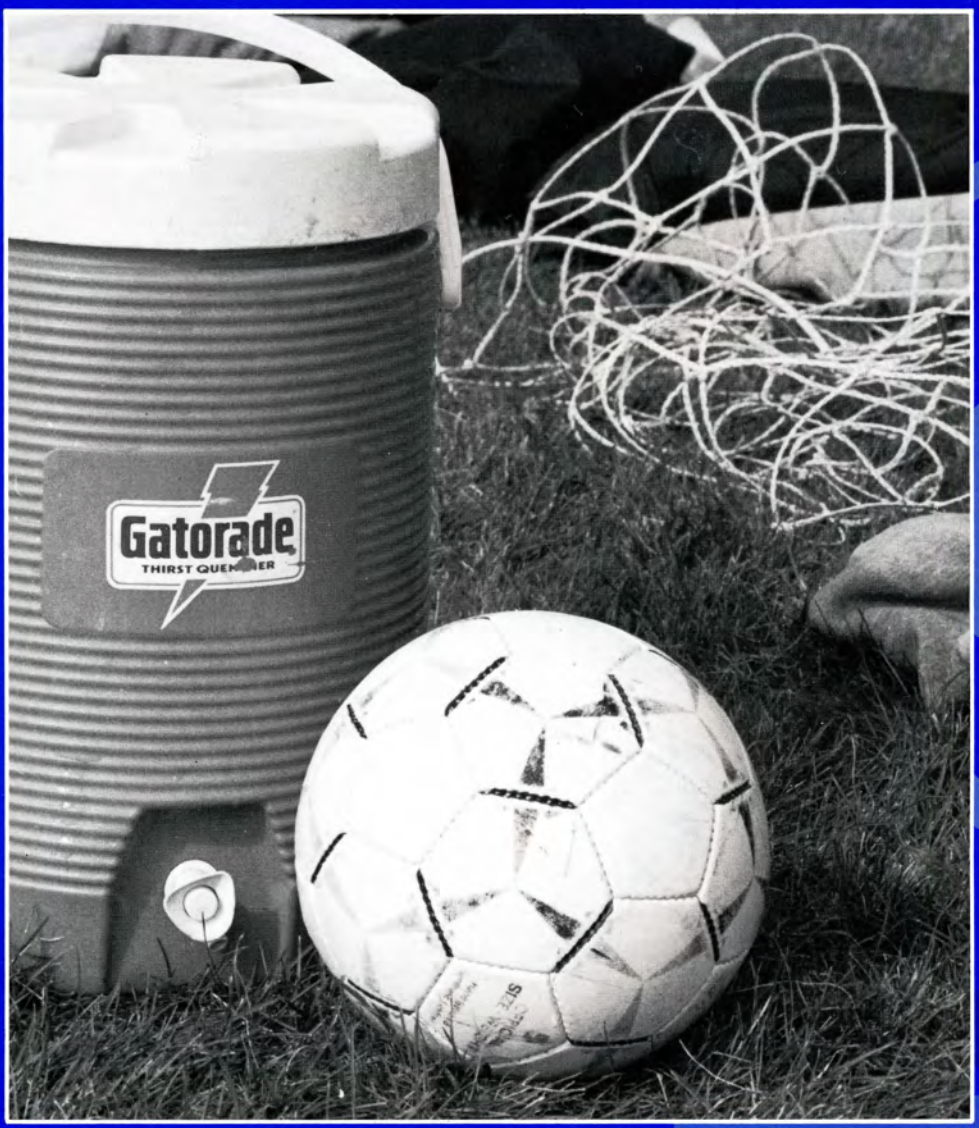
Volume 32, No. 2 December 1992

CHRISTIAN EDUCATORS JOURNAL

Quarterly journal for Christian day school educators



The Place of Athletics in Christian Schools

Focusing the Vision

Lorna Van Gilst

A former colleague of mine used to introduce herself to new faculty members as a teacher "who doesn't coach any sports." We always chuckled at that remark, but some of us wondered if coaching was becoming a qualification for teaching. Only a teacher who could also drive bus had equal worth.

Studying one summer in Cambridge, England, with a group of American English teachers, I understood why so many of them stopped to photograph a familiar sign near the transport terminal. It read: "No coaches allowed." No doubt many of those photos were blown up and posted in stateside faculty rooms (where "coach" is not just a high-classed bus).

I used to think those of us who resented coaches taking team members out of class for games were maybe a little bitter because we had been last pick in grade school when team captains chose up sides. But those who are currently speaking and writing about the obsession of athletics are coaches and athletes themselves. They are people who sense that athletics are having an all-consuming effect in the life of the Christian school community. And they're concerned.

People take quite different responses to concerns such as this one. We have both the fixers and the thinkers. The fixers see the effects of a problem, so they change the circumstances. The thinkers try to understand why the problem exists so they can change the thinking behind it. Changing the way a community thinks is a slow and difficult process, and sometimes a situation is so serious that we need to act quickly to curb the symptoms before we do the careful thinking about their causes.

Quick-fix responses such as grade point average requirements for school athletes or crowd control measures for spectators change immediate behaviors. But they don't change the deep attitudes, such as idol worship.

"Focusing the Vision . . . from this time on forever."

How do we ask people to stop caring so much for something that takes over their entire lives? I know a ten-year-old whose thoughts seem to focus non-stop on Michael Jordan. His parents are not particularly athletic, nor do they condone their son's obsession. To ask him not to care about Michael Jordan is like saying to a starving Somalian, "Don't think so much about food." We can't turn off our obsessions at will.

We can pray, though, for the Holy Spirit to redirect our focus. Several *CEJ* writers for this issue are people who know the power of obsession. They're athletes and coaches who have experienced the power of competition, the thrill of winning. But they have also been redirected, and they seek a balance in their lives. They want that balance for their students as well.

At the Christian Schools International conference held in Toronto last summer, several of these writers discussed their vision for Christian school athletics. Their talk reflected the theme of the whole conference: "Focusing the Vision . . . from this time on forever."

Defining the vision is crucial to our work in Christian education, including our vision of athletics. It must be a carefully-considered vision, a long-range vision—forever. Governments, too, have vision for education, and candidates for office promise to make schools great. Such vision is usually focused on grades and production—for the glory of the state or province. The students in their schools are commodities. Their brains, it seems, belong to Iowa or Ontario or Tasmania. "Best in the nation in education"—that's Iowa's goal. So every year the American College Testing (ACT) scores of Iowa high school students are checked against those of Wisconsin, whose average sometimes jumps a point ahead. As if statistics make us best.

The vision for high scores is one Christian schools haven't had to worry about so much, at least not schools affiliated with Christian Schools International. The same parent support and competitive spirit that make successful ball teams have produced successful test scores too. After all, God gave us strong bodies that move well and keen minds that think well, and we must offer God the best we can give.

And yet, our focus can be short-sighted. It's as if we wear two kinds of lenses. One eye gives us God-focus that looks "from this time on forever." The other gives us only a view of what is now, immediately before us—the glory of the prize in hand, the one we can win by hard work and smart moves.

Sometimes the pull between the two lenses drives us crazy, so we block one eye and try to focus. In time, the mind can train one eye or the other to carry the vision.

That vision depends, of course, on which lens we use.■

America's Typical SUCCESS STORY

Joe Hale

You will go to college in your "old clunker," choose a major you feel will make you the most money and, four years later, graduate to enter the work force of America.

You'll probably pray something like, "Lord, I've struggled through four years of college and I'd like to get a *good* job. And, Lord, if you'll help me get that job, I'll pay off my school debts and then I'll give you a couple of years of service on the mission field, and I'll tithe to my church, and, Lord, if you'll give me a good mate, we'll serve you all of our lives. God, I need your help. Amen."

And, if you're typical, you will drive your Chevy up into the driveway of your small apartment, and you'll probably be married within two or three years of graduation. You'll work at your first job approximately a year and a half; you'll live within 300 miles of your (or your wife's) hometown. You'll rent a house for about three years, move up in your job, then commit yourself to approximately thirty years of house payments as you finance a small but nice home. As you drive your Buick into your one-car garage feeling as if you're on your way to success, you'll pray something like this:

"Lord, thanks for getting me that job. I'm really movin' up now! I own my own home; I've got a great wife; we're expecting our first child; things are going great! And, Lord, I'm sure you understand why we can't get too active in our church right now, because, Lord, if I'm gonna be able to really give to your work in the future, I've got to make a lot of money, right? But I didn't forget, Lord. Amen."

At your third job you decide that the home in which you now live is neither big enough for the two growing children, nor in the right neighborhood for the image you want to portray at work (where you are now a supervisor), so you take the big plunge, sell your house, and finance a home whose monthly payments are now more than your first job's whole paycheck was. You drive your Volvo, which is financed to the hilt, into your two-car garage beside the family van.

Now you're spending much of your time and energy on advancing on the job and doing a lot of traveling. You've just been offered a management position in your company in another state. You live approximately 800 miles from where you call home; your spouse spends much of her time driving the three children to and from soccer practice, piano and ballet lessons, and the private school they attend about ten miles away. And you pray,

"Lord, this is too good to be true. I'm making good money; got a good job; upwardly mobile. I never thought I could live in a house like this. I'm rubbing shoulders with the big boss now. Lord, it looks like I'll have to pay someone else's way to the mission field, because it's obvious to me now, Lord, that my spiritual gift is making money. But, Lord, when we bought this house, I had no idea the furniture would cost so much, so I'm really kind of tied up financially. I'm sure you understand, Lord. But I didn't forget; I just can't make good on my promise to you yet. But some day I will. Amen."

Finally that day arrives when you move to your dream house. You drive your Jaguar into one of your carports, right beside your yacht, after picking up the children from daycare or after-school care. You throw the dinner packets into the microwave, and wait for your wife to get home from work. (The only way you could make those payments was for both of you to work, even though you do have small children at home.)

Your dinner is rushed because mom has to get to the PTA meeting and dad has promised to go see at least one of Johnny's football games (and this is the next-to-last game, and you haven't made it to any of them yet.) You see your spouse only in passing these days and rarely have time for intimate sharing of your hearts with each other, and somehow it seems that even your love for each other has grown cold. Your house is full of all the world has to offer—swimming pools, HBO, cellular phones in the cars, machinery, computers and the best of everything; but there's not much time or funds available for the work of God. And you pray,

"Lord, I don't know what's going wrong, but it seems like my life is falling apart. I've worked so hard to provide nice things for my family; I give them practically everything they want, but it never seems like it's enough. Lord, I'm starting to wonder if the kids just see me as the 'money-bag.' I don't feel very close to them—or anyone for that matter (including you). People say I'm a success, but Lord, I don't feel very successful! I've spent all these years, Lord, working so hard . . . for what?"

And now you attend church sometimes on Sunday morning; you give 1% of your income to God; you will win .5 people to Christ in your lifetime (some people give you that statistic; more likely, you will not win any). Your chances of divorce are 50/50. And today's society will say you are successful. You have spent most of your life killing yourself to make more money than you really need, in order to live a life-style you can't really afford, in order to impress people you don't really respect!

Maybe we had better start looking at success from God's point of view rather than "Christianizing" the world's definition!■

Joe Hale is executive director of Network of International Christian Schools in Memphis, Tennessee.

Sports Participation in a Reformed Biblical Worldview

Tom Visker

This is the first of a two-part article.

Athletic programs in Christian schools have changed considerably since the late 1960s when I participated in them. For the most part these changes have been positive. One of the most significant changes has been the dramatic increase in the number of students participating. Title IX legislation in the 1970s provided female athletes with greater opportunity to participate, with the requirement that school athletic programs for females must be equal in number and quality to men's programs. Youth sports programs in both the school and the community have experienced phenomenal growth as well, largely due to the policies of "no-cut" and "everyone plays."

As a strong advocate of character building and values transmission through sports participation, I have welcomed the increased participation in school athletic programs. It seems to me the more students we have in our athletic programs, the greater our potential is for building strong character and developing a positive value system in our students. It is for this reason that we need to take a hard, honest look at what we are doing in our athletic programs.

Athletic programs have expanded at such a rapid rate that we have not had the time to reflect what a Christian school athletic program is all about. What character traits are we building in our student athletes? Whose values are we transmitting? Unless we have taken the time to develop a philosophy of sport that states who we are and what we believe, we take the serious risk of possibly accepting secular cultural standards for our Christian school athletic programs.

The purpose of this article is to develop a Reformed biblical understanding of sports participation that is true to a Reformed understanding of the Bible. It is not intended to be the statement of philosophy for a particular Christian school, but, rather, a starting place or model that can be used by any school adhering to a Reformed interpretation of the Bible.

A Reformed, Biblical Stance

A Reformed interpretation of the Bible acknowledges the lordship of Jesus Christ over every aspect of life. There is no part of life to which the Bible does not speak. We are to look at everything through the "spectacles" of scripture. It does not allow for a distinction to be made between the "secular" and the "sacred." All areas of life are sacred because God created all things good and perfect. It also recognizes that sin has distorted the created goodness of everything. This sinful distortion is not the final condition of creation since through God's grace it is redeemed because of Christ's victory over sin.

The creation, fall, and redemption motif is central to a Reformed biblical understanding of sports participation. In this context, our sports participation can be viewed as part of God's good creation, fallen prey to the effects of sin, but restored to its original goodness through the blood of Jesus Christ.

Placing sports participation in this context requires an understanding of how God created sport, how sin distorted it, and how it can be restored to its creational goodness. Albert M. Wolters' definition of *structure* and *direction* can help us understand these concepts (1985). Structure is the form in which things have been created. Direction refers to the pull of sin and grace on that structure. If, by grace, we live in harmony with the goodness of creation, our direction is toward God. Conversely, if, because of sin, we live contrary to creation and distort its goodness, our direction is away from God.

The Structure of Sport

Sport, at its most fundamental level, is play. While not all play is sport, it is correct to say that all sport is play—at least at the level of sport in our schools. Therefore, an investigation of the structure of play will provide the essential elements that compose sport.

A review of the literature on the nature of play reveals eight characteristics of play with which most theorists would agree. This list is not definitive, but it is representative of a gathering of opinions of many of the major play scholars.

A characteristic of play on which there is nearly unanimous agreement among play scholars is that it is freely chosen. When we play, we do so because we want to. No one can tell us we must play. When we play only because we are told to, we are not really playing.

Play must also function in its own space and time. Johan Huizinga refers to this aspect of play as being outside "ordinary" or "real" life (1950). Play is something we can only experience when we get away from our normal daily routines. We need to have a play space and a play time that do not allow for the concerns of everyday life to interfere with our playing. This does not mean that what we do in our play space and play time is less significant than what we do otherwise. Play is to be as much a part of our lives as work and worship. God is equally interested in our work and our play. In keeping with the Reformed tradition, we may not banish play to the realm of the secular or unimportant.

The third and fourth characteristics of play can best be understood together. Play is both serious and non-serious. Although these characteristics appear to be in opposition to each other, they

are both essential to the understanding of play. Play is serious in that we need to be wholeheartedly involved in our play. We must commit ourselves totally to what we are doing. It is non-serious in that our playing has no important consequences. Our playing is not serious business. We must be able to walk away from our play with feelings of satisfaction and rejuvenation, not anger and hostility.

Play must also be engaged in for its own sake. It is to be intrinsically motivated. We are to play because we love to play, not because of what we can get through the play experience. When we play for rewards such as self-promotion, money, and championships, the quality of the play experience is greatly diminished.

While we must not play to gain certain outcomes or rewards, it is true that playing does have outcomes. This may appear to be a contradiction, but it is not. A person can play for play's sake and yet have outcomes or consequences attached to it. For example, a golfer can play solely because of his love for the game, yet may have such by-products as relief from stress, development of social relationships, and the satisfaction of mastering a physical skill.

The seventh characteristic of play is that it is orderly. Play has spatial, temporal, and movement restrictions. We normally refer to these restrictions as rules. Rules define for us the spatial boundaries, time limits, and movements that are permissible while we are playing. When we violate these rules, we are no longer playing the game we agreed to play.

Finally, our play must be fun. Play that is fun entails a sense of adventure and uncertainty of outcome. This is often the quality that attracts people to play. From child's play to professional "play," the uncertainty of what will happen next or what the final outcome will be enhances the play experience for players and spectators. Conversely, when we know what will happen next or what the final outcome will be, our interest in playing is drastically diminished.

While these eight qualities form the structure of play, several other qualities need to be added for a complete understanding of sport. Sport entails goals and obstacles. In each sport there is always an objective or goal to be accomplished, and there are obstacles that keep us from accomplishing that objective. In baseball, for example, the objective of the game is to score more runs than the other team. The obstacles to be overcome are the limitations of the rules, the skill of the other team, and the strategies they use to prevent your team from scoring or to help their team to score.

Sport also requires physical skill and muscular exertion. In order to play our best, we spend time training our bodies to perform skillfully and efficiently when we engage in sport.

Finally, an essential, but controversial element of sport is competition. All sport is characterized by some type of competition. Competition has been defined as "the will to outdo each other." In sport we find several types of competition—individual competition, team competition and competition with oneself.

These twelve characteristics of sport provide us with a better understanding of its original created goodness. In order for sports participation to exist as God intended it to be, these characteristics must be present in our playing of sports. We must be able to voluntarily and wholeheartedly subject ourselves to a play time and space that will not allow the concerns of everyday life to interfere with the enjoyment we can experience by playing a game that we love.

(In part two of this article we will investigate how sin has robbed us of the enjoyment of sport and has turned it into serious business and how we can, by God's grace, restore sports participation to its original creational goodness.)■

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Christian School Athletics: An Agenda for a Passionate Prophet

Ron Polinder

A discussion of Christian school athletics very quickly can take on the tone of an intellectual exercise, a philosophy, a statement of the mind. Although that is an absolutely crucial dimension of our task, I believe that we will better succeed if our discussion also shapes a statement of the heart.

Athletics, by their very nature, involve the whole person—mind, heart, body, spirit. I am convinced we must search our hearts and passions to get behind our "mindset" and our "behavior." I can think of no better way to make my point than to acknowledge that I have plenty of my own passion regarding sports. I share some of myself here only to serve others in identifying these as issues of the heart.

I must confess that I have been ejected from games in my life, I sometimes hate the opposition, I have "booed" the officials, I have second-guessed my coaches, I have cheated, lied, and cursed.

I have been impatient with my own kids. I have wished that I could have been a better ball player, evidently searching for greater love and acceptance. I confess that when my beloved Seattle Mariners are on a losing streak (which baseball fans know to be frequent), I go to bed crabby. I am tempted to idolize Ken Griffey, Jr., Steve Largent, and Jack Sikma; and if they came to my church I would want to give them a place in the front row, and I would like to sit by them.

Such are the issues of the heart.

My pastor, Ken Koeman, has said, "The passions raised by sports in our communities are among the sharpest and strongest of all passions. More of us get more worked up more quickly over sports than over any other aspect of life, including work, religion, or politics. This strongly suggests that the attachment we have to sports borders on the idolatrous, because idols evoke passions. Show me a person's passion and you reveal his or her idol."

If we fail to consider the passion packed in our Christian school student and parent population regarding athletics, we will not truly recognize the nature or extent of our task. This passion is an issue of the heart, and out of the heart come the issues of life (Proverbs 4:23).

Stephen Kaufmann from Covenant College has done an important study of Christian schools in which he notes the considerable disparity between the stated mission of schools and the students' perception of that mission. We should be embarrassed, if not depressed, to sense how fully our sports programs have captured the hearts of our students. If we could transfer some of that passion to our students and spiritual pursuits, our schools would change dramatically. If a school's mission were articulated more clearly to students via faculty words and actions, maybe the passion would become more equitable in all facets of school activity.

That propels us to a second vital ingredient in our attempt to bring our athletics under the lordship of Christ: we must include a critique of—a comment on—our culture. Indeed, there is much about sports in general and Christian school athletics in particular that calls for a prophetic voice.

Being prophetic, saying what we believe and prescribing how we should live it out, we run the risk of alienating some of our friends and supporters. Prophets usually heat up a situation, but some of us need to feel a little heat. Not unlike competition itself, "as iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another" (Proverbs 27:17). Our purpose should be "to build one another up to good works" so that God is better served in our Christian school communities. A prophetic analysis will help our schools address the real needs and issues in the 1990s and beyond.

Dr. Shirl Hoffman notes, "Evangelicals have concocted a locker-room religion. It is not so much evangelicalism as a hodge-podge of biblical truths, worn-out coaching slogans, Old Testament allusions to religious wars, and interpretation of Paul's metaphors that would drive the most straight-laced theologian to drink." True, the Bible is

This article includes excerpts from the "Philosophical and Theological Treatise re Athletics at Lynden Christian School." Lynden Christian School is in the process of adopting a Statement of Athletic Philosophy and accompanying commentary. Copies are available for a $5.00 charge to cover copying and postage.

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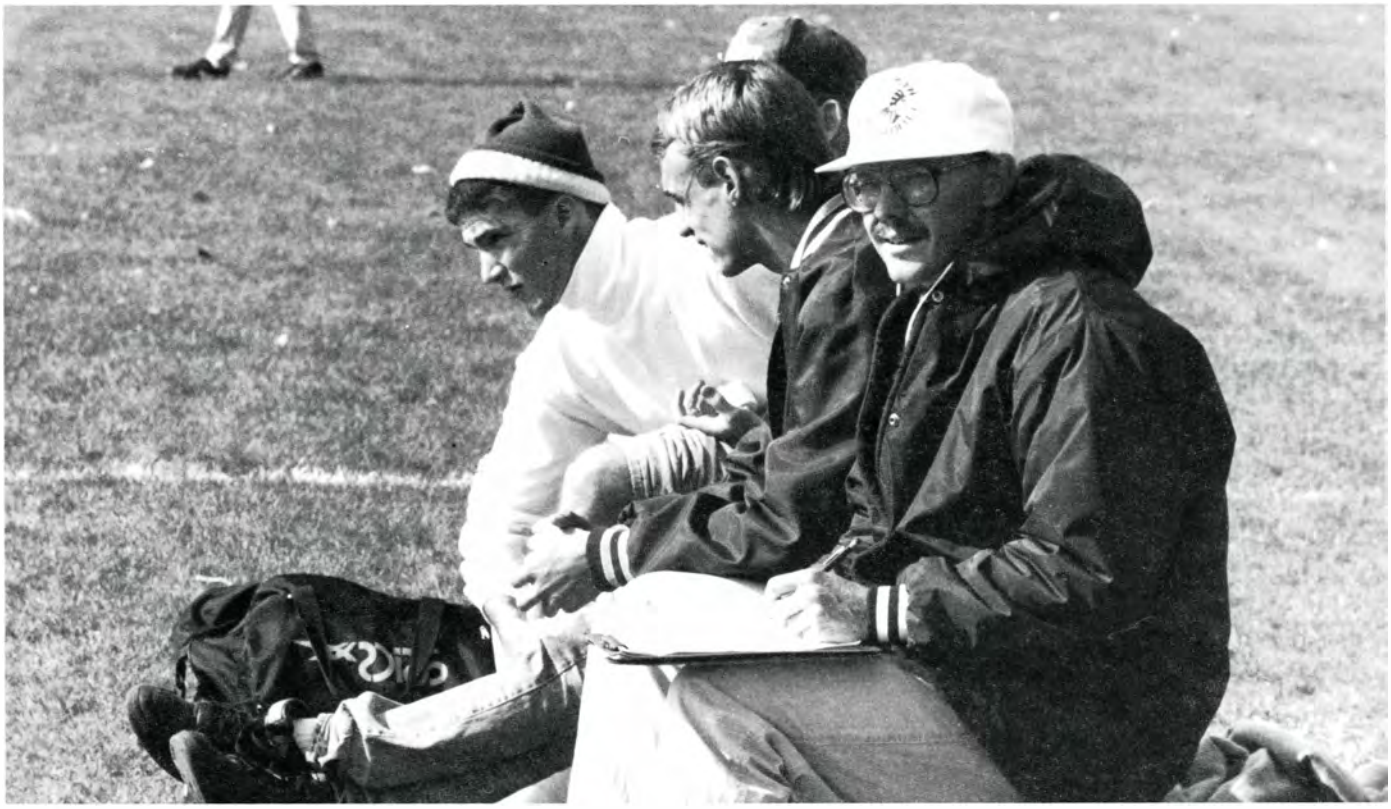

not bursting with proof texts concerning athletics, and even a careful reader will find scanty specific reference to sportsmanship. But that is not to say that there are not profound principles in scripture that, when taken as a whole, speak to the issues of play, sport, and athletics. Indeed there are, and we must doggedly search the Word of God for light to guide us in our athletic activity. One way of beginning our search is to consider athletics from a "creation, fall, redemption" perspective, which Tom Visker has done in his accompanying article.

Claiming athletic activity as a God-glorifying enterprise easily becomes twisted into self-glorification. It is rare and difficult to dedicate our "great plays" to the glory of God. Indeed, much of the motivation for participation in athletics is to make a name for ourselves. We often measure our worth, not in being children of God, image-bearers of the King, but in being superior athletes. The tragedy of this tendency is that one feels his worth plummet when he drops the football in what would have been a winning touchdown play.

So too, a proper notion of play has been lost. The professional model has made athletics a big business. Amateurism, preparation for Olympics for example, is an obsession for many athletes! Big-time college athletics programs are loaded with exploitation. And now the purity of high school athletics is endangered as well. The pressure placed on fragile teenagers by communities, coaches, and parents easily can take the fun out of the games. The escalation of practice, the importance of winning, and the pain of "not making it" render stress and burnout that rob the activity of its playfulness.

Balance and moderation can easily be lost. What was intended to be festive and celebrative, to offset the drudgery of work, to balance life's demands, has gotten out of whack in our culture and schools. Athletics overwhelm the arts, threaten academics, and compete aggressively with the life of the church (Sunday tournaments, poorly attended youth groups). The sense of stewardship and balance implicit in the cultural mandate is eroding and evolving into a cultural aberration. Friendly competition degenerates into the Vince Lombardi philosophy: "Winning isn't everything; it's the only thing." Lombardi says, "To play the game (football) you must have fire in you, and there is nothing that stokes fire like hate. I will demand commitment to excellence and victory, and that is what life is all about. This is a violent sport; and that's why the crowds love it." Christians are called to redeem athletics from such a fallen cultural approach.

Athletics must be kept in proper perspective in our Christian schools, receiving due attention, but not dominating our other efforts or capturing our hearts, either extra-curricularly or curricularly. We must recognize the subtle cultural demands (national, state, and local) for more, more, more, and draw appropriate lines of limitation that will not be compromised. Gordon Dahl has said, "We worship our work, we work at our play, and we play at our worship." Such are the distortions of our times. The Christian community has a lot of work to do to redeem this dimension of God's good creation.■

Ron Polinder is principal of Lynden Christian High School in Lynden, Washington.

A Philosophy of Christian School Athletics

Robert F. Topp

With this theme issue we introduce the first of a series of three articles by Robert F. Topp. Subsequent articles will feature the athletic director and coaches. **Slightly edited and reprinted with permission from the May 1992 *CSI Administrator*.**

Bill Cosby, whose undergraduate degree is in physical education, knew that he could quell vine-covered philosophical meanderings such as "Why is there air?" He said that any P.E. teacher knows why there is air: to inflate basketballs and volleyballs and footballs. . . .

We in Christian school athletics (not to mention P.E. and other curricular areas) should be able to think a bit more deeply about our philosophy. Forming an educational philosophy forces us to examine our beliefs, practices, and priorities. We must decide on the outcomes that we want to see in our students. We must decide what is important in our content and methods.

A Singular Message

The philosophy of the Christian school must be mirrored in the athletic department. Athletics is a curricular portion of the Christian education package, not a recreational side-light to factories producing scholars and evangelists. Every portion of the educational package must be philosophically consistent, otherwise students receive mixed messages and are left confused.

Two philosophical premises dominate current Christian educational thought. One, based in Calvinism, states that all curriculum falls under God's sovereignty and must be used to prepare students to affect all of culture to transform it for Christ. A second says that the Bible is the center of Christian education; to claim its promise and to master its principles in life applications are the two main desired student outcomes.

The choice between these two made by a school will affect an athletic department. Which to choose is not the point; rather, consistent approaches throughout a school's entire program are important. The differences in these two philosophies may be subtle, but they do influence the way your school teaches athletes, schedules games, relates with opponents, and administers the athletic program. However, merely to say "Our program will be Christian" is simplistic and naive. Knowing specifically how your school philosophy should shape your athletic program will lift the program to a higher level of ministry to students and of testimony to the community.

Our teams are featured in the newspapers and are known by public and prep school people as well as by casual observers in the community. Our teams are obviously and unavoidably "in the world." How do we avoid being "of the world"? How are we distinctively transformational, evangelical mirrors of Christ? Teaching athletes to think, to act, and to react as Christ would is an important philosophical approach in Christian school athletics that would not conflict with either of the two main premises stated earlier.

Two authors on this topic stand behind this philosophy. Wes Neal of the Institute for Athletic Perfection and the author of *Total Release Performance* defines *winning* as "the total release of all that you are toward becoming like Jesus Christ in each situation." (8). He goes on to walk the reader through specific examples of Christ-like actions and reactions in the athletic realm. Claude Schindler, Jr., superintendent of Dayton Christian School and author of *The Role of Athletics in the Christian School* (as well as *Educating for Eternity*), offers these philosophical statements:

> We, as administrators, teachers, and coaches, are to be so thoroughly taught by God's Holy Spirit that we by precept and life-style may in turn teach our students to see life from Christ's point-of-view, enabling us to think like him and to act like him by demonstrating his character qualities. (4)
>
> Our philosophy of coaching . . . is to cause athletes to act and think like Jesus Christ. (5)

Schindler's book also covers examples of spiritual victory, Christian character awards, application of memorized scripture to athletics, and positive, specific, Christ-centered goal-setting. Neal has a number of books, pamphlets, and services that his institute offers to athletes and coaches to develop a sense for Christ's lordship over one's athletic life. The work of both authors is highly recommended.

A Gift from God

The intensity that competition brings has resulted in deplorable behavior by players, coaches, and fans. Players and coaches have been known to treat officials and opponents rudely and abusively. The stereotypical Little League parent, who shows great intolerance of mistakes by players and coaches and officials, shows up at Christian school athletic events. Many observers have cried out for competition to be downscaled if not eliminated. To eliminate competition, however, is to throw out the proverbial baby with the bath water. Competition is a gift from God. In both areas, Christian leaders

Working heartily or hustling is not enough until that maximum effort is offered to Jesus. This puts competition on a different measuring scale.

need to model how to manage the sinful actions of people who feel unrestrained in doing things that effectively damage that gift of God. We must reestablish a perspective on competition that keeps the otherwise unrestrained participant from crossing appropriate, God-honoring boundaries.

Our perspective on competition needs to begin with an understanding of gifts and talents. In the face of criticism such as "competition fosters elitism," we must remember the Bible's comments on gifts. Romans 12 urges us to make full use of our gifts. "If a man's gift is prophesying, let him use it in proportion to his faith. If it is serving, let him serve; if it is teaching, let him teach" (vs. 6-7, NIV). We might add this scholastic paraphrase, "If one's gift is in athletic skill, let him or her compete; if it is in music or acting, let her or him perform; if it is in academic achievement, let such a one study and research; if in working with the hands, let one craft, sculpt, build, and repair."

God gives students skills and talents. The disappointment of being cut from the varsity squad and the disappointment of losing starting positions, much less games, are trials God puts in our paths for his purposes. He may be testing one's faith, teaching a lesson, or redirecting one toward a new path. Athletics can be a way in which we discover what our gifts are.

Age Considerations

We need to keep this idea age-appropriate. Elementary school students are not ready psychologically for the rigors of competition and training. Low-key recreational programs that stress fun and basic instruction in local communities are usually enough (if not too much).

Middle school students are ready to compete on a limited basis. They need the outlet of scholastic sports (an idea that stands in contrast with the philosophy of many public middle schools). Restraints on practice time, practice frequency, and number of games will maintain a low-key "fun and fundamentals" approach. Another important factor in minimizing the competitive pressure, as budget and facilities allow, is to avoid cutting players. Creating a second team is an ideal plan if it can be arranged. This perspective can be upheld on a league-wide level with rule accommodations by league decision makers.

Middle schoolers are beginning to discover their gifts. They need to have plenty of opportunities for such discovery in low-pressure settings. However, high school students are ready to step to higher levels of performance in their areas of highest interest. They are ready to train as highly competitive athletes, as skilled musicians, as eloquent debaters, as entertaining actors, as inquisitive scholars, and as skilled craftspeople.

New Definitions

The intense nature of competition is not limited to the world of athletics. Rather it is a significant part of life in general. We must view it as part of God's plan to test and redirect us. If we teach this perspective, competition can be seen in a healthier way, as something that brings out the best in us and offers a vehicle of praise to God.

Wes Neal, in *Total Release Performance*, states, "The most widely accepted definition of winning is to *defeat your opponent*. It naturally follows then that the common definition of losing is to *be defeated by your opponent*. These definitions have been ingrained in us from childhood" (3). He urges us to redefine winning, in other words, to have a Christian perspective on competition. Neal cites Colossians 3:23, which refers to working "heartily as for the Lord." Working heartily or hustling is not enough until that maximum effort is offered to Jesus. This puts competition on a different measuring scale, one that measures degree of effort and focus on the Lord.

Claude Schindler, in *The Role of Athletics in the Christian School*, discusses expressions of spiritual victory: "To demonstrate the fruit of the Spirit during normal and stress situations." "To praise God for physical victories because every good thing comes from Him." "To develop the understanding of the need to present oneself as a living sacrifice . . . for an entire lifetime." (18). Spiritual defeat, on the other hand, is "to allow winning to dominate the life of the team or the life of an individual. This MUST be reserved for Christ alone!"

We must avoid a worldly view of competition that is based in self-centeredness, jealousy, and haughtiness. Romans 12:3 keeps our heads from swelling with pride after victory: "Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment..." (NIV). Jealousy and envy, elements of worldly competitive motivation, are listed as acts of the sinful nature in Galatians 5.

Before we present our teams to the community as distinctively Christian, we should have our hearts and minds set on God's way.■

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Thinking Christianly About Athletics

John Byl

Scripture directs our whole life, including athletics. However, situations and circumstances vary, and the way our understanding of scripture is applied will also legitimately and considerably vary; at times the choices made are even arbitrary. For example, the European model of athletics places athletics as a community responsibility, not that of a school. The American model includes athletics in the school. Is one view more or less Christian than the other? In the North American context, how do we involve ourselves from an administrative and coaching perspective and please God in our athletics?

A school, through the school board, committees, administration, faculty, and staff, must make an honest claim on athletics. I am aware of one situation in which the school provided no funding for athletics. A faculty member who was keenly interested in athletics took it upon himself to organize the program, raise funds, coach many of the sports, and, at his own expense, drive athletes to and from various events. Everyone appreciated his efforts, though some became critical of his classroom performance and frequent absence on account of his athletic involvements. The school, in its enthusiasm for the faculty member's fund raising, gave a blind eye to some of the negative effects it had on his classroom. Since the school board permitted this situation to occur, it abdicated its responsibility in shaping the athletic program. To make an honest claim on athletics, the school board should have either curtailed the athletic program or provided necessary funding to ensure that the program was adequately organized and implemented. Only then could the school enter the critical discussion on the direction of athletics.

In light of laying claim to the athletic program, how much money does it take to do it Christian justice? One thousand? Ten thousand? One hundred thousand dollars? The question cannot be answered in general. Seeing athletics as part of the abundant life we find in Christ, and in part a fulfillment of God's call for people to develop the gifts of this world, we could provide scriptural grounds for spending money on this area. But the extent of funding needs to be placed in the context of the school's situation, within its community, nation, and world. Are students with special needs adequately cared for? Does the support community adequately support works of service and mission work? Are children of poor families discouraged from attending the school because the fees, which include the cost

of athletics, are too high? Does athletic time away from class, home, and family seem excessive?

We need to understand that North American culture attaches great importance to athletics. Nearly a quarter of the news in American daily newspapers is devoted to athletics, and billions of dollars are spent. Sports writers describe sports events as if they were the most important events of the century, using such colorful words as record-breaking, potent, insurmountable, slaughtered, whipped, stunned, blow-out, sweep, propelled, battled, and clinched. Though much of this jargon can be heard with some enjoyment and humor, it also shows a "world" that is taken much too seriously.

A school reveals its philosophy even in minor ways. Think about the name for your school's teams. Professional sport teams use aggressive animal names like the Bulls, Bears, Lions and Stampeders; or they reflect a preoccupation with bird watching, with names like Blue Jays, Orioles, Red Wings, Penguins, Hawks, Eagles, and Cardinals. There are loyalist names, such as the Canadiens, or, in colloquial form, the Canucks and Yankees. There appears something godly about the Saints, Royals, Flames, and Angels, and something ungodly about the Devils. Surely it is not ungodly to call your team the Lions or the Penguins, but does the choice of name reflect the godly mission of your school?

One often-asked question is how much competition to allow or encourage. Some time ago I played a volleyball game with teachers, board members, and committee members. Some tension arose as a result of the way different people were playing—probably a common occurrence at such socials. Some wanted to play "just for the fun of it," which meant most volleyball rules went by the wayside. Others wanted to "play the game right," which meant play by the rules and use strategy. The experience was frustrating for both sides. Members of one group thought the others were not playing very Christianly because they were trying too hard. The more competitive players thought the others were not playing Christianly because they were fooling around too much and not playing right.

To argue that a playful game is more Christian than a competitive one, or the other way around, is to miss the point that the spiritual antithesis of life affects both—play and competition can each be done in ways that please or displease God.

The antithesis also cuts through school spirit and sportsmanship. A winning team excites and rallies the school community, but does a losing team deject this same community? And is the excitement of winning really an expression of thanksgiving to our Creator, or an emotion of self-congratulation on our excellence and self-sufficiency?

Some schools provide a wide variety of sport activities for their students in an effort to cater to many more students and give students a broader choice of involvements, both now and later in life. Others would rather specialize in one area so the athletes can learn to play the game well and the school can become better known by that particular sports team. Both approaches have positive and negative aspects to them. Like the volleyball game, the choice is not really a question of which is more or less Christian, but rather, which is more helpful to the school in its philosophy of pleasing God.

Playing interscholastic games requires a certain intensity or the game becomes another practice or, even worse, a humiliation of the other team. Games are spoiled through frivolity. But intensity need not show a disrespect for others. Quite the contrary. The Spirit-filled athlete not only loves God but also loves others, and he or she ought to see the game as an opportunity to challenge others, not to hurt them. Such challenge occurs through a process of building obstacles and maneuvering around obstacles placed in the way, much like a continuously moving chess game. Pre-game prayers should express thankfulness to God for the opportunity to play and request a well-played, safe game for all participants.

Developing a Christian athletics program needs to be done with fear and trembling before the Lord, with the sensitive leading of the Holy Spirit, in the context of our situation. Done in joy, the athletic events will become feasts of skillful challenges in appreciation of our Creator, or what others have called Shalom Athletics.■

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Letter to a Writing Teacher

Dear Marty,

Thanks for asking about developing a composition program for junior high. It's a privilege to think with a former student about such matters.

Let me begin by summarizing what I've learned from graduate work on composition theory, from conferences, from continued reading, and from the testing ground of my own classrooms. Then I'll qualify how that might relate to your goal of developing a new writing program.

There have been, by my count, three major changes in composition theory over the last fifteen to twenty years. The *first change* made the *purpose rather than the modes* (or kinds) of discourse the most important factor in writing and in assessing writing. James Kinneavy's *The Aims of Discourse* was most influential in bringing about this change. Sadly, the book is written in a "wooden" style. Story has it that the author brought out the book earlier than he had intended because former colleagues were pirating his ideas–at least, that's the standard scoop. Interestingly, Kinneavy's emphasis (some still think of it as a revolution) goes back to Augustine's qualification of classical rhetoric.

As Augustine looked at ministers with a fairly weak education trying to instruct and inspire the people of God, he said that purpose and audience were more important than the subject was for determining the appropriateness of speech. The standard argument had been that one wrote in high style about tragic heroes, in low style about mundane things or about lower class people, and in a middle style for what lay in between. Augustine argued that if even a glass of water, when given in the name of God, could be credited to one's eternal salvation, then obviously purpose was more important than any "natural" ranking of the importance of subjects.

Many textbooks and teachers have taken a middle road by organizing courses around modes (definition, comparison/contrast, narration, description) but emphasizing them as strategies of invention rather than as the formal goals of discourse. My concern with this approach is that assignments often seem disjointed, purposes unclear, and knowledge scattered. I prefer working with a particular goal and working in alternative modes that may be used to accomplish that goal. That way students know that modes are means to an end, that the goal of an assignment is never to write a correct comparison/contrast paper but to see how comparison/contrast might further one's goal, say, of increasing minority representation on campus.

The shift in emphasis to the aims rather than modes of discourse greatly affects the design and evaluation of assignments. Each assignment must have definite cues that let the student know whether explanation, persuasion, personal expression, or creative play with language (the four aims Kinneavy spells out) is required. Each assignment must also describe a particular audience for the writing. And each assignment must be evaluated first of all according to whether the purpose was accomplished for that audience. This can be hard on the B+/A- student who gets most technical matters correct but whose writing seems unrelated to any strong sense of purpose or to any particular audience. But then, wouldn't a congregation be equally tough on such a minister (Augustine's concern)? And wouldn't an employer be equally tough on such an employee?

One final note about emphasis on purpose: This does not mean that forms and style become unimportant. On the contrary, they should be taught as an alphabet or vocabulary of forms. But their appropriate use is what counts. In other words, appropriateness—not formal dexterity—becomes the primary criterion for writing.

The *second major shift* in composition theory emphasized the *process as much as (and often more than) the final product* of writing. This influenced and was influenced by Janet Emig's work on the composing process of twelfth graders and James Britton's work on the composing process of eleven- to eighteen-year-olds. Different teachers use different strategies for getting involved with the student's writing before it is completed. These strategies range from individual conferencing to in-class readings in small groups to class workshopping of one or two anonymous drafts.

When I work with small groups (triads when possible), I give a set of questions to direct the students' response. Though the questions vary from assignment to assignment, they usually stay pretty close to the following set: What do you think was the author's purpose? Who seems to be her or his audience? What was the most memorable part of the essay for you? What seemed least important or interesting? What alternative strategies or inclusions would you suggest? I always end with some version of this last question so that the emphasis of the group stays on invention, or discovering what to say and how to say it.

Whether the author writes down his audience's responses or whether the other members of the triad write down their own responses, the list on paper must have a name attached and must be handed in with the final draft. That way I can check student responses and help authors think about the question of when to resist and when to accept a reader's advice. When a paper shows strong improvement, I give some of the praise to the triad group a) in written comments I ask the author to share with the triad in class, or b) by placing the comments on an overhead.

While we're talking about the writing process, let me also say that I let students know early and regularly that their writing processes will vary from one student to another, just as their thinking processes do. And then I show them some very good (which usually means messy) pre-writing exercises or drafting that other students have done. Probably the main cause for poor writing is that people shut the process down too early. Sometimes this is caused by laziness, but often it is caused by fear—a fear of not living up to some model of writing as an orderly march from beginning to end. I try in these various ways to get rid of such a model and to extend the students' ability to keep the writing process fluid rather than frozen.

Although I frequently use triads and workshops, other teachers depend upon journals or conferencing. I think the strategy choice is not as important as the goal. One composition expert has speculated that the two things most necessary for a good composition class are getting involved with the students' processes of composition and establishing a sense of authority (not to be confused with discipline). Try a variety of approaches to your involvement with students' writing processes. What's essential is not the approach but demonstration of your interest in the writing process, its variance from one writer to another, its (usual) messiness, and its importance for good writing.

Students sometimes quit when their creation hasn't mysteriously sprung into life as they suppose other people's writing has sprung into life: the natural reflection of its author's intentions. Or they quit when their process doesn't fit a textbook's diagram. But it's important that they see there is no creation, much less a perfect creation, that doesn't go through some birthing process. And birth, as we know, is seldom neat; nor is it, as Eliot has reminded us, exactly as we had planned.

The *most recent shift* I have seen is *away from methods of problem-solving,* which first had accompanied emphasis on process, *to the generative power of knowledge and learning communities.* We're not sure about the methods by which the mind makes connections. That may be more haphazard (or at least unpredictable) than we had first imagined. We are sure, however, that we learn new material more easily when we can make more bridges to it. Connections generate new connections.

When I first heard this argument imported into composition theory from cognitive psychologists, it confirmed for me the value of sequencing assignments. Students could build on the knowledge of a subject they had gained for one assignment in order to write the next.

For example, one fall I chose one of my freshman classes to use the Greek Orthodox Church just down the road from Trinity as the focus of several writing assignments. First I asked them to write a description of the exterior of the church (and suggested comparison to other churches they knew or to the rest of the neighborhood as a strategy for invention). Then I arranged for a tour of the inside of the church, and the students wrote a second description; but this time I encouraged them to be more reflective about their expectations for a place of worship. The students then used the library to do some historical research on the Eastern Orthodox Church. They had to choose a particular focus for a short research paper that showed—in its final draft—correct Modern Language Association documentation. (The students gained a new appreciation for a research paper because this assignment was embedded within a sequence of other assignments and experiences.) Finally, I asked the students to attend a mid-week or Sunday service and conduct an interview with the minister. Then they were to write an essay from the point of view of a participant, not only as an observer. Again, they were given opportunity to compare their experience to their expectation.

Through this sequence students had ample opportunity to use comparison/contrast, description, narration as modes of discourse and explanation, persuasion, and personal expression as their goals. I should probably have shifted audiences more than I did in this sequence, but some students did choose to write the final assignment for the student newspaper or for a church youth group. The sequence also gave them a new context within which to view the ethnic, racial, and denominational differences among their own churches.

Sequencing also works well for simulations of business writing: in-house memos, proposals, letters or reports. Case studies work especially well. I have received a few from IBM and Honeywell, but any local business could supply these as well. I think junior high students might be able to do a sequence that begins with a bank employee's memo suggesting that the bank do some educational advertising for grade school children of clients.

Or, if these students could not imagine themselves as bank employees, the sequence might begin with a bank's contest, open to all twelve- to sixteen-year-olds, for ways to introduce younger students to the principles and services of banking. "Contestants" could first write a proposal to the bank and then write to younger students the letter or advertising that would follow. If possible, you should arrange for someone at the bank to read at least some of the proposals and letters/advertising. That will help the students' sense of purpose as well as their sense of the serious task (and play) of writing in the adult world.

One easy way to get a sequence going is to begin it with a memo in which the students have to spell out a plan or procedure. I have often found this more helpful to them (and a more recognizable part of the work world) than asking for an outline. At the same time, it teaches them an indispensable form (the memo) that they might not otherwise learn in school. A simple way to extend an assignment, and to test the students' sense of appropriateness, is to have them address a younger audience after addressing an audience of peers or of people in authority over them. On occasion you can also ask them to write a reflection on what they learned in working through a sequence, its challenges, and questions.

With the increased recognition of the part knowledge and learning communities (as opposed to methods) play in problem-solving came *strong emphasis on different kinds of writing in different subjects or groups.* One result of this emphasis was the push for writing-across-the-curriculum programs.

Finally, let me say a word about problem correction. Mina Shaughnessy wrote a great little book called *Errors and Expectations* in which she argued that all errors have a logic behind them that students need to identify and understand in order to change. I believe her wholeheartedly. She also shows the logic behind a great many errors of her students, so the book doubles as a very handy reference book.

For the last several years, I have marked errors, as much as possible, according to patterns. I try to go for the patterns of the most repeated and most grievous errors first. Recently, a student had ten errors in one paragraph. Seven of these were caused by using an *-ing* form of the verb instead of a complete verb. I marked each one with an x-1 in the margin, circling the first two instances but only using the marginal comment for the last five. The student then had to tell me what the errors had in common—and could gain extra credit for doing so if the errors did not recur in the next essay. I try to limit myself to marking three patterns of error per paper. By keeping these marks simple, I can involve the students in their own error identification and still have time and space to attend to questions of purpose, audience, and strategy. And, of course, I always find at least one good thing to write about each paper, and I try to give an A paper as much written response as a C or D paper. I figure its author deserves this effort and desires such communication.

Much of what we do is intuitive. On the other hand, just as we help our students by de-mystifying the writing process with them, so too we help them by becoming more reflective about how we shape writing instruction. That's why I was grateful to receive your request.

Near the beginning of this letter I promised a qualifying statement about how it might relate to your situation. I want to say that I have a last word neither about theory nor about practice. Theory, including Christian theory, seldom has a last word—or it finds a final word shortly before it dies for lack of interest. And practice has to be appropriate to its context. While I enjoy writing about recent composition theory and suggesting how it has influenced my practice at Trinity, you'll have to develop not only an analytic but also a historical logic appropriate to your school's writing program. That's where the real fun begins. If you give me an update in three months, I'll tell you what discoveries I think my classes and I made this fall.

Cordially,

Michael Vander Weele
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National Profile of the Christian School Teacher: Cause for Contentment or Concern?

Joe P. Sutton
Timothy G. Watson

So much has been written and published by professionals about schools, teaching, and learning. Clearly, most of this information pertains to secular education and the public school movement. Yet most Christian parents and educators would probably agree that we need to know more about the quality of the conditions and outcomes of private Christian education and the Christian school movement. After all, approximately 12% of the school-age students in our country today are enrolled in private schools (U.S. Department of Education, 1991).

If one were to conduct an investigation of Christian education what would the focus be? Three obvious possibilities come to mind: (a) teachers; (b) students; and (c) schools. Of these three, a study of teachers is probably most preferable, for Deuink (1991) argues that "teachers are undoubtedly the most important" component in a genuinely Christian school (1). We believe that a study of teachers is paramount in our effort to determine whether Christian schools are effective in their ministries to our children.

Interestingly, the published information to date concerning Christian school teachers basically represents ideas and conjectures about what we *think* we know about these teachers, some of which may be true, but very few can be supported empirically at present. Although certain educational organizations (e.g., National Education Association, 1986) have collected data on teacher characteristics, Christian educators will have difficulty generalizing from these secular sources. Likewise, Christian educators will have problems with studies done by other agencies such as the National Center for Education Statistics (U.S. Department of Education, 1988) on private school teachers, because these researchers have failed to differentiate teachers of fundamental Christian schools from those of other religious, non-fundamental Christian schools in their findings.

Our concerns fall squarely with the fundamental Christian school movement. We need more empirical data on fundamental Christian schools in general, and fundamental Christian teachers in particular, so that we can more accurately determine whether Christian schools are providing the appropriate education our young people will need to serve the Lord better, if he tarries.

Furthermore, as empirical studies uncover and expose problems about Christian teachers that will need to be ameliorated, it is better that we recognize and correct the problems ourselves, rather than yielding that responsibility to a state agency (Prov. 27:6). Moreover, we contend that the Lord expects this of Christian educators, for the Scripture instructs that "we should judge ourselves" (I Cor. 11:31).

The purpose of this article, then, is to report the findings of a nationwide study conducted in the fall of 1990 on the characteristics of fundamental Christian school teachers. Christian school principals armed with the knowledge of what is ailing their schools in the area of faculty will know better where to start the remediation process, and we believe that is with the teachers themselves. Better teacher preparation, more accurate information, and more exclusive hiring practices may be some of the results of the data that can be gleaned from this study on Christian school teachers.

Method

We drew our sample from the member schools found in the American Association of Christian Schools directory (AACS, 1989), which consisted of 1,030 schools covering 45 states. The number of member schools per state ranged from one to 169, with a median of 13. To ensure adequate representation of Christian schools across the states and, hence, to allow for a nationwide sample, we randomly selected several schools from each state. Our total sample for this study consisted of 169 schools. The selection from each of the states ranged from one to seven, with a median of four.

We used a questionnaire that included nineteen items designed to collect basic demographic and educational data on the teachers represented by the schools. The items were constructed so that teachers could provide their own written responses. Three questionnaires, along with a cover letter providing instructions on completing the questionnaire, were mailed to each of the respective school administrators in September of 1990. Administrators were instructed to randomly select three teachers from their schools. These teachers were then asked to complete the questionnaire and return it in a self-addressed, stamped envelope.

We concluded our data collection in November of 1990. Fifty-one percent (N=87) of the initial sample of schools

responded with a total of 201 teachers. The number of schools and states by region of the country represented by our final sample were as follows: Northcentral (22 schools/10 states); Northeast (24 schools/9 states); South (26 schools/13 states); and West (15 schools/7 states). The final sample included 87 Christian schools from 39 states.

Data analysis consisted of basic descriptive statistics. To ensure consistency in classifying data from the questionnaires, a graduate student not associated with this study was asked to code the data using the same rules and procedures as the investigators. Interrater reliability was then calculated and resulted in an agreement coefficient of .99.

Results

The findings from this study allow us to characterize the typical Christian school teacher according to (a) gender, (b) race, (c) age, (d) marital status, (e) whether the teacher's spouse is also a teacher, (f) undergraduate preparation, (g) type of undergraduate college attended, (h) graduate/advanced level preparation, (i) whether the teacher's teaching assignment reflects his or her preparation, and (j) teaching experience. Figures 1 and 2 provide graphic representations of the data collected on each of these variables.

In sum, the Christian teacher population is predominately female (71.1%) Additionally, the overwhelming majority (97.5%) are white. Very few (less than 3%) are represented by minority races. The median age of this teacher sample was 34 years, with the largest group of teachers (38.31%) ranging in age from 25 to 34 years. The findings on marital status indicated that seven out of every ten Christian school teachers are married. About one-fourth of Christian school teachers have a spouse who is also a teacher.

Only a little over one-half (56.3%) of the Christian school teachers nationwide have an undergraduate degree in education, and 11.4% have no baccalaureate degree. Most of the teachers graduated from Christian colleges (63.5%). In addition, most of the teachers in this sample (72.7%) had not taken any graduate work or earned advanced degrees. Only about four out of every ten teachers (39.3%) were teaching in areas/grade levels that reflected their major areas of undergraduate or graduate preparation. The median number of years of teaching experience in private or public schools for these teachers was seven years, with the largest group of teachers (29.8%) falling in the range of five to nine years of teaching experience.

FIGURE 1

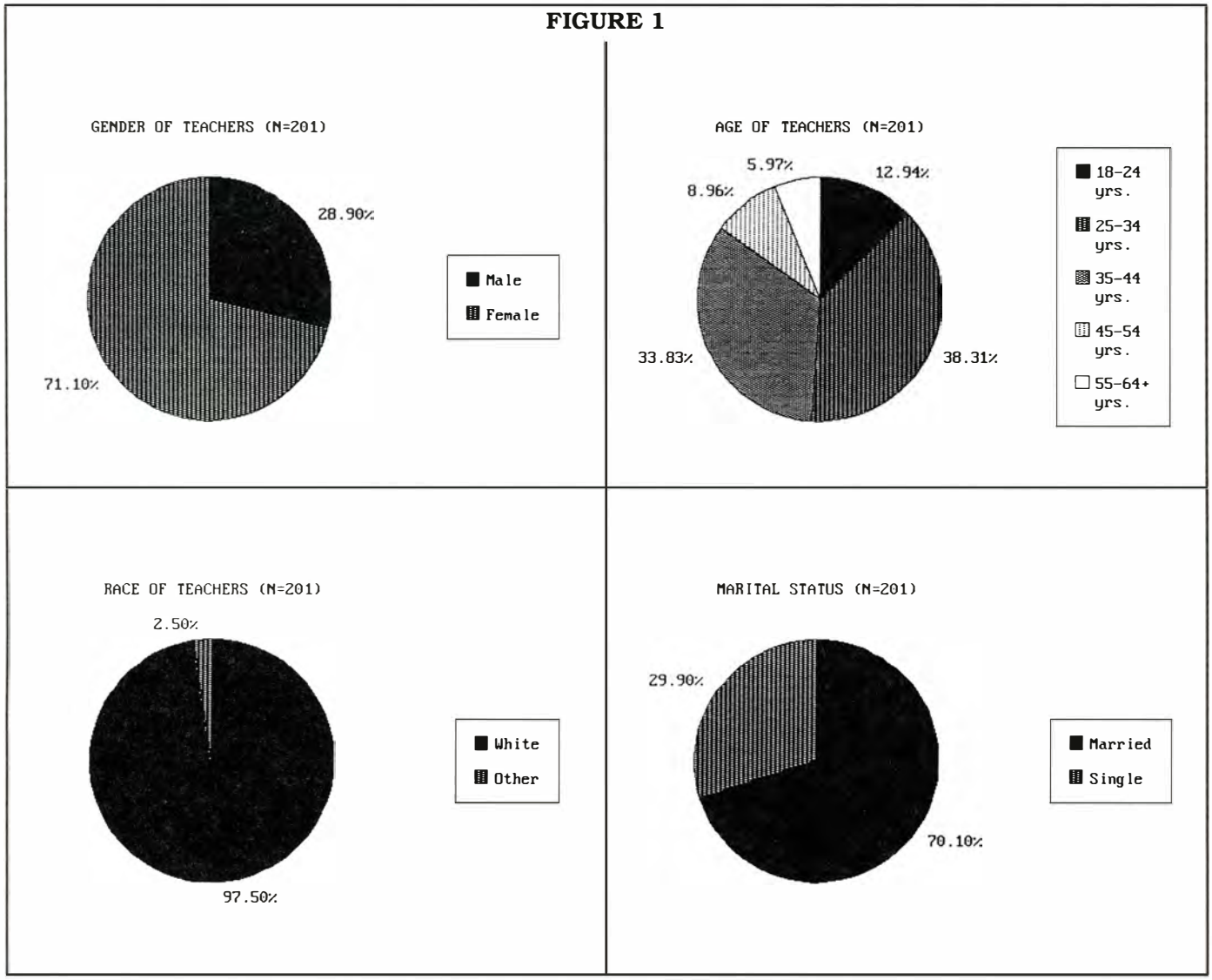
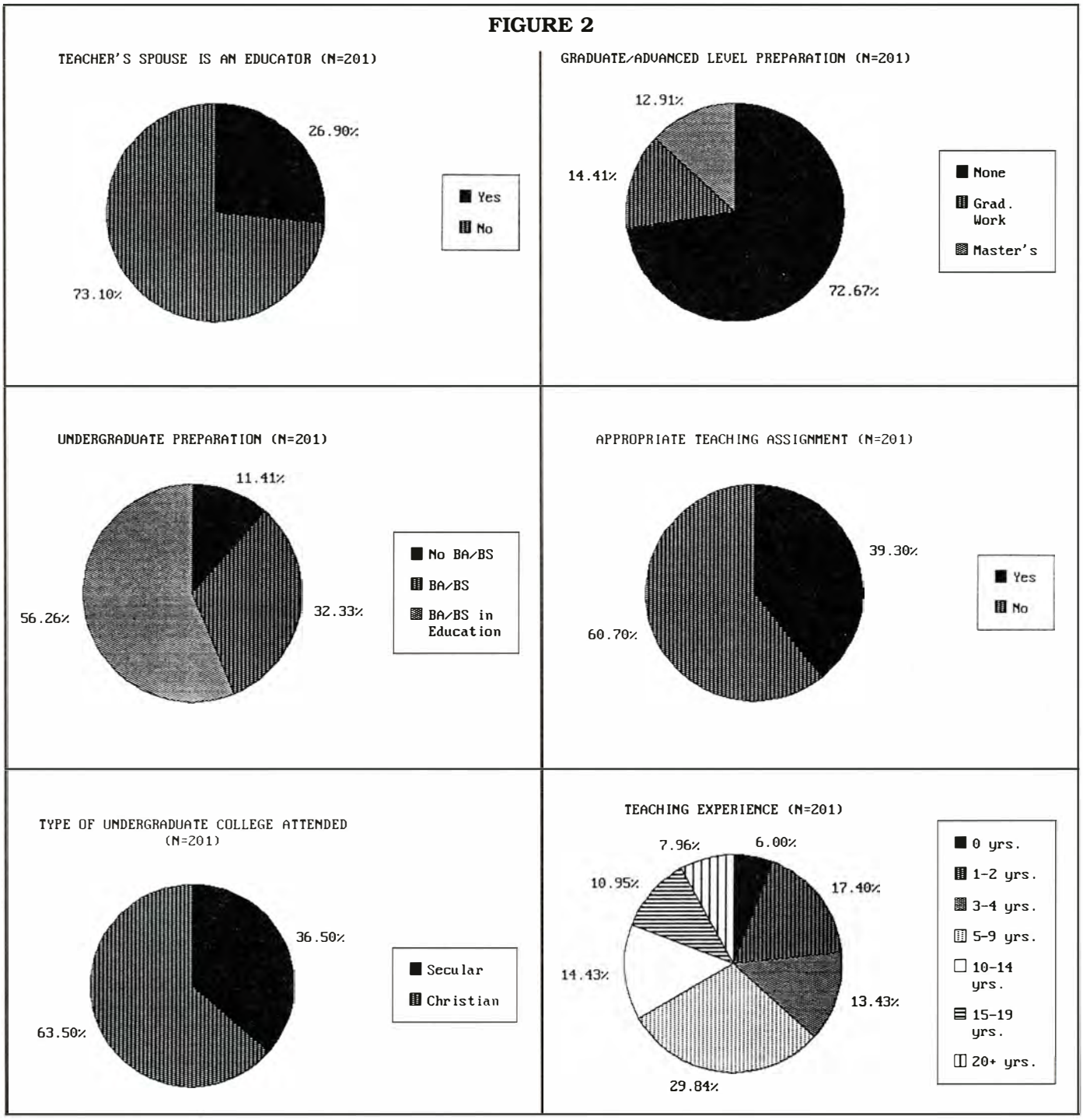


FIGURE 2



Discussion and Implications

Although the findings of this study raise a number of concerns, we shall limit our discussion to two we believe are major. We could classify one as philosophical and the other as professional.

The finding that over one-third of the Christian school teacher sample graduated from secular colleges raises a serious question about the existence of a consistent, biblically-based Christian philosophy of education in our Christian schools nationwide. Most of our Christian school parents make a reasonable assumption that our fundamental Christian school teachers have such a philosophy. This study suggests that in the majority of cases the parent is probably correct in making this assumption, given that almost 64% of the teacher sample in this study graduated from Christian colleges. However, this study also suggests that too many times a Christian school teacher's philosophy of education may not be what it should be, and therefore the parent's assumption is not correct.

While it is true that a dedicated Christian is able to be a witness on a secular college campus, it is also true that secular

teaching and humanistic philosophies may permeate that Christian student. Romans 11:36 states that we come "from" him, live "for" him, and go "to" him. But secular education emphasizes the "now." There is a tendency for students coming from that type of educational environment to give more heed to topics such as acid rain, homeless persons, snail darters, baby seals, and other problems of society than the eternal concern of the individual's soul. Moreover, that teacher may also have some unusual views about the world order, garnered from a secular college classroom.

While many Christians are able to ferret out incorrect, unbiblical ideas and material they receive from secular classrooms, some are not. But are Christian school principals ready to deal with those people who wish to teach in their schools who may have educational philosophies that miss the scriptural mark? Do principals have time to adequately screen these people before hiring them? We might add here that principals should not assume, just because a teacher graduates from a fundamental Christian college, that his or her philosophy of teaching is automatically Christian. Nonetheless, the influence of public school teaching and philosophy on a person is clearly evident. Cropsey (1983) found that many teachers have had twelve years of public school teaching and have picked up many secular ideas.

Finally, the teachers in this study present a problem for parents in the professional realm. While 56% of this teacher sample held degrees in education, a considerable number of these teachers (32%) held college degrees that did not include formal teacher preparation and 11% did not hold an undergraduate degree at all. Although a degree in education alone does not automatically and completely guarantee that proper teaching and learning will take place in a classroom, a person without professional teacher preparation will probably not provide the best, most effective education for his or her students.

Neither the awful "horror" stories of teachers with formal teacher preparation, nor the wonderful "honor" stories of teachers who have no formal training justifies the finding in this study that almost 44 percent of Christian school teachers nationwide are not adequately prepared to teach our children. What a poor testimony to have before a predominately unregenerate world and, more importantly, before our Lord.

These findings notwithstanding, parents among the general public desire that teachers receive formal teacher preparation. A recent Gallup Poll (Elam, Rose & Gallup, 1991) gathered opinions from the public regarding preparation of public school teachers. When asked if the ability to teach resulted more from a natural talent to teach or from college training about how to teach, 57% of the people polled responded that college training alone (25%) or both natural talent and college training (32%) affected teaching ability. Furthermore, Gallup and his colleagues found that 88% of the public believed college education courses were very useful (53%) or fairly useful (35%) in training people how to teach.

From an educational perspective, the implications of poorly prepared teachers in our Christian schools will surely have an undesirable effect on our students in the near future. As far as human efforts go, we agree wholeheartedly with Hawley (1991), who holds that "the capabilities of teachers are the most important determinant of student learning in schools" (29).

We admit that we are biased. We admit that we believe teachers in Christian schools should have professional educational credentials. We admit that we believe teachers in Christian schools should receive their preparation in Christian colleges. We further admit that we are deeply troubled about the findings from the present study. We believe that Christian school principals nationwide should begin to take a serious look at the quality of their teachers.

It may be that the statistics and figures we have gathered do not tell the real story of Christian education and Christian teachers in the United States. We hope this is the case. However, if this data is an accurate reflection of what currently exists, parents may become troubled with the knowledge that the teachers of their children may not be properly prepared to teach, may not have a college degree, and may be teaching subjects for which they have no training. What might Satan do to these parents' psyches and hearts when they hear Christian education trumpeted for its lack of quality? Parents, students, the whole Christian education movement, and, above all, our Lord deserve better.■

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Are girls in our Christian schools being taught and encouraged to be all that they can be?

The question alludes to sexism, which is a controversial and divisive issue and would ordinarily require voluminous research and data. However, the topic has been written, read, and argued about so extensively over the past years, I will presume teachers are quite familiar with the varying views and have established a stance regarding them. The concern, though, is still legitimate; and the answer lies in education assisting all students in reaching their full potential.

Understanding how and why this lack of development happens specifically in girls is important in order to practice intervention. Dr. Carol Gilligan, a Harvard psychologist and author, contends that up until eleven years old, girls are outspoken and accept disagreements and conflicts; in fact, girls can even sometimes be "bossy" at this age. The turning point is adolescence, when they become less sure of themselves and have been convinced that femininity means being soft-spoken and unopinionated. Interestingly, Dr. Gilligan concludes that women teachers need to model the right to demonstrate honest feelings, to disagree, and simply to be heard. Otherwise, girls will continue to respond as they did repeatedly to the Harvard researchers by saying only what they think is safe and acceptable.

The challenge is difficult for us who are female because we have established some of those life-long patterns and find it easier to cater to expectations than risk criticism, to point the finger at male domination than take some of the blame ourselves.

The subtle avoidance of equal opportunities for and treatment of female staff and students is still present in our schools, but truly enlightened and committed faculties will substitute an environment of respect and discovery. Many hindrances can prevent optimal performance in all students, but recent statistics regarding sexual abuse starkly remind us again of the silenced victims, girls who may be sitting in our classrooms in need of God's love and reassurance.

Should schools hire their graduates as teachers?

Whether they should or not, schools do hire their graduates. Definitely some advantages exist. Familiarity with facilities, some of the staff, general rules, and the background of the constituency speeds adjustment. Obviously, too, prospective teachers applying in their hometown school have a great love and commitment for the institution and location. Possibly also, this practice establishes stability and continues tradition. Certain acceptance, a comfortable transition, and proximity to friends and family make the option attractive to college graduates.

Nevertheless, disadvantages may surface as well. Many graduates in one system limit exposure and background for the students. Even though similarities are present in all of our Christian schools, some characteristics are indicative of a specific area of the country, often only recognizable by newcomers. Wide variety in educational and multicultural experiences enhances student thinking, learning, and growing; plus, the teachers benefit from the mutual exchange.

A few schools already do require applicants to teach elsewhere for a specific period of time (e.g., two years) before returning "home," thus allowing the development of more insights and the desire and willingness to share within the context of the alma mater.

Infrequently, graduates seek employment in the hometown for selfish, personal reasons. Fortunately, that seems to be as rare as the community being a hindrance to their return. Yet familiarity can breed contempt, rivalry or even complacency, which could deter healthy relationships in and outside of the school setting.

I believe that wherever they live teachers are called by God to the profession and to particular school positions in order that they might meet the needs and challenge the abilities of God's children.■

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

Address questions to:
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CEJ Query Editor
2135 S. Pearl
Denver, CO 80210

Imagine That!

Robert C. De Vries

Do you remember the radio commercials Jay Leno did a few years ago? One still stands out in my mind. Jay is quietly sleeping in his four-poster bed. Suddenly the bed's engine starts and, like a sports car, the bed careens down the stairs and out the door. Just as Jay begins to relax and enjoy the ride, the bed stalls straddling the railroad track. With the train whistle screaming through the darkness, Jay tries to get the bed started again. Over the grinding starter you can hear Jay Leno saying, "I got it started once, I can do it again. Imagine that! Yes, imagine that—you just did, on the radio."

Imagination is that phenomenal capacity of the human mind to picture what isn't immediately there, to enflesh an idea that is distant and abstract. Our imagination can evoke a full range of powerful emotions: tears, laughter, anxiety, exhilaration, fear.

The role of the imagination in education has been debated for centuries, as far back as Plato and Aristotle. We see a renewed interest today in the role of imagination in education. We live in a culture of visual images that are increasingly critical to effective communication. In this context, the word "imagination" is not a synonym for "fantasy" or "myth," a mere projection of emotions with no reference to reality. Imagination, rather, is that capacity to put shape to abstract concepts. Imagination puts legs on love, arms on admiration, muscle on mercy.

Educators are purveyors of images. Teachers should be especially conscious of the images they seek to elicit from their students in considering issues of faith.

I would suggest three images that help students focus on the essentials of the Christian faith.

First, "dress" your students in a **prophet's garb.** Take the well-worn mantle of the faith-knowledge you have inherited from prior generations and lay it squarely on the shoulders of your students. In a world where so much seems to be bobbing untethered in a sea of opinions, help your students to see themselves walking on the water! Help them picture the solid footing just beneath the ebb and flow of our society, a footing welded to the very person of Christ. This firm foundation was called into existence by the thunderous voice of God. Christ redeemed this foundation when he ripped the world out of the clutches of Satan and raised it up to the Father like the rescuer handing a child back to a waiting mother. And God will fully reclaim this world, weary and torn as it may presently be. Christ is, through his people, preparing this world for a new beginning—a new heaven and a new earth. Dress them as prophets, then, in long flowing coats. Shape them as prophets, privy to the mysteries of the Creator-Redeemer because "God has revealed to us the mystery of his will!" (Eph. 1:9). Revealed to us! We must let our children know!

Train your students to imagine themselves as **priests.** Put a censer in their hands and invite them to inhale the pungent scent of incense, the purifying aroma of divine reconciliation. Create in them a heart nurtured by true Christian affections. The work of the priest, dressed in a white flowing satin robe interrupted only with purple sashes, is to hold out his hands in both directions to bring people together. Once they are together, the priest presents them to God. Help your priests make peace with an environment gasping for air in the grip of pollution. Equip them to make peace in a world where marriage, friendship, and intimacy are fractured by individualism, greed, and competition. Weave with them a peaceful tapestry in which various cultures and races revel in the multiplicity of color and shape of the human form just as we relish the hues and shapes of a summer garden. Dress them with simplicity. Help them love quietness, meditation, and reflection. For in that quietness, they will meet themselves and their God. "Be still," says the Lord, "and know that I am God" (Ps. 46).

Dress your students also as **rulers,** queens and kings of royal stature, armed to the hilt, ready to do battle. "For we battle not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of darkness and against the forces of evil in the heavenly realms" (Eph. 6:12).

We can now share in the lordship of Christ. The long-standing tradition of the Reformed faith still holds: reclaim the world in the name of Christ. Dress students in the royal splendor of the monarchy, lords and ladies of this culture equipped as leaders in the new technologies. Let them claim computers, CD-ROM, and lasers in the name of Christ. Let them become the leaders in global politics. As communism dies, equip them to claim the global economy in the name of Christ before seven other demons of greater threat seize control. Let them be leaders in the exploration of knowledge and information. Show them

Adapted from a keynote address to the Grand Rapids Christian School Association teachers and staff on August 29, 1991.

how to claim, in the name of Christ, all information, data bases, interactive computers, and tel-star communications. I can imagine this year's kindergartners, potential college graduates in the year 2009, as sons and daughters who will see the kingdom of God more clearly. They will know better than we do how to recognize Christ's lordship. They will be able to imagine how a simple faith in Christ uses this explosion of knowledge and technology to prepare for Christ's coming.

Perhaps, you object, this is all too dramatic. This is a fantasy, a myth. I suppose to some degree you are right. There will be wars and rumors of wars. Sons and daughters will be turned against their parents. There will be pain, and suffering, and tears. I know the pain all too well. We have all, in our own way, visited suffering. But my faith gives me pictures—images—to live by. They are technicolor renditions of a tomorrow so vivid that they have lived for centuries in the minds and hearts of believers. They are the prophet Joel's images, he who saw our sons and daughters prophesying, our old men dreaming dreams, and our young men seeing visions (Joel 2:28). Yes, our students can imagine the kingdom! They can see Christ. Can you imagine what that might be like? Do you dare picture it in your mind? The message is simple: you cannot help another imagine a picture of the kingdom if you cannot see the kingdom in your own heart.

You are God's instruments, called to shape the future, to challenge the mind, to set the heart. *Imagine that!*■

Robert C. De Vries is associate professor of church education at Calvin Theological Seminary in Grand Rapids, Michigan.

NEWS

Readers are encouraged to submit news items that would be of interest to readers regardless of their familiarity with the school or the people involved. Items for the column should be a maximum of 500 words, typed, and submitted to the managing editor or a regional editor four months prior to expected publication.

Minneapolis Area School Adds Second Campus

The term "community" means more than just a neighborhood to the members of Calvin Christian School in Edina, Minnesota. Their community extends twenty miles north to their new campus in Blaine and even out to California.

Three years ago they knew they were outgrowing their space, but attempts to rent were frustrated. "But that was providential," says teacher Marilyn Hielkema. "The Lord blessed us with something much better." When a former public school building in Blaine came on the market in the spring of 1991, Calvin Christian was able to purchase three times the space they currently need for less than a third of normal cost.

The neighbors and officials in Blaine were eager to see the renovated building be reclaimed as a place for students. Once the bid closed this past spring, the people of Calvin Christian began turning the building back into a school, largely with volunteer help. Two of the volunteers actually lived right on the property. Ray and Betty Heimstra, friends of Principal Steve Groen, came in their trailer home from Redlands, California, to work during June and July. They helped to restore three classrooms, an office, a library, an art room, a music room, restrooms, and one of the two gyms for primary grade use.

Throughout the summer Calvin Christian held open forums and open house sessions for the neighborhood. A Christian bookstore supplied 29,000 names of potential supporters, to whom the society sent brochures, inviting people to consider Calvin Christian. Between 250-300 responded, and ten families asked for interviews and enrolled children in the school. During the last two weeks of August the new K-3 campus enrollment jumped from twenty-one to thirty-three students. A third of the students at the north campus were previously enrolled at the Edina campus but have transferred to the Blaine campus, which is closer to their homes. The other two-thirds are new to Calvin Christian. The Edina campus currently has 205 students.

Hielkema serves as the only full-time teacher at the Blaine campus. She has fourteen first and second graders during the morning hours, while the kindergarten teacher teaches her thirteen students and the third grade teacher has six. During the afternoon hours the third graders join Hielkema, who coordinates multi-graded science and social studies units, music, art, and physical education, with the help of music and physical education specialists.

"I found several well-planned units already available," says Hielkema. "I'm using one I call 'God's World,' about earth forms and caring for the creation." Several mothers volunteer at the new campus to help with secretarial work and playground supervision.

Both the Edina campus and the Blaine campus operate under one school society, one board, and one principal. The Edina librarian spends one day a week at the Blaine campus, where she has collected duplicate copies of library books, a number of her own donated books, and books supplied by donations. Principal Steve Groen goes up to Blaine at least twice a week, and the Blaine teachers meet monthly with the Edina staff.

"We plan to add a grade each year at the Blaine campus," says Hielkema, "but we'll see. We've been so blessed."■

Film Shortcuts and the Long-Run of Lit

Stefan Ulstein

A colleague told me that back in the 1970s she had to tell her high school English students that she would not accept book reports on books whose film versions had aired on television that year. One Tuesday morning a ninth grader had turned in a book report on *The Robe* in which he stated, "You could just tell that Judas was gonna betray Christ by the look in his eyes." The film version, of course, had been the Monday Night Movie. A book report on *Airport* noted "how cool it looked when the jet crashed."

In this age of video stores, it's probably not possible to keep students from watching a movie as a shortcut to reading. Most of the classic high school texts like *The Red Badge of Courage*, *The Grapes of Wrath*, and *Great Expectations* have been filmed at least once. If you want your students to actually read the words from the page, you may end up doing all kinds of pedagogic gymnastics.

I stopped giving objective tests fifteen years ago. True-false, fill-in-the-blanks, and multiple-choice questions are easily answered by anyone who has a VCR or a set of *Cliff's Notes*. They can get the basic content without having to grapple with the book on a deep level. I found that if I wanted my students to actually read, I'd have to demand that in both written and oral responses, they quote from the text and give the page number.

But the film versions of great books can often be very helpful to students—readers and non-readers alike—so how can we use the film versions to better educate our students?

Robert Redford plays the title role in the movie version of The Great Gatsby.

I suggest using the film as a supplement to the book, and teaching the mechanics of script writing and film making along with the teaching of the book itself. When I teach *The Great Gatsby*, I start by asking the students to read the whole book. I encourage them to think about the literary terms they have learned—plot, climax, denouement, character motivation—and find passages that will help them to discuss the book according to those concepts.

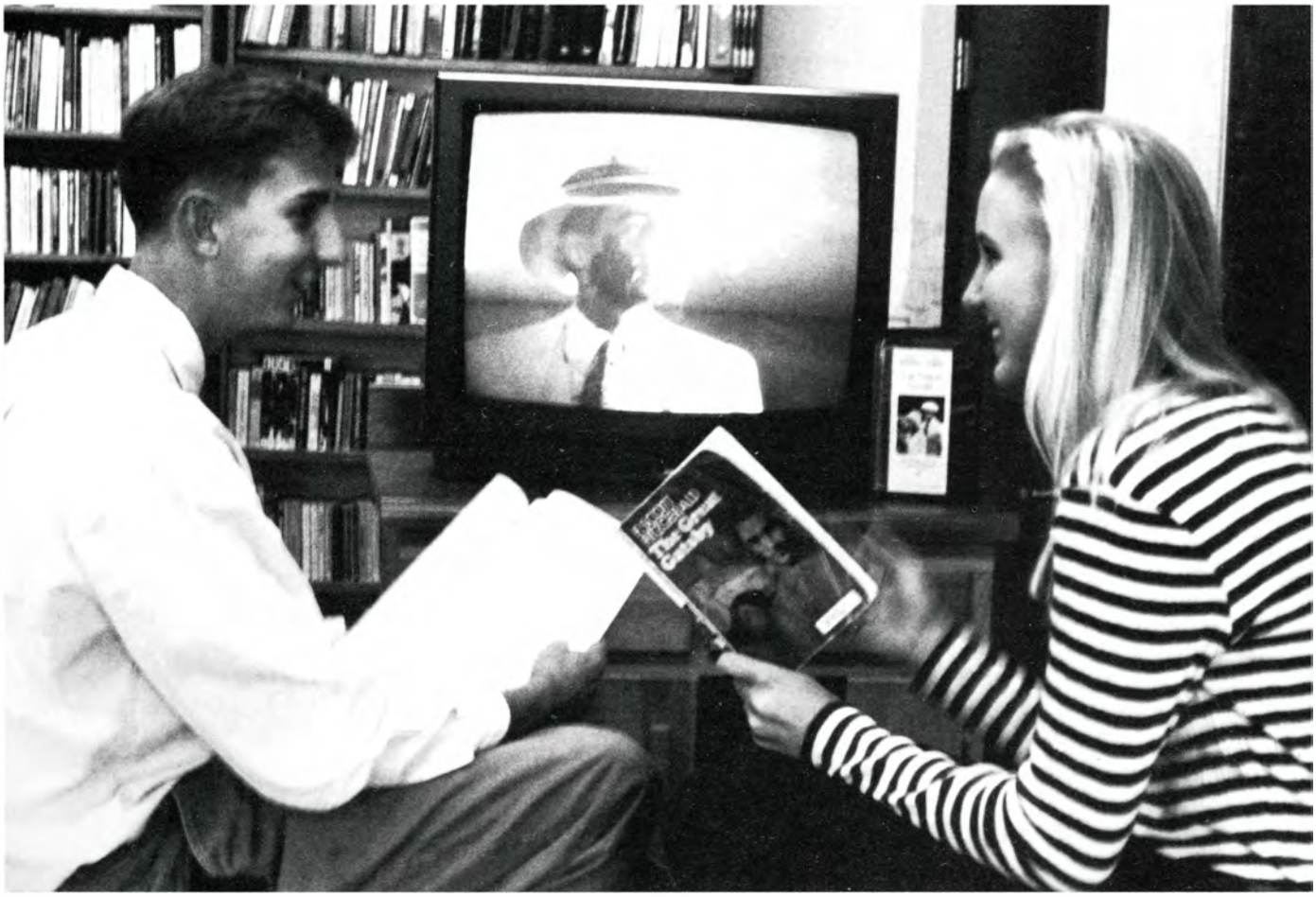
To make sure that they read it, I have them bring their books to class, and I give them class time to read. This allows me to find out who doesn't own a copy of the book, who can't read, who won't read, and who doesn't understand that we're really going to read the book this time.

When everyone has had a chance to read the book, I give a content test that requires the students to quote passages and document page numbers. Once that is accomplished, most of the students can actually participate in an intelligent discussion because they have a working knowledge of the text.

Then I give them a copy of Francis Ford Coppola's script, which I got from a company in Los Angeles called Script City. The script consists of 150 typed pages, which can be copied and given to students. Script City has an enormous bank of scripts, and personnel can acquire almost anything for you if it's not in stock. Scripts cost about $50.

With the script and their marked copy of the novel in front of them, my students watch the film version of *The Great Gatsby*. Their writing assignment asks them to note the differences between the book and the film and then to write an essay discussing the extent to which the film is thematically true to the book.

My students quickly note that the film is not only different from the book,



Two students discuss differences between the novel and video of The Great Gatsby.

but it's different from the script as well. Passages are deleted, new scenes are added, and some dialogue is spoken by different characters. In some cases, one character in the film speaks dialogue that originates from several characters in the book.

Having read the book before seeing the movie, my students have many opinions about the casting of Redford, Farrow, and Dern in the key roles. They talk about the sets, costumes, and props, and they offer opinions on the way the set designers visualized the book.

When students see the script in front of them, they get a better idea of how much has to be cut to make the average novel play in 90 minutes. It's helpful to go to a bookstore and note how long audio tape versions of books are. Jean Auel's *The Mammoth Hunters* was a fairly incoherent two-hour movie. The audio tape version is twenty-six hours long. John Huston's 1966 movie, *The Bible*, was about three hours long, and it didn't even get through Genesis.

We hear a great deal in the press about the short attention spans of the MTV generation. My own experience tells me that there's something valid in the criticism. It's harder to get students to read, and harder to get them to read difficult or long texts. Students, like their parents, are busier in the 1990s. They have many more diversions, sports, and activities than previous generations, and the mass media have changed to accommodate them by shortening and simplifying media messages. Why read *East of Eden* when you can see James Dean act it out in a movie?

If we want to train students to read, exegete, and critique a book, we will have to do more than just assign them the reading. We will have to block out time for them to *do* the reading, and we'll have to develop strategies to teach a dying art: the close, careful reading of a text.

By showing our students the ways that visual media such as movies change, shorten, and simplify a text, we can help them to see that "watching the vid" is not the same as reading the book.

The telephone number for Script City is 213-871-0707.■

Stefan Ulstein teaches at Bellevue Christian Junior and Senior High in Bellevue, Washington.

WHEN THE CANDLE IS LIT: Storytelling the Bible

Dorsey Price Salerno

Who can be a storyteller? Anyone! Before the Bible stories were written down, they were told, passed on from friend to friend, handed down from parent to child. And they were remembered, because the message of a story is more powerful in the telling than in the reading.

So, reach back for this ancient teaching tool and learn to use it effectively. With storytelling you will catch and keep the attention of your junior high students, you will get across the messages kids need to hear, and you'll entertain. And, of course, the story makes an easy point of departure for a discussion and understanding of our faith.

We love to tell stories, all day long, about our activities, about our hopes and desires, about our reactions to events in the family and in the world—so we've had plenty of practice. Telling Bible stories takes a little more organization than the spontaneous talking you do with your friends every day, but what an impact you can make! You are guaranteed an eager audience because everyone loves to listen to stories, and if you prepare one Bible story every few months, you'll have a fistful of them in your pocket by June. With a little review, you'll be telling them to your next class the following year, or, if you teach the same group, they'll benefit by hearing them again. And, of course, you're ready with questions for discussion after the storytelling.

PREPARATION

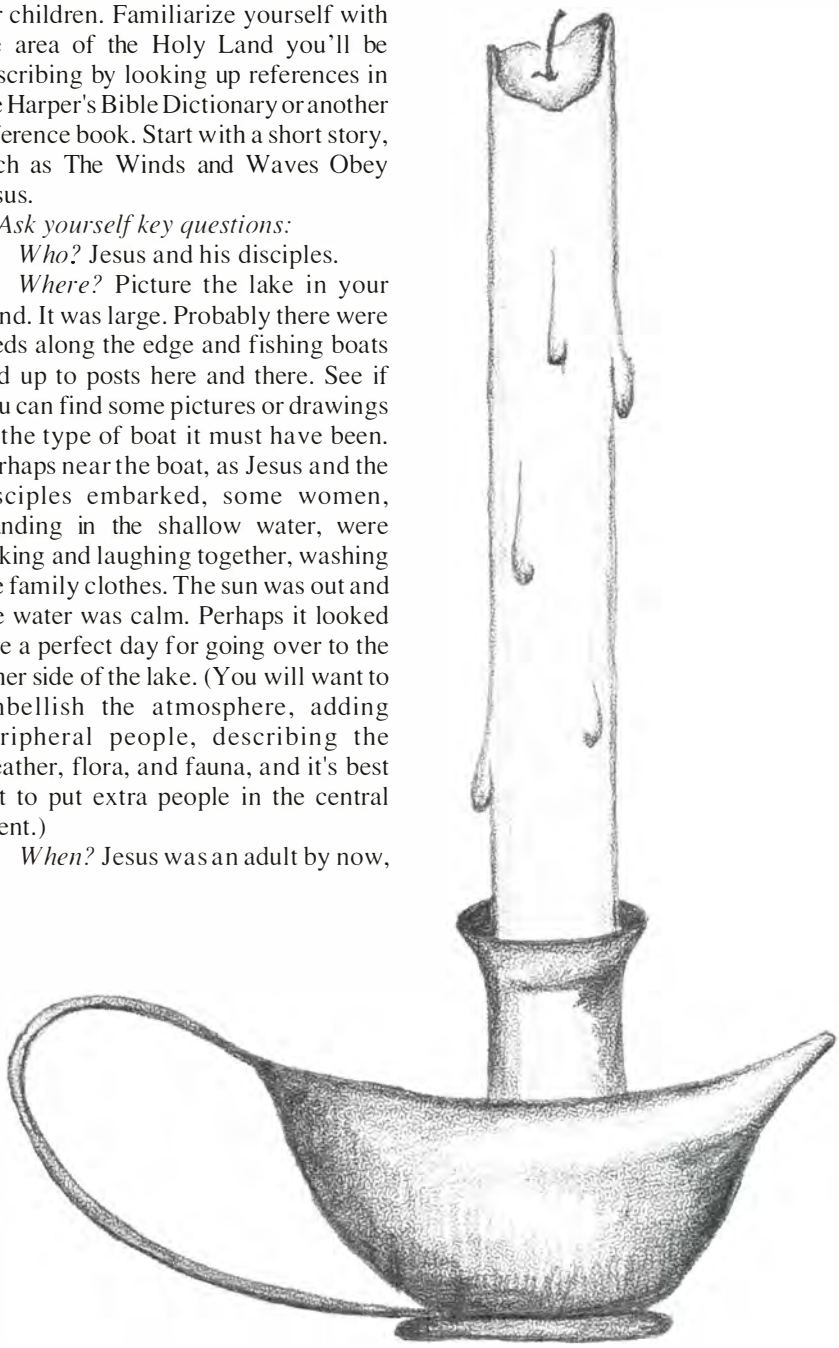
1. *Choose a story* to suit the occasion. Read it in the Bible, but also look over the story as presented in a book written for children. Familiarize yourself with the area of the Holy Land you'll be describing by looking up references in the Harper's Bible Dictionary or another reference book. Start with a short story, such as The Winds and Waves Obey Jesus.

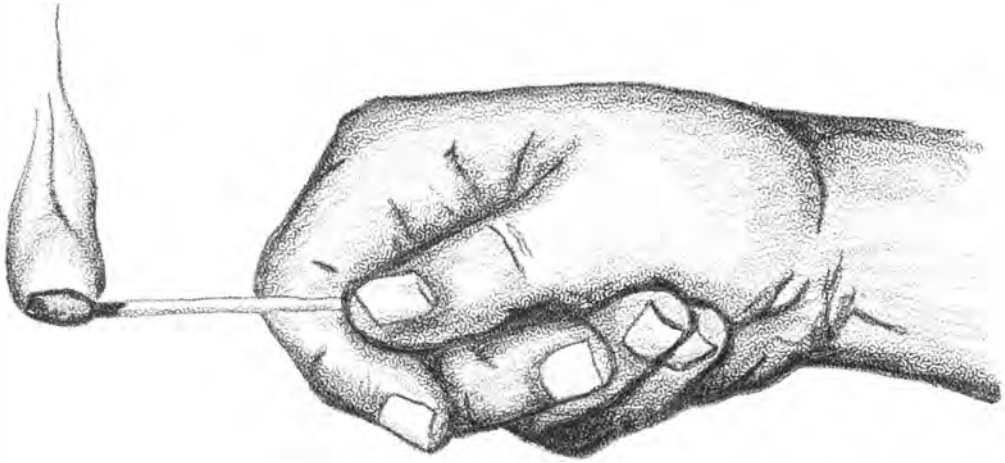
2. *Ask yourself key questions:*

Who? Jesus and his disciples.

Where? Picture the lake in your mind. It was large. Probably there were reeds along the edge and fishing boats tied up to posts here and there. See if you can find some pictures or drawings of the type of boat it must have been. Perhaps near the boat, as Jesus and the disciples embarked, some women, standing in the shallow water, were talking and laughing together, washing the family clothes. The sun was out and the water was calm. Perhaps it looked like a perfect day for going over to the other side of the lake. (You will want to embellish the atmosphere, adding peripheral people, describing the weather, flora, and fauna, and it's best not to put extra people in the central event.)

When? Jesus was an adult by now,





having already preached a great deal, and having already gathered his disciples.

Why? He had decided to go over to the other side of the lake to preach. Perhaps some of the people Jesus wanted to talk to had heard of him but hadn't met him yet.

How? In a creaky old fishing boat with a sail. Did one of the disciples look up and see a dark storm cloud in the east and notice some small white caps on the lake? We don't know, but we do know how fast storms can come up on a lake. But Jesus wasn't worried.

3. *Walk through the setting and action* of your story, because you will be walking around the room as you tell it. Where is the edge of the lake? Where is the fishing boat? Is it morning or afternoon? Where is the big storm cloud that perhaps only one disciple sees?

4. *Describe to yourself the attitude of the characters* before, during, and after the story takes place. There is always a character change in such stories, because Jesus is out to change us!

5. *Learn the story* without memorizing it. Know the sequence of events; memorize the first and last sentences and a few key phrases. Stay on the same level of vocabulary–natural, but not slang.

6. *Tell the story to yourself aloud.* Use a conversational tone, not a storytelling voice. Start telling at a "walking pace" and, during the story, vary the speed of talking. Speak clearly and distinctly; don't rush, because it takes your audience time to process what you are saying. Use a few gestures, if you like. Too many are distracting. Do not use different "voices." You could easily get tripped up in the device, and find yourself saying a woman's words with a man's voice and vice versa!

7. *Practice.* Tell your story to a friend, spouse, child, or stranger. Test yourself by seeing if you can tell it aloud with the radio on! If you have that kind of concentration, then a roomful of students won't distract you.

TELLING THE STORY TO THE CLASS

Take a candle and matches with you to class (*see caution below). Tell the students you are going to tell them a story. When they are settled, preferably in a circle, light the candle. Say, "When the candle is lit, the speaking no longer belongs to the audience, but to the storyteller." Always begin your stories this way, and accept no whispering or talking during your story.

AFTER THE STORY

Blow out the candle to signal the end of the time when the youngsters have to be quiet. There should be a moment's silence after your telling. Do not break in on it too soon, because it takes time for the audience to return to our century and our era. Have your questions for discussion ready. Perhaps a student will have a question. You may want another student to think of an answer to it. But be sure you leave time to talk about the important meanings and levels of the story. For example, start a sentence saying, "If I had been a disciple who saw the storm coming, I would have felt . . ." and invite the students to finish the statement. Or ask, "If you had fallen asleep and woke up to see the boat filling with water, what would you have said to Jesus?" And use your other favorite devices for getting a discussion started.

You can use these steps to prepare any Bible story. You may find yourself a little nervous the first time you light the candle and begin speaking, but when you see the effect on your audience, you will grow in confidence. Your students will love even your first efforts because everyone loves to hear "what happened," even if they've heard it before and know the ending.

So, pick out your favorite story and start preparing it. You will be rewarded when you light the candle, by seeing a circle of students leaning forward with rapt attention, listening to your every word!■

**Check with your local fire marshall regarding the use of candles in classrooms. Some communities have code restrictions. An alternative might be an electric candle or a candle-shaped flashlight.*

Dorsey Price Salerno taught Latin and French to junior high students, and she is a storyteller. She lives in Chappaqua, New York.

Leading Others, Following God's Lead

Pat Geels Oostenink

Lois DeJong, part-time fifth grade teacher at Seymour Christian School in Grand Rapids, Michigan, provides an exemplary role model in balancing a professional career, motherhood, and many other commitments.

Although she has lived in Grand Rapids for nine years, Lois's early roots grew deep on a farm near Pella, Iowa. She fondly recalls enjoying God's majestic creation in creeks, woods, and wild flowers, and in witnessing the births of animals. Growing up under a farmer's constant faith despite weather conditions, and sharing cooperative learning activities with three sisters who also drove tractors and threw hay bales helped lay firm foundations for her future endeavors.

Complementary to the rural scene was Lois's becoming the first Pella Christian High girl to be crowned Pella's Tulip Queen. This honor was brought out as a point of interest in her fifth grade class by one of her pupils, Anjean VandenBosch, who also had been born in Iowa. The young student researched and presented a social studies report on Iowa and told the class about their teacher, a "beautiful, gracious former queen." The class seemingly was less impressed with this fact than the adults whose memories securely held this tidbit through the passing years.

Lois's dedicated Christian parents, William and Gertrude DeKock, neither of whom had a Christian schooling or a higher education, encouraged Lois to pursue a servanthood career in teaching. Also nudged toward the teaching field by Klaas Kramer, her eighth grade teacher and principal, Lois worked diligently and received her A.B. degree from Calvin College and a master's in reading from Chicago State.

Lois DeJong (right) shares information with her job-sharing partner, third-cousin Jana Grimburg.

If she needed any affirmation that teaching was the profession she should have chosen, it would be in the fact that only one of the many teaching jobs came through the normal job-seeking process. The first job appointment was at Oakdale Christian in Grand Rapids, Michigan, where the principal, Dorothy Westra, became a positive influence for DeJong. In all other situations the different institutions took the initiative in finding her and used a modified interview/selection process.

"The Lord led the way," Lois says. She adds, "Teaching gives me an opportunity to do something I truly love to do, something else to zero in on other than the problems in the Christian Reformed Church or Calvin Seminary!" (Her husband of twenty-nine years, Dr. James DeJong, is president of Calvin Theological Seminary.)

This enthusiastic teacher has been immersed in a variety of educational experiences. Not only has DeJong taught elementary school in the United States, but she also experienced the joys of teaching first grade in the American International School of The Hague, Netherlands, for four years. Subsequently she moved to Oak Forest, Illinois, Public Schools where she taught grade two and remedial reading for three years. Clearly, all her varied experience and expertise came into play when Dordt College hired her to teach elementary

Lois DeJong and student Anjean VandenBosch, both Iowa natives, read through a brochure from their home state.

reading and language arts courses for prospective elementary teachers on both a full-time and part-time basis. After a five-year stint in Sioux Center, Iowa, she returned to Michigan and served as a part-time student teacher supervisor for four years at Calvin College.

Learning Center office and facilities are housed in this school, many unique opportunities are offered to teachers like her, who wish to develop children's sensitivities toward people with disabilities.

Lois's leadership qualities continued to surface in each educational setting. Frustrated with the rigid spelling program in her fifth grade curriculum, she designed her own program with the goal to personalize it and make it more meaningful. Part of the whole language approach to reading instruction, this new program goes beyond memorization of language patterns set up by a company. It includes high frequency words, words from personal writing in many genres, content area vocabulary, instructional level challenge words, and high interest words chosen by each student. This unique program has been readily and enthusiastically accepted by her students and their parents. The Grand Rapids Christian School Association Communication Arts Committee, on which DeJong serves, will be using virtually all of her program as a pilot in the coming school year.

"I believe someone who loves to read can be a positive role model and can radiate contagious enthusiasm for reading."

Presently, Lois shares a position at Seymour Christian with Jana Grimburg, who, during the job interview, discovered they were third cousins! Colleagues also include four former student teachers whom Lois had supervised at Calvin. Small world, yes? She enjoys teaching in a school where job sharing is allowed. It is ideal for her because it is a perfect way "to teach what I like and what I'm most prepared to teach." In addition, she enjoys and appreciates the inclusive education program where the special-needs students are actually part of the regular classroom. Because the Christian

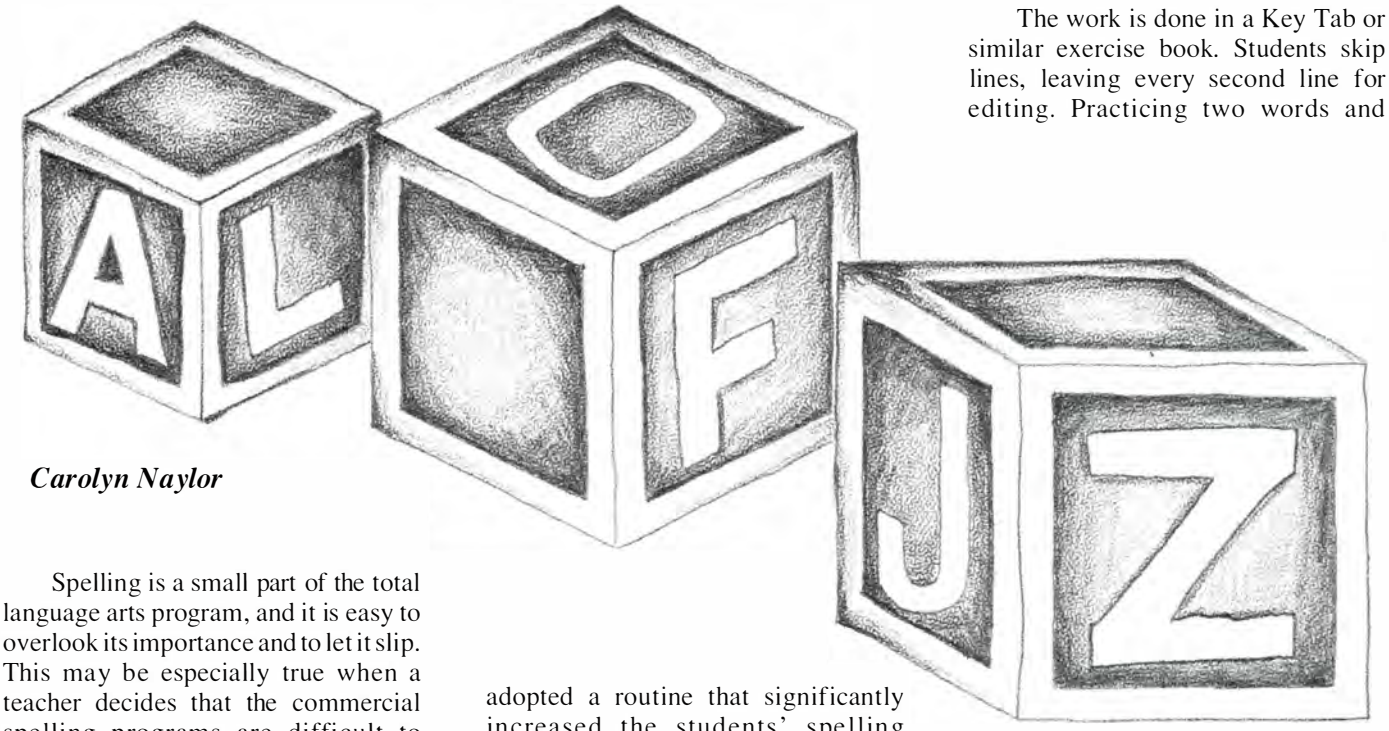
With DeJong's strong language arts background, it is no surprise to find that her main objective in teaching is to encourage every student to be "joyfully literate." She says, "I believe someone who loves to read can be a positive role model and can radiate contagious enthusiasm for reading." This is why she enjoys the Read Aloud Time scheduled at the end of each day and why she reads constantly herself—mostly books on the grade 5-8 reading level to keep up with her students and recommend books to them.

If you pop in to get a closer look at DeJong at home, you may find her digging, gloveless, in the flower garden. You may also see her cooking or sewing, but taste variations and time limitations are necessary considerations for this busy wife, mother, and teacher. On a quiet afternoon, as you peer through the trees enclosing her large yard on the Calvin College campus, you might get a glimpse of her sitting in her glassed-in porch writing letters to her married son, Kurt, a medical resident at South Bend, Indiana, and daughter-in-law, Julie, a preschool teacher. However, letter writing could get interrupted by her tenth grade daughter, Kristin, or eighth grade son, Kyle, who like to involve the rest of the family in sports. The active teen family members help keep DeJong and her husband young. But, DeJong reports, "They also make us tired sometimes."

If you do not find Lois DeJong at home when you visit, you will most likely be able to find her as she whizzes around the city in her car or note the family vehicle parked at sports events. How do you identify it? Just look for a sign adorning her back window that boldly states "Mom's Taxi—rates available."■

Pat Geels Oostenink teaches in the education department at Calvin College in Grand Rapids, Michigan.

Individualized Spelling



Carolyn Naylor

Spelling is a small part of the total language arts program, and it is easy to overlook its importance and to let it slip. This may be especially true when a teacher decides that the commercial spelling programs are difficult to individualize or integrate with themes and units. But you may want to develop your own program.

I worried about what would happen to competence in my grade three classroom as I tried to individualize spelling for my students. I experimented with many different ideas in an attempt to develop my students' spelling abilities. Some systems were not manageable, requiring too much time and too much record keeping. Others lacked accountability for either teacher or students. Still others were not meaningful enough because they were not related to the context of the curriculum.

My goal was to develop an individualized spelling program that was manageable for me, useful and meaningful for my students in their writing, and integrated as much as possible with other areas of study. After five or six years of experimenting, I adopted a routine that significantly increased the students' spelling competency and, interestingly, their writing fluency. It is quicker and easier to write a word when you are certain of its spelling than when you are figuring out how it probably goes. Students progress beyond invention to certainty. In addition to peer editing, the students are monitored and challenged in daily spelling activities.

Procedure:

Every day, for four consecutive days, each student chooses two new words to work on. The students follow the Ves Thomas recommendations for study: Look - Say - Cover - Write - Check (*Teaching Spelling*, Gage Educational Publishing Co., Toronto, 1979). They write the spelling word three times. Then they write a simple sentence using the word. This puts the word in context and provides a sentence for the partner to use when dictating the eight words on test day.

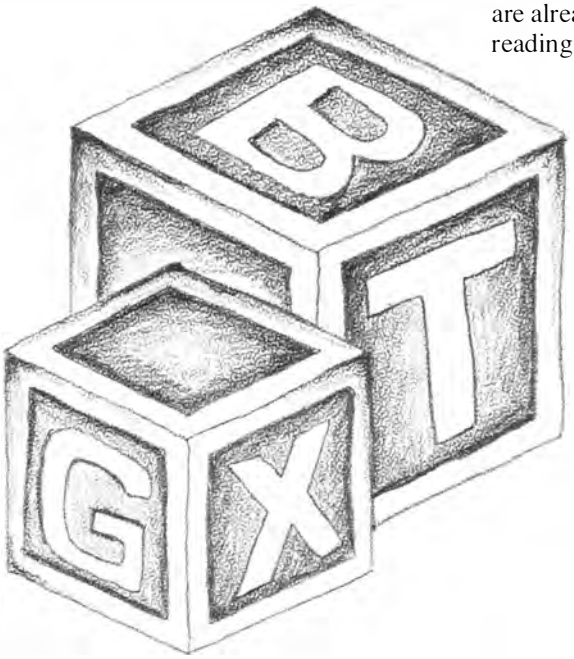
The work is done in a Key Tab or similar exercise book. Students skip lines, leaving every second line for editing. Practicing two words and writing a sentence for each takes about ten minutes. During this time, I move around, checking students' work. I put a check mark in the margin in front of the word they have practiced correctly three times, and I proofread the sentence. If a correction is necessary, I put an arrow in the margin, pointing to that line of work. (In sentence writing, I hold the students responsible for previously learned words or punctuation.) When the correction has been made, I put a check mark over the arrow. I praise liberally for good effort to practice, learn, and work carefully.

If you are fortunate enough to have a learning assistance teacher in your room each day, this spelling routine allows for individuals to be given specialized help. By following this procedure my learning assistance teacher and I can give one-on-one help

to five students in a half-hour period. These students write their words on cards, learn them using visual memory and phonemic analysis, and retain words on their lists until mastered.

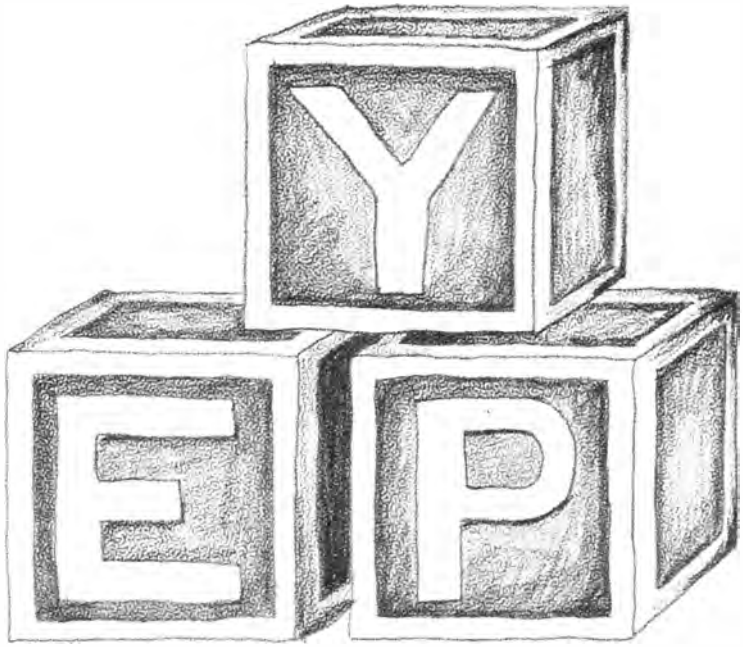
Test Day:

Since each student has different words, partners whom I have paired together test each other. This makes a fine cooperative activity. After four days of practice, they have eight words to be tested on. On small pieces of paper, the students being tested write numbers 1 to 8. They give their notebooks to their partners, who then read each word and the sentence that was written to use the word in context. When the eight words have been dictated, the partners mark the paper together. In case of error, the student finds the word in his or her notebook and uses a highlighter pen to indicate the letters that were a problem, then prints the word in this notebook two more times, using the double - spacing area. During the second half of the testing, the roles are reversed.



Variations:

Any system that is used every day can get boring and lose its effectiveness. Thus, after four weeks or so, I break the routine in order to work on a common spelling problem for a week or two. We explore and learn how to add "ing" or "ed" to various categories of words. Contractions and plurals present problems in spelling that can be presented as a group, thus breaking the routine throughout the year. Any common problem that I notice can be used to break the routine for a day. Word families such as "tion," "ou," or "aw" provide good study breaks. Within these "families" I use only words that are already in the students' spoken and reading vocabulary.



Word Sources:

1. I use the high frequency word lists from *Teaching Spelling* by Ves Thomas. I begin the school year by testing the first twenty-five words from Thomas's list. Only those words that a student has wrong go into the back of the student's notebook for further study. As more words are needed throughout the school year, I continue testing from the Thomas lists, twenty-five words at a time.

2. Errors of commonly used words from written work are circled so students can study them also.

3. Other common and useful words, such as colors, numbers, days of the week, months, and provinces are tested and added to the list as needed.

4. For those students with a special ability in spelling and few errors, I supplement from lists of more difficult words and "content" words.

Each year when I begin with a new group of students, I find myself doubting that they will catch on to the routine. However, if we practice for two weeks, correcting procedural errors, take a break for one week, then go back to the routine, they do catch on. Soon they are making few errors, and my daily marking time is reduced to about fifteen minutes.■

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The Lovesong of Advent

A special love came down to Bethlehem
That starlit night long centuries ago.
It's true that God had always loved His own;
Had dealt in patience with their wanderings,
Their hardened hearts and unbelieving minds.
He'd loved, and wept for bearers of His image;
He'd shepherded and covenanted them;
He'd promised them protection and relief
From all the Pharoahs' shackling whips and bonds.
He'd pointed to the future, to a Savior.

But love that came to Bethlehem that night–
That changed, for all, the calendars of time–
Was something very special, pure, unique:
A Father-Son duet, a haunting lovesong–
The Father giving up His Son to die;
The Son becoming flesh to show us grace;
To mingle humanness with the divine;
To give up royalty to save the world.

That song caught on. The angels sang the chorus;
A thrilling descent floated down from heaven;
The shepherds passed the lovely words along,
And instruments of all the ages joined–
The harp, the cymbals, trumpet, and the strings
Accompanied the lovesong through the night
As on it moved in time with history's beat:
A solemn dirge with Jesus on the cross;
Triumphant symphony when He arose;
The final notes–the aria of God,
"This is my Beloved Son, He pleases me;
He is your Savior; give to Him your heart."

A special love came down to Bethlehem
That starlit night long centuries ago.
And all adopted children of the Lord
Who catch that theme of grace and sovereign love,
And sing the song salvation brings to them,
Must stand in awe and tremble at the sight
of Jesus in a crib and on a cross—
His gift to the redeemed, His song of love.
No human bond compares; no other melody
Can capture that great love from God's own heart.

Ruth Donker