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**Fantasy and Imagination in Literature**

# God's Love Makes a Difference

## An Open Letter

Rosalie B. Icenhower

Dear Teacher,

Here we are on the threshold of another year of providing solid Christian education for the students the Lord has chosen to send to the school we serve.

As the year begins, I'd like you and your colleagues to consider how *God's love makes a difference*. Let's examine just *how* this makes a difference to us as professional educators, co-workers, and employees of a Christian school.

First of all, of course, God's love makes a difference in our lives as individuals. It is because of the Father's love he sent his Son into the world specifically to make atonement for our sins. God's love does make a difference—we are *forgiven* people.

He saved us, not as a group but as *individuals*. Isaiah 43:1 reminds us, "I have redeemed you; I have called you by name; you are mine." We are individuals, not masses and not numbers. When we know we matter to the Lord, we have a whole new appreciation for ourselves as individuals. We are not loved by God because of our goodness. We are loved because of *his* goodness. He loves us unconditionally and has claimed us as his own. This *should* make a difference in our homes, with our families, in our churches, in our neighborhood, and in our school.

Former President Bush, when running for office in 1988, emphasized how we could become a "kinder and gentler nation." Are we kinder and gentler members of our own households, with our own families? The national tone is set in the *individual homes*.

God's love makes a difference to us as professional educators. We do our best because we are responsible, first of all, to him. You were carefully chosen by the school board for your position. As a principal, I have found over the years that it is unnecessary for me to panic when August rolls around and there are still teachers to be hired. In fact, I have learned to pray that God would send just the teachers he wanted and to keep all others away! That's sometimes a dangerous prayer to pray, but it is a reasonable one. You were chosen by your board by prayer, and you chose to accept your contract by prayer.

I know that, as a professional, you will do your best at all times in your classroom—not because a supervisor is looking over your shoulder, but because you are a professional. Because you are a Christian professional, you have an added dimension. You are aware of fulfilling a special call from Christ to glorify him in this particular assignment as a teacher.

As a professional, you have a reputation for treating your students with dignity and respect. As a believing professional, you treat your students with the additional ingredient of Christian love. This means that your classroom is well-managed and orderly, that students know your classroom standards as well as the school regulations. Students are not yelled at, put down, or allowed to call each other names. You are treading on holy ground, because it is the place to which God himself has called you.

All of us know it is totally unprofessional to backbite or slander our professional colleagues. Yet I observed a great deal of this in public schools where I've taught. And, horror of horrors, a goodly amount of it also occurs in Christian schools! If God's love truly does make a difference, this offensive behavior need not occur here at this school. It might be wise to open your Bible every now and then to Titus 3:1-8 as a reminder.

Certainly, if you have a difference with one of your colleagues, talk it over, pray together, work it out. If you have questions about what I am doing, ask me. The secretary, volunteers, parents, everyone connected with the school, should be treated with respect, dignity, and love. You, as a believer, already do that. That's one of the great beauties of being followers of Christ, isn't it, being able to confront in love, being able to apologize if necessary, and working out any differences—remembering all of us here are members with you in the body of Christ.

God's love makes a difference in us in employer/employee relationships as well. There is a mutual respect for one another's "rights" and responsibilities. Your board and administrator are doing their best to give you as much as possible in salary and benefits. In turn, you are giving your best work and loyalty to the school and the families who have placed their confidence in you as a teacher. I trust you will pray for them as I know they pray for you.

Professionals meet their obligations by arriving at school as early as they are required to and remain as long as they are supposed to after school. As a Christian educator, you do even better! You, I know, arrive somewhat closer to dawn and nearly have to be evicted in the late afternoon! You are a conscientious, caring, dedicated professional, and the school community appreciates that.

I also am confident of this: you truly want to know the Lord better and become more like him. You desire to have this school known as a place where unity in fellowship and commitment to Christ reign, where teachers care enough about one another to share each other's joys, burdens, heartaches, and pains, each other's triumphs and pleasures. You want to be in a place where the teachers and kids love one another, pray for one another, and help shape one another into conformity with the image of Jesus Christ, the hope of glory!

Yes, God's redeeming love in Christ *does* make a difference as each of us remains faithful in carrying out his will for us. I challenge you and your fellow teachers to see how God's love makes a difference here this year!

Sincerely,  
Your Principal

Rosalie B. Icenhower spent twenty years in education and now does free-lance writing from her home in Bothell, Washington.





## Living the Metaphors of Grace

Rarely have I met Christian school teachers who wanted to purge all magicians, hobbits, and munchkins from their classrooms. I suppose such teachers exist, but I am not aware of them.

I am keenly aware, however, of fervent conflicts over these matters in Christian schools. Usually they arise in the name of Christianity. And always they seem to pit educators against parents, with the pastors of the community splitting sides on the matter, depending on their willingness to acknowledge metaphor as essential in understanding the Word. (The Word, of course, is the prime metaphor.)

I've heard similar arguments in church groups: "Why do the theologians tamper with the simple truth? Everything we need to know is presented in the clear teaching of the Word." And it is—the message of the Gospel is clear, though it is by no means simple. The wonder of salvation by God's grace stretches far beyond mere words.

Thus we have the riches of biblical imagery: the rainbow, the pillar of cloud and the pillar of fire, the ark of the covenant. And the metaphors of love, both pure and adulterated, in Song of Solomon and Hosea. And the parables. And visions of the New Creation. No one who reads the Bible can really ignore the power of metaphor. Some literary specialists call metaphor the highest form of imagery.

Not all of us value metaphorical language in the same way, however, perhaps because of the way we think, whether more intuitively or more analytically. But beyond those natural tendencies, if we are encouraged to think metaphorically, I believe we are more likely to value the metaphors of Scripture and literature and life.

Of course, metaphorical thinking

can become distorted. Frankly, I am concerned that the idea of metaphor has been cheapened lately by overuse in professional circles. Syndicated columnist Mark Shields recently called the U.S. deficit "a metaphor for failed government." Shields' comment arose quite naturally out of his vivid imagination. But nowadays university professors prod their students always to think of metaphors around which to develop educational concepts. Forcing a concept into a metaphor seems artificially manipulative to me, as if the metaphor is the end rather than the means to the end of knowing. Being somewhat tired of educational jargon, I balked when I read a recent headline about national education standards: "Conversations as a Metaphor for High School Teaching/Learning." I hope the new metaphor doesn't limit the potential for learning. A wrong metaphor can quite subtly take us in the wrong direction.

Apt metaphor, however, is a precious gift from God. We must appreciate it as a gift that enables us to sense concepts too profound to be fully expressed in literal terms. And we must enable students to appreciate this gift.

But sometimes I am troubled about the manner in which we educators defend the value of metaphorical language. Sometimes we fail to respect those who differ with our views, and we come across pompously better informed than "those poor mistaken literalists who don't know how to read correctly."

The truth is that, undoubtedly, all of us read wrongly some of the time. Even if we specialize in metaphor, even if we believe fantasy and imagination enlarge our awe of God and God's gift of language, we gain nothing by claiming superiority of understanding. A

condescending response to literalism only alienates us further.

I am not advocating weak-hearted concession to every parent who offers to cleanse the classroom library. But I am asking you to understand a parent's deep concern. That parent cares at least as much as you do about a child's welfare, and you will be wise to appreciate that level of parental interest.

In my own classroom more than fifteen years ago, long before "New Age" was in vogue, an avid student came to me with a fantasy novel she had just read. Embarrassed that someone else might be watching, she slid the book onto my desk and said, "My mom says this book's no good."

"What's the problem?" I asked.

"It's not real," she said.

"But it's not intended to be real."

"She says it's too unreal. I don't think so," she said, "but my mom said I had to tell you." Having witnessed more volatile scenes over library books, I thanked the girl and sent the novel through the evaluation process already in place. The book was soon returned to the library, but we did give a respectful hearing and response to the objecting parent. Thus, the student, the mother, and I were able to carry on without resentment toward one another.

No book is worth more than Christlike respect among us. Much more damage occurs in the lives of students from parent-teacher confrontation than from missing the riches of metaphors in seventh grade. In fact, readers who discover apt metaphors by choice may appreciate imagery far more powerfully than by having teachers impose fine-tuned interpretations on them without their parents' blessing. ☺

# FEAR NOT:

## Selecting Fantasy Literature

### for the

# Christian Classroom

*Karen L. Kalteissen*

A year ago, I included in my Medieval Studies unit T. H. White's *The Sword and the Stone*. It is the tale of the early years of King Arthur, in which the wizard Merlin figures prominently. I soon received a call from a parent who objected to what she considered the New Age element in the book and asked that her son not read it.

I knew very little about this mother except that she worshipped in a church very different from mine and her son was a likable kid. When we met to discuss her objections, we discovered how much we have in common: we both are concerned about the values bombarding our children today; we both find New Age thinking dangerous; we both are vitally interested in what our students read.

I explained that I chose the book because the Arthurian legends are key to understanding how our culture's values, for better or worse, developed

and because the legends are gloriously imaginative and engaging literature. We talked about how our children will encounter magicians, wizards, and worse ideas all over, from television cartoons to movies, books, magazines, and stores selling crystals in the malls.

We agreed that while parents, teachers, and pastors may be able to control some of these things in a child's life for some time, we all know that control is limited and time runs out. Perhaps we could better use our time training our children to be independent interpreters of reality and culture. Where better to learn what to do with a wizard, even an old one like Merlin, than in a Christian classroom, and in the process, nurture the vital imaginative capacity planted by God within each student? On that day, a partnership was formed between home and school that has continued, I believe, to bless her child and all of us.

Not all censorship anecdotes end so pleasantly, but I still believe it is

essential for us to be wise but fearless in our selection of children's literature, in particular the literature of fantasy and imagination, because it offers so much to our classroom reading communities.

Of course, it is understandable that some of us proceed into this area with some trepidation, if we proceed at all. We are preparing children for life in a world in which their faith and values will be challenged or, what may be worse, ignored at every turn. It is no wonder that some of us have chosen to avoid selecting books that—some fear—contain references to ideas or images associated with beliefs contrary to our own.

In my experience, however, I have found that such a fear causes us to reject too many treasures, and what's more, such fear is unnecessary. It is based on a misunderstanding of what literature is and the specific ways literature conveys meaning. Also, such a fear disregards the pedagogical presence of the Christian teacher and in fact deprives the class of

important interpretive experiences.

My all-time favorite work of fantasy literature is *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, and I use it, in some form, at several upper elementary levels. I choose the *Dream* in part because it enables students to discover for themselves a great deal about *how* things mean, *how* things are real, and the special role of art in the realm of truth. At first, students demand to know if Shakespeare "really

truth. I use *The Merchant of Venice* despite its anti-Semitism and *Animal Farm* despite its cold-war cynicism. As we read those works, we learn to exercise our critical capacities to interpret rather than simply extract meaning. Christian teachers have no less influence in guiding comprehension of fantasy literature than they do in other areas. What is more central to our educational mission than helping students

what Blake would call radical innocence on the other side of the imaginative literary experience. The finest fantasy literature produces a sort of wise-childlikeness. We may find ourselves, with our students, not in the place of the rote recitation of "Now I lay me down to sleep," but rather in the place from which issues the wise child's cry of "Abba!" It's a good place to be.

In fact, we may recognize that trying to be wise but fearless in selecting imaginative literature for children is an intrinsic part of our mission, since failure to nurture the imaginations of our students can have dire consequences that run counter to our goals as Christian educators.

Failed imagination affects community health, moral decisions, and the life of faith. Think how our society spits out images daily of our failure to imagine creative solutions to gunk-clogged rivers, unbreathable air, homelessness and helplessness and ethnic cleansing. Think, too, how often Jesus encountered failures of the imagination: at Bethany, where no one could imagine anything better than healing a sick man; at his own empty Easter tomb where (despite repeated teaching!) one of his closest friends couldn't imagine anything but a stolen corpse; and, of course, Thomas, the universal representative of the thoroughly failed imagination.

In the epilogue to George Bernard Shaw's *Saint Joan*, De Stogumber reflects that his faith came to life not as a result of official Church teaching but rather from witnessing Joan of Arc being burned at the stake. Cauchon asks, "Must then a Christ perish in torment in every age to save those who have no imagination?" As Christian educators, is it our mission to help students develop into human beings who can fully hear the good news that one Christ's death and resurrection are quite sufficient for all time. We are indeed fortunate to have such rich materials to help us in our task. ☺

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believed" in fairies, Amazon queens, and love potions. By the end of the unit students understand that those questions might be apt regarding a biblical commentary or a history text, but are somewhat beside the point to the literary way of meaning. The *Dream* is about a duke named Theseus (who may have never lived) and a fairy named Puck (who surely never lived) woven together to spin a tale of love and vanity and folly (which, alas, are yet alive and well).

C. S. Lewis and Madeleine L'Engle are two authors whose works I include in my curriculum in part because of their spiritual depth, or at the very least, because of spirited characters large enough to contain healthy souls. I know teachers who become nervous in the face of white witches and genies in lamps, but we need to remember that distinguishing between fiction and non-fiction reading is a skill students acquire long before they are ready for *Narnia* or *An Acceptable Time*. Distinguishing between realistic fiction and fantasy is but an extension of that skill.

We, the teachers, are, after all, present with the children to sharpen these skills as well as guide discussions on a wealth of topics including allegory, literary devices, symbolic value, imagery, deus ex machina, and many others. It's our job. Most of us freely select non-fantasy literature that requires the class to distinguish between the author's point of view and universal

understand that there is truth in the Bible, in *Hamlet*, and in the *New York Times*—all different?

When I teach L'Engle's *Many Waters*, for example, we always begin and end in Genesis, and I have never found children confused about where biblical narrative ends and virtual unicorns begin. When students ask, "Are angels really like that?" we launch into a biblical study of angels to distinguish between L'Engle's biblical scholarship and her imaginative constructs.

As a Christian educator, I look at the best of the fantasy writers as far more than "not dangerous." I would feel shackled indeed if I were forced to give them up because when I have entered with children into the wide and wild worlds of Lewis or L'Engle, we have found ourselves in a Stretched Universe, one that is, by imagination, opened to vast vision and possibility, where there's extra oxygen and extra room to move. It is in this Altered State that I find children (and more than one crusty grown-up) open to envisioning the largeness of grace. Tesseracting and time-traveling bishops are like imaginative muscle-stretches, warm-up exercises that prepare us for the real thing, thinking about the most limit-busting subject of all, the love of God in Christ Jesus.

One final advantage of journeying with our students through Lewis or L'Engle or Tolkien or Alexander, is the understanding that there is a place of



# Fantasy from the Artist's Palette

*Rennie VanderWal*

My earliest recollection of literary food for thought was a hearty diet of fairy tales. Reading myself into the tales of the fantastic provided for me a time in which the impossible was possible, a beautiful world of imagination was real, and the underdogs received the love that, at first, they were bereft of. It was a thrilling experience. I always felt sorry for the child who was picked on in my school experience. I guess I could empathize, having received similar treatment. Stories like "Cinderella" provided compassion and grace for one who was unable to help herself, and my idea of justice for the wicked step-mother and her two selfish daughters was gratified, too.

My intent, however, is to point out the validity of fantasy in the Christian school curriculum that goes beyond a mere subjective notion of personal preference. I believe that fantasy is an inspired art form; an imaginative description of the human experience transposed into the story of creatures in another world, the laws of which arise out of the faith in which the author's life is rooted.

Of course there is "bad" fantasy in which evil is celebrated because the author has lost touch with God and brings the lie of Satan, but this can be the case with any other genre of literature as well. I believe, however, that fantasy can be a particularly powerful means of expressing Truth legitimately. Today, fantasy often stands accused by Christians of being escapist in nature, being untrue, evoking fear in children, and simply being silly. In contrast, I believe it can be a genre that portrays reality (including spiritual reality) perhaps better than any other.

When one considers that all of

human history is the unfolding of God's story, with God as the author, then the scriptural motif of creation, fall, redemption, and restoration can be considered as the over-arching theme or meta-story of history. When we human beings, as image bearers of God, engage in the creative task of telling our own stories, the touchstone for truth will be the degree to which our creative works fit into the pattern of God's meta-story.

J. R. R. Tolkien, the Christian author of the famous Hobbit fantasies, worked out the relation between fantasy (or Faerie as he called it) and the primary story of the Scriptures. Tolkien considered humans to be sub-creators in the making of Faerieland. This sub-creation becomes a secondary world in which writers endow themselves with the enchanter's power of making "beauty that is an enchantment and an ever present peril," creating reality out of all of their imagined wonder. In this land, heavy things are able to fly, gray lead can become yellow gold, and a still rock a swiftly flowing river.

But not everything is necessarily beautiful. Because humans are fallen creatures, Tolkien says that we have "stained the elves with [our] own stain" and [we are] compelled to show also the image of the locked door as an example of eternal temptation. The fairy story, in the heart and imagination of the writer as the sub-creator, becomes a mirror of "Humanity" whose archetypes can be transmitted into the shapes of mysterious creatures in a land outside of our own time.

In the fairy story or fantasy the protagonist may be a weak, unheroic, persecuted individual with numerous physical flaws. The author-enchanter can change all that by sending a free gift of magic, love, or sacrifice via another character, whether the protagonist be

deserving or not. The "happy-ever-after" theme is the fantasy expression of free grace through the redeeming work of a savior who gives out of selfless love. Tolkien calls that consolation of the happy ending the "Eucatastrophe" ("eu"=good), which denies final defeat. It is secured through sacrifice and does not deny sorrow or failure, but the final outcome is the joy of deliverance.

When, as sub-creators, authors have built their secondary world well, they are able to portray Truth. Tolkien dares to compare good fantasy, therefore, with the story of the gospel in which Christ's sacrifice on the cross is the great Eucatastrophe, culminating in the resurrection and the restoration of God's world.

Many Christians look upon human imagination with suspicion; they regard making "images" that are different from perceived reality as disobedience to the

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**"Even non-Christian writers can, by God's common grace, reflect aspects of truth in their writing because they too are creative image bearers."**

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second commandment. Moreover, some quote Genesis 6:5 in support of the feeling that to use imagination is to give ourselves over to evil. ("The Lord saw the wickedness of humankind was great in the earth and that every inclination of the thoughts of their hearts was only evil continually." NRSV) Thus, I believe that non-Christian writers often do not write truth because they can only write what their unregenerate minds can discern. Humans can come to the point

of celebrating evil in the fantasies of their minds. As C. S. Lewis points out, an author will write about ideas that flow or grow out of "whatever spiritual roots [he or she has] succeeded in striking during the whole course of [his or her] life" (999). Consequently, if our minds are baptized by the Holy Spirit we cannot but have some understanding of truth. We cannot understand fully, as yet, but perceive as though "through a glass darkly." Even non-Christian writers can, by God's common grace, reflect aspects of truth in their writing because they too are creative image bearers.

A helpful analogy of the author as sub-creator is that of thinking of the author as a prism through which the pure light (the total wisdom of God) is refracted into millions of rays of color. All of God's human creatures reveal that wisdom in part through their own "color," and the totality of it won't be realized until God's number of the redeemed is complete.

Luci Shaw writes in her article "Truth Through Imagination and Metaphor," "It is my wild hope that perhaps creative Christians, by means of their 'baptized imaginations,' may be able to help integrate the universe by widening and sharpening their focus, by seeing the whole picture as if through God's eyes, by observing man and environment and saying, 'Yes, I see. This is like that. There is meaning in it'" (19). It takes imaginative story to help us see beyond our own rather small rational understanding.

Unfortunately, those that hold to the theory that there is truth only in what can be empirically experienced and rationally understood have a very narrow and even unscriptural view of reality and truth. Fantasy is often able to show far deeper truth than what we can understand through observation and rational thinking, just as an artist can often arouse powerful feelings through the subtleties of color variations and combinations. The gospel story is nonsense to the rational mind, yet it is the greatest Truth in the world. Through the power of "magic," that kind of truth can be illustrated in fantasy stories. In fantasies such evils as pride, greed, and selfishness are easily typified in the creatures of this secondary world. Seeing them in this setting, we more willingly recognize them as our own attributes

than if we saw them portrayed in people in more realistic stories. In the latter, we are more apt to suspect finger pointing by the author, or find others of our own experience to liken to them.

Fantasy is furthermore accused of being escapist in nature. C. S. Lewis attacks that notion with the idea that fantasy creates a secondary world in

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which the setting and characters are very obviously otherworldly. When entering that world we can enter into the excitement of heroism, danger, and triumph—as well as destruction—without expecting to encounter those same situations and characters in our own primary world. We enter into that world, perhaps, with a longing for something better than the reality that we experience in everyday life. Fairy tales, no doubt, arose out of the folklore of serfdom in which the poor suffered oppression by the rich landowners, with little hope of change for them in any "real" future. Their longing for something more came to expression in the fairy tales of their time and created those moments of joy, the pockets of sunshine in an otherwise often dreary existence. Their fantasies brought color to the landscape that otherwise might only have served as a symbol of their servitude.

In contrast, Lewis points out that sometimes the more "realistic stories" are more dangerous in their falsifying

of reality. The notion of superficial beauty, popularity, sex appeal, and power of money as being the end-all of happiness lies deceptively close to the reader's "real" world and can be especially dangerous food for a young person's thought. After reading stories that flatter the ego, one feels more often depressed than particularly joyful. Lewis refers to this longing for ego fulfillment as disease (dis-ease). We no longer can be at ease with ourselves after that. I never expected to marry a real prince; on the other hand, after reading fairy tales, I did expect to find certain qualities in my "prince" in the same sense as I sought what the apostle Paul calls the "greater (more excellent) gifts."

Fantasy is often condemned for being frightening in its portrayal of dragons and demons and gnomes and other monsters concocted in the imagination. Sometimes fantasy is frightening. I agree that children shouldn't be terrified for the sake of excitement, but there is evil in the world; and to pretend that there is nothing frightening about the effects of sin and death is to falsify life for children, too. On the other hand, just as children don't expect to meet Snow White, or a fairy godmother, they don't expect a dragon, a troll, or an ogre on their street or under their beds. Children instinctively know the confines of the secondary world and don't expect a transferal to their primary world.

The gift of being able to create good fantasy is a wonderful vehicle for our imaginations to imitate the Creator while we live on this earth. I imagine that someday, when we are made perfect, our powers of sub-creation will be extended far beyond the literary. The possibilities of the imagination of God's people will be endless, and God will see to it that imagination in his renewed people will be "very good!" ❸

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# I Still Believe in Fairy Tales



**Marianne Jones**

Are fairy tales harmful to children? To someone of my generation the question seems strange. Didn't we all cut our teeth on tales of castles and princesses, wicked witches and valiant princes? Fairy tales were among our earliest literary experiences, and the progression from Mother Goose to Sleeping Beauty was natural and inevitable.

But now we find ourselves in an age that challenges everything, from our political and religious leaders to the nuclear family. In this new Republic of Virtue, every aspect of our lives is daily put on trial; and it appears that even our beloved Rapunzel has been accused, if

not convicted, of messing with our children's minds.

Most of the criticism comes from two fronts: the feminist movement and—surprise—zealous and literal-minded Christians. Many politically correct feminists who would oppose censorship in theory are banning classic folktales from the nursery and stocking the bookshelves with new, rewritten versions that have had any trace of traditional sexist stereotypes expunged from their pages. *Their* children's minds will not be poisoned with images of Snow White cooking and cleaning for seven little men who are out working in the mines all day. Furthermore, there will be no more helpless princesses waiting to be rescued by their stalwart

heroes. Our modern princesses will take care of themselves, thank you very much.

While I have no quarrel with stories about strong, independent heroines, I feel uneasy with those people who would attempt to erase our society's collective memory by "laundering" the literature of our culture. Quite frankly, they scare me. When they have banned Shakespeare, the Brothers Grimm, and the King James Bible from our schools and bookshelves as containing "unsuitable" ideas for young minds, what will they put in their places? And who will they deem qualified to decide what world views are "appropriate"?

Of course folktales reinforce stereotypes. As products of the cultures





of their times, how could they do otherwise?

That is one of the supreme values of studying the literature of past centuries; it provides a window into the past by which we may better understand our present. Without that window, we are in immediate danger of becoming like the totalitarian society of George Orwell's *1984*. In that visionary tale, the government was able, by rewriting the history books, to create an intellectual vacuum in society, which it then filled with its own dogma.

My calling as a teacher is to keep culture alive. If I share with my students only the most politically correct art, music, and literature, according to the prevailing wisdom of our times, I will be limited to teaching only those things that have been created in the latter half of the twentieth century. Are we so arrogant as to believe that wisdom began in the 1960s? Or that we in North America in the last few decades have a monopoly on goodness and humanity?

But the mindset that hunts for

villains even in the most innocent vessels is not limited to feminists or other worldly movements. Many Christians, in their anxiety over the rise of New Age thinking, also take exception to the teaching of stories that include such no-no's as dragons, witches, talking animals, and magic. To such people, even C. S. Lewis' magnificent allegory of Christ's redemptive death and resurrection, *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, is suspect because he uses the vehicle of fantasy to convey the Christian message. What a world of wonder and delight is denied to the child who is "protected" from fantasy and imagination! It is not children, but literal-minded adults, who have difficulty separating make-believe from fact.

Such adults, in believing that the presence of wicked witches in fairy tales in some way promotes witchcraft and Satanism, are missing the point. In all our traditional folktales, the wicked witches and evil sorcerers are defeated and justly punished. That is one of the main reasons for the enduring popularity of these old stories among the younger set. Children are reassured by stories in

which bad and scary creatures are defeated. They feel safer knowing that evil is ultimately punished, and virtue rewarded.

In fact, the central issue of folktales is neither sex role stereotyping nor magic; it is the triumph of good over evil. In addition, folktales promote many of the ideals we as Christians would like to pass on to our children: ideals of virtue, forgiveness, heroism, and courage. Personally, I see more hope for the child who dreams of slaying dragons and freeing prisoners than for the child who dreams of being a rock star—or a wealthy businessman.

Fairy tales are about beauty. They are about truth and justice, wonder and imagination. They are daring to do great deeds, and obeying our noblest impulses. Further, they are part of our rich cultural and literary heritage.

More than ever, in this rootless and disconnected society, our children need this heritage. Let us not deny it to them. ©

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# Wrinkle on Trial

*Henry J. Baron*

There was going to be blood, Mr. Bange thought to himself. He could sense it by the looks on faces as people crowded into the gym of Heritage Christian Middle School. He could see it in Mrs. Wright, pushing her husband ahead of her, trying to get close to the front, a large handbag bulging with ammunition hanging from her shoulder. And he could see it in Mr. Reus standing in the doorway, at 6'5" towering over his wife, calmly and confidently surveying the restless crowd of parents and teachers already seated.

Principal Bange shuddered. He had tried everything he could to prevent this.

It all started when Ruby Wright had called him six weeks ago with the demand that Madeleine L'Engle's *A Wrinkle in Time* be removed from the library and all the reading lists. He had listened to her politely and patiently as she catalogued all the reasons for indicting L'Engle as a dangerous, un-Christian author who would surely lead the children astray and whose writings should not be found in a Christian school. Not being very familiar with the book or the author, he had found himself gradually becoming alarmed that such reading should be readily available for student consumption in his school. He felt vaguely responsible, offered Mrs. Wright a tentative apology, and promised to look into it at once.

What he looked into, he soon discovered, was a can of worms, or worse, a brood of vipers slithering like slimy eels on the bottom of a dark, dank barrel, repulsive but eager to escape. The librarian had snorted derisively at his suggestion to remove *Wrinkle* from the shelf, even temporarily. "What?" Ed Garde had exclaimed. "Yank a

Newberry classic, one of the most popular and wholesome books in this library? Over my dead body! If you're going to listen to Ruby Wright and her twisted ideas about occult symbols and witches and mental telepathy and all that nonsense, we might as well lock up the library."

Principal Bange had beat a hasty retreat, leaving his feisty librarian frowning fiercely while clutching a copy of Donald Hettinga's *Presenting Madeleine L'Engle*. But reminding himself of his authority and responsibility, Bange had tried another tack and loosed another viper or two.

He had asked Board President Bill Dozer to have a talk with the librarian and stave off a confrontation with Ruby Wright. But the "talk" had turned into an ultimatum, followed by a series of nasty meetings. Soon the teachers joined the fray. Ruby Wright gathered her forces in the community and delivered a petition with forty-six signatures of the school board, demanding the removal of *Wrinkle* and all other books of that ilk from the school program and premises. The librarian and teachers signed a counter petition. The board debated, dismissing Bill Dozer's suggestion to remove the offending books, fire the librarian, and reprimand the teachers, but were unable to agree on a solution that would appease both the community and the staff. When Grace De Vries, long-time and highly respected language arts teacher, reminded the board that the school had a book selection policy, the board member eagerly searched the document for wisdom. Instead they found that they had already violated its guidelines in numerous ways and that none of the criteria forbade the use of literature whose authors are impure in doctrine or in life or whose characters go on strange missions beyond the boundaries of

planet Earth and meet weird creatures along the way. Bill Dozer opined that the school was in dire need of a new document, but he was reminded that the board had adopted the policy only three years ago. At that point someone suggested the idea of a public forum where all the issues could be aired and where the board might well receive some guidance for action.

And this was the night.

It was almost eight o'clock now, and all the chairs were occupied. The principal made his way to the front, his heavy heart sighing a prayer for God's help, and then he stood facing the crowd of parents and preachers and teachers who had come to put *Wrinkle* on trial. Bange offered a short prayer for guidance and wisdom, for patience and charity. Then he turned the meeting over to Bill Dozer.

"Ladies and gentlemen," said Dozer, "we're here to discuss what kinds of books are appropriate reading for our Christian boys and girls. Obviously we are not all of one mind on that issue, or we wouldn't be here." Bill Dozer cast a reproving look in the direction of the faculty row where, among others, De Vries and Garde were seated next to each other for moral support. Then he continued. "So we thought it might be a good idea to expose these differences and find out who stands where and why. And we hope that the outcome of this meeting will help the board decide on the right course of action. As board president and chairman of this meeting, I want to recognize Mrs. Ruby Wright first of all, who will tell us about her objections."

Bange, seated on stage with Dozer, watched Ruby Wright walk stiffly to the microphone in front to address the audience. Then he listened again to the recital of evils in *Wrinkle* and other L'Engle books that would jeopardize



the children's faith: occult powers like mental telepathy, tesseracting, scrying, and psychic healing; occult symbols like runes, unicorns, rainbows, and crystal balls; occult characters like witches, demons, and mediums; New Age concepts like cosmic oneness, unity of all truth, and potential of human powers.

A rather acrimonious session ensued. Early on, Oscar Reus stood up. No one had trouble seeing him, and he didn't need a mike. "At Ruby's suggestion," he boomed, "I started reading *A Wrinkle in Time*. Not far into the book I read that Jesus was one of the great men along with da Vinci, Shakespeare, Schweitzer, Buddah, Beethoven, and others. Let me tell you, ladies and gentlemen, I had seen enough. For that is what Satan would have us and our precious children believe. And if that's what's being taught in this school, then your and my children don't belong here." A burst of applause indicated considerable support for Reus's position.

The Heritage Christian principal felt heart palpitations as the debate continued. Ed Garde explained to Reus that L'Engle is not saying that Jesus is just another extraordinary man but is talking about the opposition to the forces of darkness and that Jesus is the first among many to lead that battle. But he quickly lost audience sympathy when he went on to excoriate Oscar for lacking integrity to at least read the whole book before passing judgment on it. After that, voice after voice expressed misgivings or confusion or outright distrust of the school's program, until the lovers of L'Engle sagged defeatedly in their chairs.

With the clock approaching nine, Dozer announced that there was time for just one more speaker. Bange was glad to see Grace De Vries rise, for he had confidence in the good sense and wisdom of his veteran teacher. Mrs. De Vries, the parents' favorite teacher at the school, strode purposefully to the microphone. There was a steady look in her eye when she faced the group.

"A year ago," she began softly, "I was asked to introduce Madeleine L'Engle as a speaker at a teachers conference. Before that meeting I had the privilege of having lunch with her. We talked about our grief, for both of us had lost a husband to cancer. Both of us knew the feeling of lostness when

suddenly a familiar figure isn't there anymore. We talked about that. And we talked about the Lord's presence in our valley of tears, teaching us about trust. We cried a little, but it was a good kind of crying. Madeleine L'Engle became a dear Christian friend during that hour.

"Tonight I heard many of you attack Madeleine L'Engle as a heretic, as a devious deceiver, as a dangerous anti-Christian influence on our children. That hurt because that's not the Madeleine L'Engle I know, not in person and not through her books.

"I've read *A Wrinkle in Time* to all four of my children when they were small. For the past fifteen years I've read it to your children too in my sixth grade classroom. Some of those children have gone on to teach in public and Christian schools. Have they told you that they are now sharing this book with their fifth and sixth graders? And why? For the same reason that I have and hope to continue to for as long as I'm able to teach at Heritage Christian: we believe that the reading of good literature is an important means of developing God's image in us. It brings us closer to an understanding of the nature of evil and opens our hearts more to the power of good. *A Wrinkle in Time* does that better than many books. It educates the head and the heart of children in all the ways that, in our Christian school philosophy here, we say we want to educate.

"It's a book about a brother and sister who nearly lose everything that is precious to them. By the time their magnificent and frightening adventure is finished, in which they risk their lives to save their father from the evil one, they have learned lessons about faith and humility and courage and love that they will never forget. And, I pray, neither will my children nor yours.

"My students shudder at the power of evil. They judge precocious Charles for relying on his own strength and thereby succumbing to the power of IT, the evil brain that has cut itself off from all human feelings of decency and needs. L'Engle teaches them about the sin of arrogance and the limitation of intelligence.


"My students get exasperated with Meg's whining, impatience, and angry tongue. Meg must learn to recognize the evil within her before she can confront the evil that holds her brother in its grip.

L'Engle teaches us about our need for human and divine help when grace and tenderness and healing prepare Meg for her final mission.

"And my students cheer her on when poor, petrified, vulnerable, insecure Meg is the chosen one to encounter mortal dangers and face the monstrous evil power that controls Charles. And they nearly dance with excitement when Meg releases the magnificent power of her own love and the love of others for her brother and thereby frees him from IT's control.

"We talk about the evil forces in our own life and in the world beyond our walls. And we talk about the power of God and the love of Jesus through which, L'Engle teaches us, we are indeed more than conquerors. The children understand that, maybe more feelingly than they ever did in Sunday school.

"Sometime later they'll learn about Einstein and Michelangelo and Madame Curie, but right now those names don't mean much to them. Sometime later they'll learn about physics and wrinkles in time or 'tesseract,' and then they may want to know about all the research and study that went into the writing of this book. Sometime later they'll learn about New Age thinking and the occult and learn to critique it from a Christian point of view. Then they may want to evaluate whether L'Engle's message and the messages of other authors promote or denigrate faith and spirituality. Since this is a Christian school that is confessionally Reformed, they better get to that when they're ready for it. But in my sixth grade I'm profoundly grateful when one of your children comes up to me, as one did recently after we finished *A Wrinkle in Time*, and says, 'Mrs. De Vries, God is really great and good, isn't he.'"

Principal Bange breathed a sigh of relief and a prayer of thanks. The applause told him as Grace De Vries took her seat that all would be well. Yes, Mrs. Wright and some of her followers might still have questions, and the school would have to be sensitive to that. But Christian education at Heritage would survive. Maybe it would even get better. 

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# Of Dogs and Witches: Dangerous Books in the Christian Classroom

**Robert W. Bruinsma**

About twenty years ago, when I was teaching a combination grade 6/7 class in a small Christian elementary school, I experienced my first run-in with a parent who was adamant about the removal of a novel from the language arts curriculum. The novel was Madeleine L'Engle's *A Wrinkle in Time*, the 1963 Newberry Medal winner, which has continued to have a history of difficulty with certain Christian school communities to this day.

As I recall, the parent's reason for wishing to have the book removed from study was ostensibly because it "glorified witchcraft and reduced Jesus to the status of simply one of many great figures of Western civilization." This parent went on to say that she had made some study of the novels on the provincial prescribed list of approved works for elementary schools, and she was pleased to see that I had also chosen

the book, *Big Red*, by Jim Kjelgaard for study because, in her view, "books like *Big Red* with their sense of adventure and solid values are just what we send our kids to Christian school for," or words to that effect. And I must confess that I have never heard or read a word of criticism from any Christian school community about *Big Red*, a book first published in 1945, its copyright renewed in 1973, with ten printings since then. It is, by all reports, a heart-warming wilderness adventure of a poor boy who makes good through hard work and a bit of luck with the help of his majestic Irish setter, *Big Red*.

I chose *Big Red* and *A Wrinkle in Time* for study in my grade 6/7 class for a number of reasons, not the least of which was that, though they are very different books, they are both "good reads" likely to appeal to a wide cross section of middle school readers. But another important reason for choosing these two very disparate titles was that

I thought (and still think) that grade 6/7 is not too soon to begin to teach Christian kids something about literary discernment. I hoped I could help them to see that *Big Red* is a far more "dangerous" book than is *A Wrinkle in Time*.

Before I am rejected out of hand as some high falutin' college professor who is simply trying to make things difficult, it may be best to let these two books speak for themselves. What follows on the next two pages is a very brief plot summary of the two books (for those who haven't read them) and then a few selected quotations from each text.

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# Big Red

## by Jim Kjelgaard

**Summary:** Danny and his widowed father, Ross, are poor trappers living on the vast Wintapi estate of the wealthy but benevolent Mr. Haggin. By a stroke of luck, Danny is allowed to care for Mr. Haggin's prize Irish setter, Champion Sylvester's Boy (Big Red). Together the boy and "his" dog forge a relationship, which, as the book's jacket says, leads to Danny's discovery of "what it takes to make a good dog and a good man."

**Selected Quotes** (all italics mine—RWB):

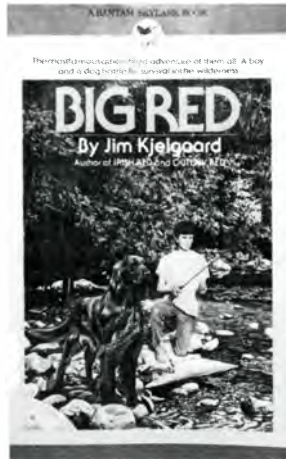
P. 6 Throughout his life [Danny] had accepted without even thinking about them the hardships and the trials that he lived. It was his, *he was the man who could cope with it*, he could imagine nothing else.

P. 24 Ross had been around long enough to know that people who handled rich man's dogs could make more money in a year than some trappers made in a lifetime. *They could be somebody, too.*

P. 32 [Mr. Haggin asks Danny], "What do you think of dog shows?"

"They seem like a piddlin' waste of time," Danny confessed.

"Danny, you're wrong. You would be entirely right if all a dog show amounted to was a bit of ribbon, or a cup, or a boost in an owner's pride. But there's more to it than that, much more. In one sense you could think of it as part of the story of man, and his constant striving toward something better. A dog show is illustrative of man's achievement, and a blue ribbon is more than a bit of silk. It's a mark, Danny, one that can never be erased. The dog that wins it will not die. If we send Boy to the show, and he comes back as the best of breed, then that's something for all future dog lovers and dog owners to build on. Don't you see? A hundred years from now someone may stand



on this very spot with a fine Irish setter, and he'll trace its lineage back to some other fine Irish setter, perhaps to Boy. And he will know that he has built on what competent men have declared to be the very best. *He will know also that he, too, can go one step nearer the perfection that man must and will have in all things.* It did not start with us, Danny, but with the first man who ever dreamed of an Irish setter. All we're trying to do is advance one step further and Boy's ribbon, if he wins one, will simply be proof that we've succeeded.

"I see," Danny breathed. "I never thought of it like that before."

"Always think of it that way, Danny," Mr. Haggin urged.

P. 110 The Picketts could seldom afford a doctor, and even though they now had fifty dollars a month that Mr. Haggin was paying Danny to take care of Red, *it never occurred to either of them to pay another man to do what they could do themselves.*

P. 110 Ross seldom rested, and never wasted time. *Ross had always secretly dreamed of having fine things, luxurious things*, and from the start was doomed never to get them. But he never seemed to recognize the fact that he was doomed, and always tried to bring as much as he could into the shanty in the beech woods.

P. 152 [After having killed a big buck deer and apprehending an escaped convict] A warm feeling crept through him. Life in the beech woods might be hard, harsh, and dangerous. But only the strong survived there, and Danny felt a swelling pride as the fact was driven home to him. The dead buck, hung by its antlers and swinging gently in the wind, was more than just another deer. It was another achievement and another victory, *an assurance that he was strong.*

P. 201 And there in the still of the night it was as though some mysterious vessel poured into him a renewal of an old faith. *First, it was faith in himself*, and then that in Red.

P. 215 Something strong seemed to have grown within him. He was not the Danny Pickett who had been born and lived in poverty all his life. He had cast off the old shackles, the confining bonds that said he and Ross had to struggle along as best they could. *If others could do big things so could he.* ☺

As these quotations clearly demonstrate, the fundamental ethos or spirit that informs *Big Red* is one of humanistic, Darwinian self-sufficiency; humans must rely on their own strength and wits to get ahead in the world, and getting ahead is largely a matter of acquiring luxurious things. This strikes me as the fundamental heresy of all time since the Fall. *A Wrinkle in Time*, on the other hand, is pervaded by a sense of the cosmic struggle between good and evil, which can only be overcome by self-sacrificing love and the grace provided by supernatural transcendence. Thus the fantasy genre of *A Wrinkle in Time* provides a far more realistic (i.e. truthful i.e. biblical) account of reality than does an ostensibly "realistic" novel like *Big Red*.

Does that mean that there aren't aspects of *A Wrinkle in Time* that aren't open to Christian criticism? Of course not! Or does it mean that I would recommend banning a book like *Big Red* from consideration in the Christian school classroom? Again, of course not! My worry however, is that Christians often focus their attacks on superficial issues and are oblivious to the much more subtle but powerful manifestations of the Lie that masquerades as "harmless adventure." And it is precisely in the Christian school classroom that Christian children can be guided to test the spirits as they come to expression in literature.

### REFERENCES

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L'Engle, Madeleine. 1962. *A Wrinkle in Time*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

# A Wrinkle in Time

## by Madeleine L'Engle

*Summary:* A group of children must rescue their father from a dark planet that is under the direct influence of a great evil power. They are aided by three strange "ladies" who take them on an interplanetary journey by creating a "wrinkle" in time.

### *Selected Quotes:*

P. 40 [Calvin speaking about his dysfunctional family] "But I love her. That's the funny part of it. I love them all, and they don't give a hoot about me. Maybe that's why I call when I'm not going to be home. Because I care. Nobody else does. You don't know how lucky you are to be loved."

P. 46 [Meg] "Do you think things always have an explanation?"

[Mrs. Murry] "Yes, I believe that they do. But I think that with our human limitations we're not always able to understand the explanations. But you see, Meg, just because we don't understand doesn't mean that the explanation doesn't exist."

P. 63 Mrs. Who's glasses shone at her gently. "If you want to help your father you must learn patience. *Vitam impendere vero.* 'To stake one's life for the truth. That is what we must do.'"

P. 65 [After Mrs. Whatsit transmutes into a glorious centaur-like creature.] Calvin fell to his knees.

"No." Mrs. Whatsit said, though her voice was not Mrs. Whatsit's voice. "Not to me, Calvin. Never to me. Stand up."

P. 67 [When the children are traveling on "Mrs. Whatsit's" back and fly over a wonderful garden in which many marvelous creatures are singing.] Listen then. "Sing unto the Lord a new song. . . ." Throughout her entire body Meg felt a pulse of joy such as she had never known before.

Pp. 71-73 [The children are brought into a high plateau and look back toward the Earth only to see a dark shadow that blots out everything.] What could there be about a shadow that was so terrible that she knew that there had never been before, or ever would be again, anything that would chill her with a fear that was beyond shuddering, beyond crying or screaming, beyond the possibility of comfort?

"That dark Thing we saw," she said. "Is that what my father is fighting?"

"Yes," Mrs. Which said.

P. 84 [Mrs. Whatsit] "It was really a very great honor for me to be chosen for this mission. It's just because of my verbalizing and materializing so well. But of course we can't take any credit for our talents. It's how we use them that counts."

Pp. 88-89 [The children visit the "Happy Medium" and are shown the evil shadow covering their own earth and are told that it is Evil, the Powers of Darkness. They are told it's been there a long time but that a battle against evil is being fought throughout the universe. Earth has supplied its fighters against

evil as well.] "All through the universe it's being fought, all through the cosmos, and my, but it's a grand and glorious battle."

"Who have our fighters been?" Calvin asked.

"Oh, you must know them, dear," Mrs. Whatsit said.

Mrs. Who's spectacles shone out at them triumphantly. "And the light shineth in the darkness, and the darkness comprehended it not."

"Jesus," Charles Wallace said.

"Why of course, Jesus! Of course!" Mrs. Whatsit said.

"Go on, Charles, love. There were others. All your great artists. They've been lights for us to see by." [Here, in conversation, are now mentioned many of the "greats" of civilization: Leonardo da Vinci, Michelangelo, Shakespeare, Bach, Pasteur, Madame Curie, Einstein, Schweitzer, Ghandi, Buddha, Beethoven, Rembrandt, St. Francis, Euclid, Copernicus.]

P. 102 "Be aware of pride and arrogance, Charles, for they may betray you."

P. 130 [The Man with the Red Eyes] "Why don't you trust me, Charles? Why don't you trust me enough to come in and find out what I am? I am peace and utter rest. I am freedom from all responsibility. To come in to me is the last difficult decision you need ever make."

P. 140 [Charles Wallace captured by IT] "On Camazotz we are all happy because we are all alike. Differences create problems."

P. 160 "But that's exactly what we have on Camazotz. Complete equality. Everybody exactly the same." For a moment her brain reeled with confusion. Then came a moment of blazing truth. "No!" she cried triumphantly. "*Like and equal* are not the same thing at all."

P. 172 [Father] "I am a human being and a very fallible one. But I agree with Calvin. We were sent here for something. And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are called according to his purpose."

P. 186 "Are you fighting the Black Thing?" Meg asked.

"Oh yes," Aunt Beast replied. "In doing that we can never relax. We are the called according to His purpose, and who He calls, them He also justifies. Of course we have help, and without help it would be much more difficult."

P. 191 [Meg trying to explain to the Beasts what the three ladies are when Calvin suddenly interjects]

"Angels!" Calvin shouted from across the table. "Guardian angels!" There was a moment's silence, and he shouted again, his face tense with concentration, "Messengers! Messengers from God!"

Pp. 198-199 Comparison of human freedom to a sonnet—a strict poetic form but complete freedom within the form.

P. 201 [Mrs. Who] "Listen, Meg. Listen well. The foolishness of God is wiser than men; and the weakness of God is stronger than men. . . ." [1 Cor. 1:25, 27-28].

P. 207 And that's where IT made its fatal mistake, for as Meg said automatically, "Mrs. Whatsit loves me; that's what she told me, that she loves me." Suddenly she knew. She knew! Love. That was what she had that IT did not have. She had Mrs. Whatsit's love, and her father's, and her mother's, and the real Charles Wallace's love, and the twins', and Aunt Beast's. And she had love for them. ☺





# *A Wrinkle in Time:* A Point of Contention

*Cathy Smith*

I lost my battle. Having enthusiastically taught *A Wrinkle in Time* twice, I was dismayed when the Education Committee and Board of my school removed this novel from the curriculum because of concerns expressed by parents over its alleged New Age content. Hurt and angry, especially because this book had been my preferred choice and had been approved only two years earlier, I tried to fight back. I marshalled my literary and theological defenses. The result was a mere skirmish. After a polite hearing, it was over.

I began to doubt myself. Had I been the victim of a New Age hoax? Could I no longer competently judge literature? Having ruminated over this event for a number of years, I have concluded two things. I remain convinced that *A Wrinkle in Time* is a story rich in Christian themes which deserves a careful reading. But if it becomes a casualty of conflict between Christians, we extinguish the very flame of meaning this novel bears so brilliantly aloft.

## Created Unique

The novel revolves around Meg, a likable but insecure girl, who grows to appreciate the value of individuality, not in the secular guise we see propounded in our society, but as the inherent worth of each person created in the image of God. Meg dislikes herself because of her hair, her braces, her clumsiness, and her difficulties in school. Early in the novel she grouches, "I wish I were a different person . . . I hate myself" (53).

Meg eventually gains a healthy self-respect because of a number of factors. She is loved by her family, a blessing that her friend Calvin envies. Meg, in turn, loves her family, and

especially her gifted brother Charles Wallace. She grows to care for Calvin, too, who has unusual empathic abilities. In accepting and loving these two individuals, who are both "different" in some sense, Meg learns to prize her own special qualities.

Meg's visit to the planet Ixchel, through the scientific discovery of "tessering," shows her that its inhabitants are valuable, too, in spite of their initially repulsive appearance. Their mercy and spiritual insight soon overshadow their external characteristics. When Meg visits the troubled planet of Camazotz, where the people are programmed to be identical, she admits to herself, "Maybe I don't want to be like everybody else either" (129).

The three witches, who are sent to help Meg, are instrumental in explaining to Meg that some of the very qualities she despises in herself can be used for good. It is her stubbornness that helps her resist the evil of IT. Mrs. Whatsit points out that whatever particular gifts we may have, they are not ours to glory in, but are there for the service of others. Regarding her own inclusion in this mission to Earth, Mrs. Whatsit acknowledges, "It's just because of my verbalizing and materializing so well, you know. But of course we can't take any credit for our own talents. It's how we use them that counts" (80). Here Paul's instructions about the use of the Spirit's gifts for the common good in I Corinthians 12 are exemplified.

Accepting oneself as a person brings the concomitant responsibility of making one's own choices. Someone else cannot make those important decisions for us. The result would be the situation of Camazotz, where the citizens are mere automatons. Nor can a loved one stand in our place of decision such as Meg's father wishes to do when he says, "But I wanted to do it for you. . . That's what every parent wants" (180).

I stressed to my students how this epitomizes our relationship with Jesus Christ. Neither our parents, nor our church, nor anyone else can make a decision to accept him as Savior on our behalf. It has to be a personal commitment.

## Church Communal

*A Wrinkle in Time* does not project the idea that community is insignificant. The loving and stable family to which Meg belongs is held up as a formative strength. Additionally, the novel provides a tender picture of how the body of believers can function.

After her encounter with the Black Thing, Meg experiences a symbolic death and rebirth. Her frozen paralysis and subsequent healing is a metaphor for the dying to one's old nature and being reborn, of which the Bible speaks. Aunt Beast, a creature from Ixchel, is a catalyst in Meg's recovery. In this manner, Aunt Beast functions much as the church does in leading the believer on the road to thankful service for Christ.

Aunt Beast points out the effect of evil: "The Black Thing burns unless it is counteracted properly" (162). Meg falls asleep "like a very small child" (163), and then, when she awakens, is ministered to by Aunt Beast: "We will have a fur garment for you in a moment, . . . and then we will feed you. . . . You must be as an infant again" (163). Aunt Beast surrounds Meg with "warmth and peace" (166) and dresses and feeds her like a baby. There are echoes here of I Peter 2:2 where Peter urges: "Like newborn babies, crave spiritual milk so that by it you may grow up in your salvation. . . ." as well as a number of other New Testament passages.

Aunt Beast and her companions function like the church in that they not only are a nurturing body, but they have a mission as well. They assure Meg that

they are concerned about the “lost” Charles Wallace: “We would never leave him behind the shadow” (166). They are resolved in every way to fight against evil.

### Doctrine in Fiction

If much of *A Wrinkle in Time* is encased in Christian imagery and biblically based themes, as I have tried to demonstrate in this admittedly brief fashion, what is it about this novel that creates so much controversy? The majority of criticisms are concerned with New Age ideas. The basic misconception experienced by well-meaning parents who object to this book is that they simply lose sight of the fact that it is fiction. The adventures in it are imaginary. This is a piece of art that must be judged on the basis of literary criteria; it is not a New Age handbook, nor is it a handbook on Christianity for that matter, either.

If a novel such as *A Wrinkle in Time* can be removed so readily from our Christian schools, then are we beginning an unfortunate process of removing fantasy and imagination from the curriculum? How will we be able to justify retaining classics such as *The Lion, The Witch And The Wardrobe*; *Peter Pan*; *The Wizard of Oz*; *A Christmas Carol*; and dozens of other favorites that also contain ghosts, witches, centaurs, and magic?

The most profound criticism dealt with is that in *A Wrinkle in Time* L’Engle appears to equate Jesus with other notable human warriors against evil. By implication, this seems to be a denial of his divinity. However, a careful reading of the text leads to a completely orthodox presentation of Christ’s role in the defeat of evil. It is noteworthy that Jesus is mentioned first in the list of those who fight against the darkness. He is “the light that shineth in the darkness” (84). The great artists and scientists and humanitarians that are listed are “lights for us to see by” (85). In this subtle way L’Engle acknowledges that God’s grace and light can be found and appreciated in the human accomplishments of many people and cultures. Nonetheless, the tiny article *the* clearly differentiates Jesus’ light from that of the others.

In her book *Walking on Water*, L’Engle speaks to criticism of this passage when she emphatically asserts, “To be truly Christian means to see Christ

everywhere, to know him as all in all. I don’t mean to water down my Christianity into a vague kind of universalism, with Buddha and Mohammed all being more or less equal to Jesus—not at all! But neither do I want to tell God (or my friends) where he can and cannot be seen!” (32). “Well,” protests the objecting parent, “why not make this distinction a little more obvious in *A Wrinkle in Time*?” The response to this again relates to literature as an art form.

One of the ongoing dilemmas English teachers encounter is to demonstrate to their students that the study of literature is an academic discipline, like any other subject, which operates within certain prescribed boundaries. Just because something is in print does not qualify it to be deemed “art.” Similarly, just because one is able to read, it does not follow that one has the necessary tools of knowledge, analysis, or imagination to assess a work critically. Literature is an aesthetic activity grounded in symbol and suggestion. To ask that L’Engle stop at a climactic moment in her novel and delineate precisely what her doctrinal beliefs are regarding the saving grace of Jesus Christ and common grace as expressed in the lives of people like Shakespeare, Buddha, or Pasteur is to ask her to forsake the artistic intent of her novel and to engage in writing that is then expository or catechetical. When a novel exhibits a message so blatantly overt, it ceases to be a novel and becomes, in fact, propaganda.

It is worthwhile, in this regard, to note that L’Engle writes for a general readership, not one that is predominantly Christian. *A Wrinkle in Time* embodies her spiritual beliefs but is not intended to spell them out in detail. In the same way, an artist might painstakingly render a portrait of Jesus on the cross, capturing a realistic image of his human agony and suffering. Would we then criticize this artist for not including evidence of the resurrection? That would not be fair; the whole story of redemption was not his purpose for that canvas. L’Engle does not deny the divinity of Christ in this passage. For the discerning reader the line between Jesus and the mortal heroes has been drawn.

### God’s Saving Power

Another objection to *A Wrinkle in Time* that continues in much the same

vein is the perception that Meg conquers the evil IT in her own strength. This is seen as an example of the New Age idea that salvation comes from within oneself. By implication, this idea denies our need for a savior and promotes the idea of the perfectibility of humankind. In the novel evil is recognized as an entity that must be resisted. Mrs. Which, one of witches, reprimands the Happy Medium because she doesn’t wish to face evil: “Therre will nno llonggerrr bee sso manyy pplleasantt thnggss too llookk att ifff rressponsibble ppeople ddo nnot ddo ssomethingg abboutt thee unnpplleasantt oness” (82). Mr. Murry, while confessing his fallibility, also affirms that the great task is to war against evil, and he quotes Scripture: “We were sent here for something. And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are called according to his purpose” (157). Aunt Beast fights the Black Thing but, again, not in her own strength. Concerning the battle waged against evil, she tells Meg: “In doing that we can never relax. We are the called according to His purpose, and whom He calls, them He also justifies” (157). To the reader who can make the deduction, the conclusion is clear that it is none other than God himself who empowers his servants to work against evil.

As the story unfolds, Meg learns that the most effective weapon against evil is love. Charles Wallace is rescued from the control of IT because of her love for him. She is enabled to do this in part because she remembers that Mrs. Whatsit loves her. The final chapter of the novel makes abundantly clear that this capacity to love another individual comes from God. The chapter is titled “The Foolish and the Weak,” another reference to Scripture. As Meg is faced with the frightening task of rescuing Charles Wallace, Mrs. Whatsit reminds her that she may not attempt the task without “grace or understanding” (176). Mrs. Who gives Meg some understanding, a gift, which will aid her. This gift is I Corinthians 1:25-29:

The foolishness of God is wiser than men; and the weakness of God is stronger than men. For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called, but God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to



confound the wise, and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty. And base things of the world and things which are despised, hath God chosen. . . . May the right prevail (182).

It is God who works his will, even through frail and sinful creatures. As Meg confronts her test, she confesses her “weakness and foolishness and baseness,” but, equipped by none other than God himself, she is capable of saving Charles Wallace. The idea that Meg in her own strength completes this task can only arise from a misreading of the text. That my interpretation is the correct one is substantiated in *Walking on Water* where L’Engle writes: “In a very real sense not one of us is qualified, but it seems that God continually chooses the most unqualified to his work, to bear his glory. If we are forced to accept our own evident lack of qualification, then there’s no danger that we will confuse God’s work with our own” (62).

### **Ironic Opposites**

The inclusion of witches in *A Wrinkle in Time* is another aspect of the novel that arouses suspicion in the eyes of some readers. The witches have been compared to New Age spirit guides. But clearly the witches are images of angels. On the planet Uriel Calvin attempts to bow down and worship Mrs. Whatsit as she transforms her physical appearance. She warns, “Not to me Calvin. Never to me. Stand up” (63). As they traverse the planet, Mrs. Whatsit and others sing a psalm of praise to God. Calvin eventually figures it out: “Angels! . . . Guardian angels! . . . Messengers of God” (173). In *Walking on Water* L’Engle affirms her belief in the biblical depiction of angels. She states, “I believe in angels. . . . If we read the Bible, and if what we read has anything to do with what we believe, then we have no choice but to take angels seriously. . . .” (21). The stumbling block is naturally the fact that the angels in this story are clothed with the imagery of witches, and this is perceived as dangerous and misleading to the reader.

Charles Wallace knows instantly that the three ladies aren’t witches at all. When he and Meg visit the haunted house, they see an old black crow, a grey rat, and a door opening of its own

volition. Charles Wallace says, “They get a lot of fun out of using all the typical props. . . .” (38). When the travelers arrive on the planet Uriel, Mrs. Which appears in the traditional garb of a witch as a joke in response to Mrs. Who’s quotation about witches from *Macbeth*. The ladies share a hearty laugh. When Charles Wallace is moved to scold them, Mrs. Which replies, “Anndd wee musstn’tt looose ourr sennses of hummorr. . . . Thee onnllly wway tto ccope withh ssomethingg ddeeadly sseriouss iss tto ttry ttoo ttreait itt a littlle lligghly” (60). Meg informs the “possessed” Charles Wallace that Mrs. Whatsit is not a witch, and Calvin agrees: “You know she’s not. You know that’s just their game, their way, maybe of laughing in the dark” (130).

Why use these conventions? Aren’t they invitations to misunderstanding? For our answer we must turn once again to literary convention. Irony occurs when a statement says one thing but means another or when a situation develops contrary to expectation. As has been mentioned previously, L’Engle is highly opposed to Christians being judgmental about how and through whom God extends his grace, something Meg must learn, too. The beasts, whose outer appearance is revolting, are actually good and kind. The witches are really angels. Much as we would like matters to be black and white, they are not always so in this fallen world, as Jesus himself points out when he leads his disciples to see that the widow’s mite is a worthier contribution than the hefty donation of the rich man.

The function of the Happy Medium, another character of concern to those worried about New Age influence, fits into this pattern of irony. Meg’s mother wonders, “A happy medium is something I wonder if you’ll ever learn” (18,19). When we ask someone to use a happy medium, we want them to strive for a balanced viewpoint or a sense of moderation. The character of the Happy Medium is a play upon this idea. Ironically, and somewhat comically, she doesn’t want to view any scenes of evil. She only wishes to see happy events, for which Mrs. Which scolds her. But Mrs. Which also scolds Charles Wallace when he lacks a sense of humor and concentrates only on the negative. When Sandy remarks, “Use a happy medium,

Meg, for heaven’s sake” (29), the reader should recognize that it is precisely heaven’s perspective that is desired, a true picture that acknowledges the presence of evil, but at the same time foresees the ultimate triumph of good (see Psalm 2:4).

Writers use irony to startle the reader into an insight. Similarly, C. S. Lewis in *The Screwtape Letters* has the devils refer to Satan as “our Father” and to God as “our Enemy” in their correspondence. Thus irony jogs the intellect into reflecting upon appearance and reality.

### **Imagining the “Impossible”**

Concerns about animism and reincarnation in *A Wrinkle in Time* arise from the same misunderstanding of how literature operates. In the imaginative world of this novel, stars are reborn after self-sacrifice. There is absolutely no suggestion that L’Engle thus believes that stars are genuinely animate beings. This phenomenon is simply a symbolic rendering of that very biblical concept of dying to one’s old nature and being made new in Christ. The confusion of what is symbolic and imaginative with what is real will drag the Christian educator into murky waters.

My son came home from school with a story he had written, in which he imagined himself to be a river and described what he saw on his way to the ocean. Could this story be construed as an example of the New Age doctrine of “oneness”? Was he participating in an adulation of “Mother Earth”? I found my son’s assignment to be a clever way of leading a student to a fresh appreciation of God’s creation. The creative writing teacher may outline an exercise in which the student must imagine himself or herself to be an eraser and speak about the classroom activities from that perspective. Is the teacher then encouraging a belief in animism?

The same difficulty occurs with symbols such as rainbows or centaurs, which are also used in New Age thinking. That in no way precludes L’Engle from using them as she sees fit in her art. Certainly Christians recognize that the rainbow is God’s own chosen symbol of his eternal protection. Will Christians avoid using this time-honored symbol

of hope merely because New Agers use it as well? There are groups who call themselves Christian with whom I have no identification at all and whose activities I find abhorrent, but I do not then cease to call myself a Christian.

The exploration of telepathy in the novel causes some to believe that L'Engle is advocating the idea that humans are evolving to a higher plane of life. It seems to me that the reality of failed communication in human life can lead quite legitimately to the question "What if we could communicate directly?" Is this "what if" more dangerous or wrong than stories in which animals and human beings speak to one another or animals speak to other animals? Children accept the ideas of telepathy and "tessering" because they understand the novel to be fantasy just as they accept animals leading human lives such as do Frog and Toad in *The Wind in the Willows*.

Ideas about time travel and telepathy may be deserving of more serious consideration by Christians. We know that our physical bodies have changed over the past few hundred years. Widely publicized research has shown that children today are experiencing puberty approximately two years earlier in life than did their grandparents. Athletes have achieved phenomenal successes, attributable not only to drugs, but also to better training, nutrition, and advancements in the knowledge of kinesthetics. If, through God's grace, our bodies are capable of improvement, is it so improbable that our brains may develop in ways that we cannot yet fathom? Searching the Bible with respect to these questions, L'Engle raises a number of thought-provoking facts.

In *Walking on Water* she states, "God is always calling on us to do the impossible. It helps me to remember that anything Jesus did during his life here on earth is something we should be able to do, too" (19). We confess that Jesus was fully human. He walked on water, and so did Peter. In his glorified body, after his resurrection, Jesus came and went without regard for walls. Philip disappeared from the sight of the Ethiopian. These truths must cause us to ponder "What does it mean to be wholly human?"

Should we be upset with L'Engle for exploring these ideas? Today's heart

transplant would have been incomprehensible to any sincere Christian five hundred years ago. If it could have been imagined, would it not have been condemned as presumptuously entering upon God's domain? If the Lord should tarry another fifty or one hundred years or longer before his return, what advances might future Christians be thankful for which we at this point can only conceive of as evil?

In her slim but profound book *The Liberty of Obedience*, Elisabeth Elliot gives an example of how Christians in any time period can be convinced that they have the total picture and no new developments will be forthcoming:

"I am in earnest about forsaking 'the world' and following Christ. But I am puzzled about worldly things. What is it I must forsake?" a young man asks. "Colored clothes, for one thing. Get rid of everything in your wardrobe that is not white. Stop sleeping on a soft pillow. Sell all your musical instruments and don't eat any more white bread. You cannot, if you are sincere about obeying Christ, take warm baths or shave your beard. To shave is a lie against Him who created us, to attempt to improve on His work." This is the teaching of a celebrated Christian institution in the second century (Elliot 45-46).

Always assuming that God is the Creator and Giver of all good gifts and that he is bringing about his perfect plan for his world, I don't think we ought to ban all imagining or exploring ideas about telepathy or time travel as sinful. Let us not delude ourselves into thinking that we in the twentieth century now possess all available insight into what it means to be a Christian any more than did the monk in the second century who forbade shaving.

The freedom to imagine is at stake

in our Christian schools. I maintain that an author has the creative license to imagine a beast to be like an aunt, a witch to be good, a lion to be gentle, or an eraser to think. While it is true that Scripture prohibits believers from engaging in occult practices, how this admonition relates to the realm of the imagination appears to me to be a different matter entirely. If I as a Christian author invent a story in which one character murders another, am I then guilty of murder myself? Fantasy and fairy tale, fable and myth constitute a major influence in world literature. As they engage in serious aesthetic work, Christian writers and readers have the freedom in Christ to explore the archetypes of good and evil our human civilization has produced.

There were more charges against *A Wrinkle in Time* than I have shared here, and further rebuttals. The sad part was that increasingly I began to dislike people whom I had respected, and they began to resent me, too. The friction built up to a point where I seriously debated quitting my job. Finally, I knew that I had to let it go. A personal campaign to save this book was fruitless.

Though I remained unhappy about what I felt were unwise perimeters on the imagination, it was time for some self-sacrifice of my own. The Lord was teaching me some hard lessons about putting the needs of the community ahead of my own need to be vindicated. And for this lesson in love, I'll give Madeleine L'Engle some of the credit, too. ☺

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# INTERVIEW WITH JOHN TURTURRO

*One criticism of the movies is that they present an unreal picture of modern life. Nobody works for a living. Rather, movie characters go on crime-busting adventures and erotic escapades. John Turturro's new film, Mac, is an exception. Turturro, who has appeared in several of Spike Lee's films, is a successful Hollywood actor who worked for twelve years to get the story of his working-class father on the big screen. Media Eye editor Stefan Ulstein interviewed Turturro when Mac opened in Seattle recently.*

## **Built to Last**

"My dad was typical of many men of his generation," Turturro said. "He didn't have much education, and he couldn't express himself well in words. So the way he expressed himself was in his work. He was a carpenter, then a contractor, and for many years he was a builder of homes."

In *Mac*, Turturro plays the title role, the eldest of three brothers, who can't bear to cut corners on the job. When his sleazy boss orders him to build a wall with the studs on twenty-four inch centers instead of sixteen, Mac protests that the wall will shake.

"What do you care?" thunders the boss. "You do what I say." Seething with

rage, Mac builds the wall, but later, as he sits eating his lunch, he keeps staring at that wall and finally, in a fit of rage, stalks over to the offending shortcut and demolishes it with a few swings of his framing hammer. Then he builds it right.

"That scene is what my dad's generation was all about," Turturro said earnestly. "Their work was what gave them a voice. It gave them their self-respect and dignity. They just couldn't compromise. They knew that what they built would probably outlast them, and they took that very seriously." Turturro gave the example of homes that lost their roofs during the recent Florida hurricane. "It turned out that a lot of those roofs weren't built properly. Look what happened! People got money for that! My dad was more concerned with building a home he could be proud of than getting paid. Sure, he made some money. But for him, the work was the thing."

I asked Turturro if he had worked as a carpenter himself. He seemed to be doing more than acting as he measured, cut, and hammered in the film. "You bet!" he laughed. "Every summer with my dad. It gave me a real appreciation for the dignity of tradespeople. I wanted to show those people working. In the movies nobody works. Or if they do they're

cops, or crooked lawyers, or prostitutes or something."

Indeed, *Mac* is an ode to men who work with their hands. The opening montage is a series of scenes where boots slog through muddy soil, and of hands pushing wheelbarrows of concrete and laying rebar. In one of the film's most sublime moments, a bricklayer curses his lazy teenage son and orders him to go home to his mother. As he resumes his work the camera lingers on his skill with a trowel and level, which seems almost magical. "I saw that guy on a job site where we were filming," Turturro laughed. "He was so ferocious, such a proud, intense craftsman, that I was actually afraid to approach him, so I sent this girl over to ask him if he'd be in our movie. He said, 'Sure,' and he was a natural."

"A lot of those men of my dad's generation were pretty fearsome. They could be crude, and blunt, but they had a dignity that went past all that."

Turturro was in Seattle for a gruelling full day of publicity, one stop in a nationwide tour. "When you have a small-budget film like this," he said, "you have to shepherd it along and help it find an audience. It was an enormously difficult movie to fund because it's not based on another movie."



*Vico (left, played by Michael Badalucco) and Mac (John Turturro) are brothers whose passion for their craft compels them to start their own business in Mac, presented by the Samuel Goldwyn Company.*

As I spoke to Turturro in the hallway of the theater, a preview screening was just winding down. Turturro was anxious, distracted, and as intense as the character he played in the film. A television cameraman was trying to wire him for sound with a remote mike, a coil of wire, and a bulky transmitter the size of an old Walkman.

Turturro shook his head and almost shouted, "No! No more of this. I did the electronic media thing all day. I came here tonight to talk to people about my movie. It looks stupid with all this stuff hanging out of me." He coiled the wire and handed the unit back to the cameraman. A few seconds later he apologized, and we entered the packed theater to a thunderous applause.

On stage Turturro began to warm

up, to drop his guard, and connect with the audience. In the back, a huge floodlight lit up the stage, almost blinding the director. The TV guy again. "Can we just turn that thing off?" Turturro snapped.

But as the audience began asking questions, Turturro's love of his film, his late father, and honest working people became obvious. He answered questions with zestful energy. Questions about the world of Hollywood, budgets, and film technology didn't interest him as much as questions about the heart of the film. One burly moviegoer buttonholed Turturro in the hallway after the Q&A. With tears brimming in his eyes he exclaimed, "You've captured what it is that I do. In your movie you show why I'm proud of what I do for a

living. I'm a carpenter and proud of it!"

Later in the lobby, a chic young artist type asked Turturro, "What's the point of all this audience feedback, since the film is done now? Do you just use the input for your next project?"

"Done?" Turturro asked, astonished. "It's not *done* until nobody sees it anymore. Every time somebody sees the film they react to it."

Like his father, Turturro has built something that may very well outlast him. His father would have been proud.

(*Mac is rated R for construction-site profanity.*) ©

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





Jeff Fennema, Editor

THINKING THIRTEEN

# Charm School

*With this column we introduce our new Thinking Thirteen editor, Jeff Fennema, who teaches seventh grade language arts and coaches at Lansing Christian School in Lansing, Illinois.*

I find punishment for improper behavior perplexing. Will ignoring the problem cause it to go away? Does talking work? Is swift and blinding action required?

Detention has always bothered me for some reason. Maybe that comes from too many viewings of *The Breakfast Club*. It seems to be, both literally and figuratively, a waste of time combined with an aura of recrimination. Prison carries the same rudiment; it offers some hope for rehabilitation but exists essentially for punitive purposes.

Cain's punishment for killing his brother was severe, but God did not punish him out of anger or vengeance (Gen. 4:11-15). The punishment was used to correct and restore. God's correction was his proof of love for Cain and is also proof of his love for us (Heb. 12:5-11). Our correction is proof of our love for our students.

Most of the improper behavior in junior high is not as extreme as killing one's brother, but it still should be addressed. One day I discovered a group of young men in the washroom engaged in pushing, shoving, splashing, and other World Wrestling Federation-type activities. I politely informed them that they would be spending some time with me after school the next day (a day's notice to adjust any calendar conflicts). Detention was, at that time, my traditional choice for punishment. Some of their free time would be taken away, and I could double-punish them by insisting that they also do homework, or worse yet, read a book!

I began to reconsider the next day. I wanted to make an impression upon these young men, to provide an encounter more productive than simply time-killing. I stumbled upon the notion that they might

have temporarily forgotten the instruction they had received previously regarding acceptable and unacceptable behavior in the washroom. If I were to make a lasting impact, something other than detention would have to be presented. Thus I created Charm School.

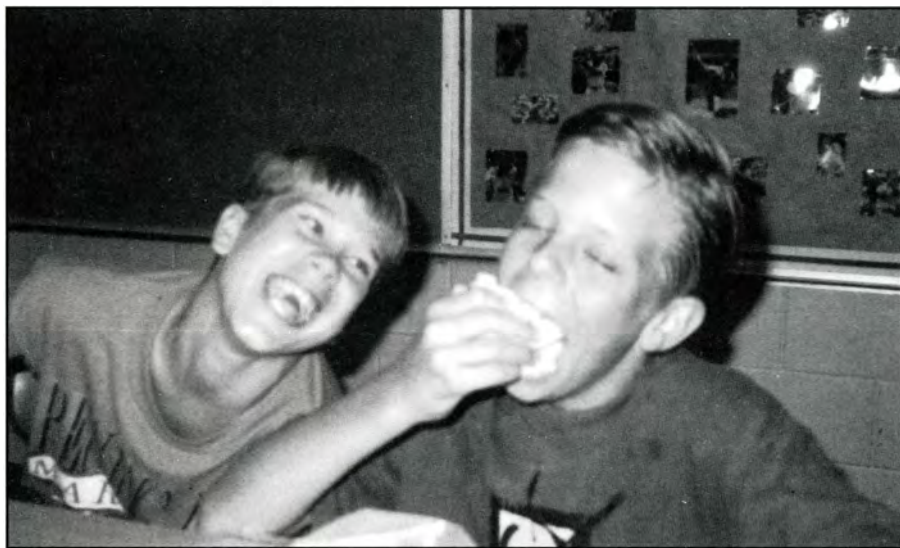
Previous ideas of charm school took me back to my childhood in the South. Some of the girls I knew actually spent an afternoon each week learning to sit like a lady and drink tea with the pinky finger extended. I'm not sure if there were classes offered for the boys, but I optimistically envisioned my detention rogues being transformed into dashing young gentlemen.

Our initial class was entitled Washroom Etiquette. These wide-eyed, mystified eighth graders helped me construct lists of proper and improper behavior in the washroom. Their recall abilities were encouraging. I placed the lists on the chalkboard; they took notes. We even had a quiz after the session and each of them aced it. We then proceeded to the location and engaged in role playing. Our first encounter allowed for them to walk through the room at a steady,

nonviolent pace while using conversational tones with their friends. One student even earned extra credit by picking up a paper towel accidentally thrown next to the trash can. For our second role-play engagement I asked each student to demonstrate his future response if someone were to push, bump into, or yell at him. Each answer showed much improvement, and I congratulated them.

Other Charm School classes have included Lunchtime Etiquette, Hallway Etiquette, and Locker Room Etiquette. Working through each lesson, I continue to discover that these students really do know the desired behavior in each situation. They have either chosen not to use that knowledge, or they have just plain forgotten.

We, as shepherds of our scholarly flocks, may often feel like using the staff of discipline out of retribution. Charm School is an exaggerated lesson that seems to catch the students' attention in a somewhat purposeful manner. But the discipline of Charm School is more of a nudge in the right direction, a channel for restoration. ④



*Lunchroom Etiquette was just one of many classes students participated in as part of the author's Charm School.*



# Gallery Walk

## *Hermann Matis*

Occasionally, when you use a new strategy for the first time, it works out much better than you anticipated! Recently I became so excited about a method of implementing prediction that I wanted to share my positive experience with anyone who would listen. I found it especially useful in introducing a novel we wanted to read and study as a class. This is an approach that is "guaranteed" to motivate your class to be enthusiastic about reading a new book. Prediction is a valuable pre-reading strategy because it activates a reader's background knowledge, encourages inferencing, and increases comprehension.

I became interested in the "Gallery Walk" because I hadn't had a lot of success with prediction as a means of introducing books. In the past, I tried to prod students to make predictions by asking questions like "What might this book be all about?" I received relatively short answers. In a workshop, Cecilia Welk of Langley, B.C., proposed that students be given the opportunity to speculate, to give their version of a story. Such a writing activity heightens the children's enthusiasm for the book considerably. Now I am seeing amazing written responses from children.

The strategy consists of the following steps.

1. Make enlarged photocopies of a selected number of pictures from the novel to be read. Black & white pictures or illustrations will reproduce best. I chose ten illustrations from Dahl's book *James and the Giant Peach*, which I mounted and laminated immediately, because I'll use them again next year!

2. Stimulate the children's thinking skills by asking them to reflect on the book cover and title. If time permits, take a few minutes to discuss their responses. Possible questions: "What could the book be all about?" "If you were given only the title and cover what would you tell?"

Remember to give the class "wait time" to think before they answer any questions.

3. Display the mounted pictures sequentially on a chalkboard ledge, counter, or bookcase.

4. Prepare your class for the "Gallery Walk." Encourage students to take time to absorb the details in pictures as they walk through this gallery of illustrations. Point out a few aspects that might be missed. They could ask themselves, "What do these pictures tell me about the story?" "If I were the author, how would I write the story?"


5. Then invite your students to come

up in small groups to view the illustrations.

6. Following the walk, ask the class or small groups to discuss their impressions, emotions, and images. Together reflect on how their thinking about the story changed as they looked over the pictures.

7. After the discussion, instruct them to write their interpretation of the illustrations. If some students have already read the book, they could summarize what they remember about it.

8. Later on, enjoy listening to your students as they read to each other about the inventive interpretations. After sharing their predictions, have your students reflect on what they noticed about their thinking as they wrote, what pictures stand out in their minds, and what they liked about this form of prediction.

You will be astonished at the breakthrough in students' ability to predict. Now children will write more, much more, when they encounter pictures, as you will note in the examples of their writing on the following page. 

*Hermann Matis is a grade four teacher at the Heritage Campus of Abbotsford Christian School in Abbotsford, British Columbia.*



# MATTHEW

*David Koning*

"A Heartsburg Christian School senior, Ryan Matthew, received internal injuries outside the elementary building of Heartsburg Christian School last Friday. Matthew had been assisting a second grade teacher at the Christian School since September . . ."

So began an article in the Saturday edition of the *Heartsburg Chronicle*.

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Ryan Matthew came to Heartsburg Christian School to work as an aide to Mrs. De Vos, the second grade teacher. Every Friday afternoon, during his "Christians in Society" class at the high school, Ryan and his classmates walked across campus to serve as volunteers in the elementary building. He particularly enjoyed reading and telling stories to the second graders. He used his stories to teach them about God, getting along with others, and forgiving the ones who do them harm. During story time Ryan read books or made up stories. He asked the kids questions and answered theirs. They had a good time together.

The students loved to tell him their favorite stories, too. They told him about their tree houses at home, their families, their pet rabbits, the tree limb that broke out of the evergreen. Because Ryan valued each child, he listened with interest. He loved the children. He admired their innocent and honest reflections on life. He enjoyed open and genuine communication with his second grade friends.

One day he told a story about Bessie, a cow. Bessie lived on his father's farm. She was the fattest cow he had ever seen, and one day fat old Bessie got stuck in the mud out in the barn yard. She couldn't get out by herself. Finally his dad, using the John Deere, helped the bulging beast get out of the muck. The cow, the tractor, and his dad were covered with mud!

The kids laughed and laughed and laughed. They wanted more stories about the farm, but it was time for the students to return to class. So Ryan Matthew said "Good bye!" to each one and, with a pat on the head, sent them back to their teacher. He loved the children. He liked to make them laugh.

Jonathan Vickers, a second grader with a zest for life, thought the cow story was awesome! He figured the cow story was a perfect way to liven up the supper hour that night. Even though the words of the story were only a few hours old, by the time he finished telling the story at the supper table, Bessie, the fat cow stuck in the mud, had become "Betty," and in the twinkling of a second grader's eye, was transformed from bovine to human being.

Jonathan's mother, Ruth, half listened to the story while fussing with the baby's bib. The story caught her full attention only when Jonathan switched "Bessie" to "Betty." Ruth's older sister's name was Betty and her sister was endowed with what seemed to be more than her fair share of bodily bulk. Although Ruth had never heard her sister referred to as a fat cow, the more she thought about it. . . .

Ruth remembered the time last winter when she and Betty had been stranded in the country after the car slid into a snowbank. Betty at the wheel and Ruth pushing from behind, they could not get the car to budge from the side of the road.

When help finally arrived, it came in the form of a bunch of rowdy high school students about the same age as the second grade aide. They stopped to help, and in less than two minutes they had the sisters back on the road. The guys waved goodbye, and laughing as they went, continued their good times. But now Ruth wondered, "Laughing? Good times? . . . at whose expense?"

As the week progressed, Ruth got more and more upset each time she thought about the story little Jonathan

had brought home. "What business does this Matthew guy have telling insulting stories about people, anyway?" she thought.

The more Ruth thought, the more she could actually picture plump Betty being pulled out of the snowbank by that mocking Matthew boy and his band of high school hooligans.

Ruth thought, "I have half a mind to tell someone about this!" Within days the story spread to coffee shops, school kitchens, and church committee rooms. It seemed that wherever two or three gathered, Ryan Matthew's dastardly behavior with the children became known.

"Did you hear that he's telling awful stories about Betty and Ruth?"

"I heard that he called some mothers cows!"

"He insults our kids!"

"Is he the one that wears an earring?"

"I don't like the way he touches my son!"

"A.I.D.S. in our school?!"

"He's not our kind . . ."

On and on it went, all week long. In the minds of many, this desperate problem was certainly going to lead to the end of the school. Something had to be done, and soon!

Later that week letters began appearing in the mailboxes of many constituents of the Heartsburg Christian School. Ruth's letter, on behalf of several other concerned parents, outlined the "truth" about the slanderous and promiscuous behavior of "that no good" Matthew. It was a call for action. It was a call for his head on the platter of truth and purity for the sake of their precious Christian school.

The following Friday Ryan Matthew also received a letter—from the principal. Mrs. De Vos handed him an envelope as he walked into the room to meet his second grade friends. Eager to get down to business, he stuffed the unopened envelope into his pocket to read later.

The envelope contained a notification about his new assignment with the custodial department, beginning next week.

Unaware of the contents of the note and the gossip which prompted it, Ryan and friends dove into the day's fable. Ryan hoped to use the story to teach

about honesty and truth . . .

\*\*\*\*\*

*The Heartsburg Chronicle's* article about Matthew's "mugging" concluded with . . .

"... Matthew, 18, remains in serious condition from last week's assault. The unknown assailants remain at large." ©

*David Koning is a middle school math/science teacher at East Christian School in Kalamazoo, Michigan.*



*Marlene Dorhout, Editor*

## QUERY

*What do you think about teachers allowing students to correct other students' papers? I feel uncomfortable with this practice, but many of my colleagues do this.*

The question does not specify whether the correcting is done in or out of class, with daily assignments or tests, with peers or older students, with objective or essay answers; regardless, the concept warrants attention.

Teachers do handle paper work in various ways. Some teachers still correct all assignments themselves. For years I believed that if I assigned it, I should correct it, and that only then would I know whether the student did or did not understand. Even though I believe the premise is valid, exceptions do exist.

Determining the purpose of the assignment is crucial to the assessment. Some subject areas require much practice for skill building. I know a high school math teacher who is also a coach; he tells his students that the daily work is like the practices, the test like the big game. Team work, such as pairs or groups, could strengthen the basic knowledge by correcting and reworking. Other times the assignment is part of a learning process; then the teacher and/or student can best determine the individual progress. We also take a risk with self correcting, however. Aside from the trust factor, a shy student who doesn't understand but makes the corrections on the paper as directed, might never ask for an explanation.

I sometimes have students exchange writing in small groups, not so much for correcting purposes, but more for stimulation, appreciation, and enhanced creativity. Students often decide to rewrite

before handing in the paper; they enjoy having control over the final product. Contrary to some writing teachers, I collect and correct the work anyway; peer evaluation at the grade level I teach does not conclude the process. My students still desire teacher approval, and I believe they need the suggestions their peers are unable to provide. Having teachers grade all papers does not, however, guarantee better learning, especially if teachers return papers long after the assignment or if they fail to explain errors.

I surveyed my middle school students regarding the correction of papers. Overwhelmingly, students wanted their work corrected. Interestingly though, responses varied greatly on who should do the correcting. There was no real concern over whether or not the teacher corrected the work, although mention of peer errors and ambiguous feelings regarding their own honesty did frequently appear. A few students did not like other kids seeing their work or grades; and maybe, for the less capable and confident, we shouldn't practice the exchange method.

My survey revealed strong student opinions regarding tests though; no one but the teacher should correct them because of the importance of the grade and the corresponding need for fairness and privacy. Granted, adolescents may respond differently, so I encourage teachers to survey their own students.

The question probably remains a question. I do think we as Christian educators have an obligation to analyze how and why we correct student work the way we do; and the answer, I believe, should always be for the students' benefit.

*My query is rather general. It would be beneficial, I believe, to have contact with other Christian educators who share a concern for special needs students and their families. Having taught previously at secular universities, I am hoping to expand my professional horizon. Are you aware of any such contacts, and are there any organizations such as the Council for Exceptional Children but with a Christian perspective?*

I have passed your letter on to individuals I felt might be good contacts and sent you the names of larger Christian school systems that are networking to meet these needs. This is a very special area of concern, and dedicated Christian educators with similar skills and interests might read this request and respond. Thus I conclude with your name and address and trust some benefit will result for you and the special education program you are developing at your university.

Ken Pudlas, Ed. D.  
Trinity Western University  
7600 Glover Road  
Langley, British Columbia  
Canada V3A 6H4

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

Address questions to:

**Marlene Dorhout**  
CEJ Query Editor  
2135 South Pearl  
Denver, CO 80210



# When Teens Leave Christian Schools

*Karen B. Orfitelli*

"Mrs. O., may I speak to you?" Ashley asked quietly while I sat at my desk.

"Sure, Ashley. What can I do for you?"

"Mrs. O., I wanted to let you know I won't be coming back next year. I'm going to public school."

"Ashley, why? I don't understand."

"I want to try public school. They have more courses and extracurricular activities to offer. I didn't want you to hear from anyone else that I was leaving. I wanted to tell you myself."

This scene has occurred in the Christian school where I teach often enough in the last ten years to cause me to consider the issue seriously. As I began to look at each teen who left our school for a larger one, I was intrigued to find that one factor was shared by every student who left.

This group of teens who ostensibly left for the public sector because there were more courses available, more extra-curricular activities, and larger athletic programs also shared one other commonality—each one had been unable to make at least one meaningful relationship in school. Simply put, these kids didn't have a best friend. They had no one waiting for them at their lockers, calling them when they arrived home, and caring whether or not their hair was just right. These adolescents experienced an ever-present sense of not fitting in. They went to lunch, walked through the halls, and participated in classes feeling like outsiders. Lacking someone to connect with, these teens felt unaccepted by their peers, and for many teens, peer acceptance is key to contentment.

The problem becomes weightier when an unhappy teen comes home from school to parents who have never known or have lost sight of the principles

and value of Christian education. Concerned parents focus on the immediate and often temporary need, while the long-term goal of gaining an education for service to God, indeed education for eternity, becomes lost in the muddle of emotions. When this occurs, it is not long before the parents capitulate to pressures from their unhappy teen and begin their quest to find contentment elsewhere.

The problem has now become two-fold for the Christian educator. We need to affirm the students' worth in Jesus before they leave and, while this process is unfolding, enhance and reinforce parents' understanding of the value of Christian education.

While peer acceptance and popularity are significant aspects of teens' lives and can create strong emotions when they are lacking, we need to first fortify families with an understanding and knowledge of the value of Christian education. In addition to this, parents need to be reminded that the storms of youth are strong, and so are the pressures associated with them.

When parents are equipped to stand firm during these times of tension and guide their teens through them, they are less likely to encourage life-changing decisions based on a temporary situation or emotions. Teens' feelings about themselves and what they think others think of them are mercurial, and wise parents aid their children in working through the problems instead of merely removing the students to a different environment.

Parenting adolescents is a challenge for even veteran parents, and a school can aid parents by providing seminars that encourage and educate, making available books on the subject of parenting teens, and even providing the impetus and environment for parents to meet together and share ideas.

Simultaneously, our students require help in solving the problem of placing too much emphasis on peer acceptance. Interestingly, the teens on the inside of a clique and on the outside need to see this issue from Jesus' perspective.

We can accomplish this through in-class Bible studies that reinforce the scriptural principals that popularity, peer approval, and acceptance by the "right" people are not as important as the understanding that each teen is loved by God and uniquely created by him.

Our students can look at Jesus' response to cliques and popularity in Mark 2:13-17, Luke 7:36-50, Luke 19:1-10, and John 4:4-10. Not only did Jesus ignore the pressure to change his ways for acceptance by the Pharisees (the elite), but he also responded by reaching out to those who were shunned by the rest of society as well.

Jesus, by example, speaks to our teens. Each of our students needs to be fortified until he or she is confident that God-approval takes precedence over peer-approval. When this occurs, a teen's feelings about self-worth become stabilized, and contentment and happiness assert themselves.

The emphasis on living for Christ and following his example transcends the typically teenage popularity issues. When our teens are taught to love and accept themselves, reach out to others, and love the unlovable, they have been supplied with the equipment for finding true contentment not only during adolescence, but also for the rest of their lives. ☺

*Karen B. Orfitelli teaches language arts and Old Testament history at Cornerstone Christian School in Rockville, Connecticut.*

# The Football Player and the Middle-Schooler

**Nancy Wade Zappulla**

*With this issue we introduce a new column of teacher narratives that include a bit of reflection, personal vignettes that catch in the mind and cause us to see value in the experience.*

For the almost one-and-a-half years I've known Jonathan, he has been skirting disaster. He was my student as a sophomore, and while he found managing his personal effects more than a little overwhelming, he had a huge heart, which he would cover with extremely intricate maneuvers.

I remember one day that the class decided it was time to rearrange the room. Changing things around was a commonplace event in my class, but I usually did it during lunch or after school. For some reason, however, on that morning we began to brainstorm on a new set-up. We tried different designs, but the bell rang before we could complete our experimental arrangement. I remember Jonathan taking an unusually intense interest in this project, and long after the bell rang he was still talking and moving chairs.

Another time I had given some lengthy assignment to be turned in on a Friday. The class raised some objections at the last minute, citing huge projects in other classes, and so I agreed to put off the due date until Monday. Usually one of the last to leave the room, Jonathan turned to me and said, "Mrs. Zappulla, moving that due date will mess you up, huh? I bet you were gonna use the weekend to correct those papers, and now you can't." Then he was out in the hall, yelling at someone or yanking some girl's purse off her shoulder, while I stared after him, amazed.

At the end of the year, I told him that I believed he would grow up to be a terrific husband and father because of his tender heart and eye for details. He looked at me without blinking and

replied, "Oh, yeah? You really think that about me?" and was gone again.

But that was last year and now Jonathan is a mighty junior and a football player. I don't teach his English section, so our contact is irregular. I hear about him, however, because he spends much time in the school office discussing his objections to the dress code. Specifically, Jonathan has a hip problem—he has none upon which to hang his pants, so they are always falling far below the acceptable site, as defined by both the school board and polite society. Whenever I see him, I try to ask about life and such niceties before launching into what I hope is a concerned comment about his behavior record. Often I fear that I fail, and rather than hearing my loving concern, Jonathan hears yet another adult scolding him.

Jonathan's name comes up frequently at home this year also. My middle-school daughter has mentioned him in our morning prayer faithfully since school began. Wondering why it is Jonathan out of so many high schoolers for whom Elizabeth is praying, I asked her if he comes into my classroom while I'm out or if she talks to him. Such a question could evidently only be answered with a look of incredulity and a polysyllabic, emphatic "No-o-o!" Why then, does she pray for him morning after morning at 7:00 a.m., long before I'm coherent enough to remember the names of my students? When asked this hopefully less-insulting question, she shook her head and replied, "I dunno. I guess God just put him in my head."

Last week, after an early-morning prayer had been offered on his behalf, Jonathan was once again in the office. When I came in and saw him sitting there, I began to half-tease, half-fuss at him. We joked a little as he assured me for the zillionth time that he hadn't done anything, and soon it would be straightened out. My parting shot to

Jonathan, sent with less-than-loving motive, was "Jonathan, and to think that Elizabeth prays for you every morning!" Just a second before the office door swished shut, his voice slid through. "Tell her not to give up on me!"

I wrestled with the searing truth of Jonathan's last-minute remark as I returned to my room. This six-foot-plus football player who is old enough to grow a moustache and drive a moving vehicle wants the prayers of an eleven-year-old girl he'd probably never notice? Or was his comment merely some adolescent afterthought, designed to curry favor with a potential ally? Could it be that this young man, replete as he is with questions and missed cues and out-of-step behavior, is a child of God reaching out for the support of another child of God, not caring about artificial obstacles like age and gender and station?

Knowing Jonathan, I cast my lot with the last suggestion, believing that the Holy Spirit works in his young life as well as in my daughter's and knowing that the God who put Jonathan in Elizabeth's head is the same God who knows when a sparrow falls.

I just have to wonder how this unlikely pairing will end—this prayer partnership between two young people. What lessons will Jonathan and Elizabeth learn as they pray and are prayed for? More important, what lessons are there for those of us more mature in years and faith? Would it have occurred to any of his teachers that Jonathan could be touched by the prayers of an eleven-year-old girl? Do we even pray for him, or do we merely try to survive him? I'm so glad those words that floated through the door were God's words to me and to every other teacher—"Don't give up on me!"

*Nancy Wade Zappulla teaches secondary English at Lynchburg Christian Academy in Lynchburg, Virginia.*



## Dordt hosts young scholars in engineering

Forty-five seventh and eighth graders participated in the Dordt College Young Scholars in Engineering (YSE) program for three weeks in June. Students lived in Dordt College dormitories on week nights and went home only for weekends during the session.

The YSE program, funded by \$52,000 in National Science Foundation (NSF) grant money and some area corporate sponsors, offered science-related activities to twenty-one girls and twenty-four boys from fifteen schools within a fifty-mile radius of the college. The series included classroom studies, laboratory work, project design, and field trips for students who have shown particular interest in science, math, and engineering.

Dordt College professors and two local teachers taught and directed the studies and group projects, including a toothpick-and-glue bridge-building project for all participants. College students served as resident staff and teaching assistants.

Although the NSF emphasizes the need to improve for the sake of global competition, project director Dr. Nolan Van Gaalen tried to show the value of service in meeting real needs in creation. "For me," Van Gaalen told the students, "that is what it means to obey the call of the Lord in engineering."

## OACS and CCEF announce Bible project

The Canadian Christian Education Foundation Board decided in April to move ahead on a \$50,000 Canadian high school Bible project. The scope of the project and its all-Canadian development make this project unique.

The Ontario Alliance of Christian Schools (OACS) has appointed Herman Proper as project director and Hilda Roukema as the writer. Roukema has been granted a leave of absence from Toronto District Christian High School while she writes Teacher Guides for grade 9 and 10 Old Testament studies and grade 11 and 12 New Testament studies.

The Teacher Guides will provide a program with the following features:

- an inductive study of the Bible itself from a Reformed perspective
- consistency with Christian Schools International (CSI) Bible program K-8, *The Story of God and His People*
- a variety of learning and teaching activities
- passages for intensive study selected for their importance to the history of redemption and for a balance of types of writing
- the use of many resources to help students understand the message of the Bible

Reader critics and teachers for pilot units will be invited from OACS high schools, other Canadian districts, and CSI-affiliated colleges and seminaries. The writing is expected to be completed by the spring of 1994, with publication expected later in 1994.

The project is especially timely in view of the recent victory which gave the Alliance high schools the right to count two courses in religious studies toward the Ontario Secondary School Diploma. Since the Bible credit case was won, the Alliance has received requests for information about its Bible program from non-Alliance independent schools, and CSI anticipates interest from CSI schools in the United States as well.

## ICS earns right to grant worldwide studies degree

After a seven-year struggle, the Institute for Christian Studies (ICS) in Toronto recently received official rights to grant the degree of Master of Worldview Studies to students who successfully complete a one-year program of study.

Government policy in Ontario restricts standard degree-granting powers to the publicly-funded universities. This policy has created immense problems for institutions such as ICS and Redeemer College which, unlike Bible colleges and seminaries, offer university-type programs in a wider range of disciplines from a Christian perspective.

ICS secured the cooperation of the local member of the Legislature, Hon. Rosario Marchese, in introducing a Private Member's bill making the necessary amendment. This process culminated in a hearing before a Standing

Committee of the Legislature last December. The amendment received Royal Assent shortly after.

"I'm delighted with this resolution of a long-standing problem," says ICS president Dr. Harry Fernhout. "After years of frustration, we're very happy that the Minister and Mr. Marchese cooperated in making the legislative process work. At the same time, I'm concerned about the fact that we had to go this route."

Besides the Master of Worldview Studies, ICS offers a two-year program leading to the Master of Philosophical Foundations, as well as a doctoral program in cooperation with the Free University in Amsterdam. ICS also offers a master's program in education, for which it has not yet secured degree-granting powers.

## RC students "seeking to serve"

Last summer's SERVE project at the Gospel Center in Stockton, California, culminated a whole school year of Ripon Christian K-12 students' efforts to practice the school's 1992-93 motto, "Seeking to Serve." SERVE is a Christian youth-oriented service organization.

High school students raised almost \$1,000 for two Miami Christian schools that sustained considerable damage from Hurricane Andrew. The Student Council also sponsored a canned food drive, in conjunction with Ripon public schools, to replenish the depleted food supply for the local Inter-Faith Ministries.

Students in junior high earned more than \$500 for the Free-a-Family project, a ministry that provides material and spiritual help for families in third-world countries.

Kindergarten through sixth grade students supported the SERVE project with Christmas giving, and other students gave allowance money or did odd jobs to raise more than \$2,000 for building materials for the Stockton Gospel Center project.

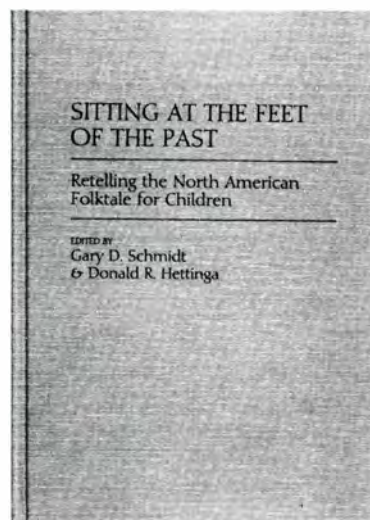
Sixty young people and fifteen adults from various states came in July to tear out old blacktop, paint the large resident halls, construct bed units, and landscape a recreation area for the Center. SERVE participants camped out in the Ripon Christian gymnasium at night during their week of service.

*Edited and reprinted with permission from the Ripon Christian Communique.*



Steve J. Van Der Weele, Editor

## BOOK REVIEWS



### **Sitting at the Feet of the Past: Retelling the North American Folktale for Children.**

Edited by Gary D. Schmidt and Donald R. Hettinga, Professors of English, Calvin College. Greenwood Press, Westport, Conn., 1992. 239 pp., \$49.95 (hard cover).

Reviewed by Steve J. Van Der Weele, professor emeritus of Calvin College, Grand Rapids, Michigan.

Let us have before us, from the start, the basic question placed before the twenty-three contributors to this volume: May a storyteller from a given culture re-tell a story from an entirely different culture? May the storyteller at the local library—say, a white woman—who majored in children's literature, tell her Saturday morning audience of children the Uncle Remus stories, American Indian stories, or French-Canadian stories? Or, to use the editors' own illustration, may teachers at a Protestant college with a European heritage tell the stories of the Amish people in northern Indiana?

Although the authors, illustrators,

storytellers, and literary critics who wrote for the book agree basically that stories belong to all of humanity, several of them, at least, remind us that one needs to earn his or her right to these stories. Aren't Canadian children, for example, entitled to confront their rich legacy of native North American lore without a European bias? Was it all right for Walt Disney industry to produce such a patronizing, sentimental interpretation of the Uncle Remus stories (*Song of the South*, 1946) that, as Alice Walker tells us, her family could never enjoy the stories again? Was it legitimate for Cooper and Longfellow to take the liberties they did with the Indian materials they used in their stories?

These questions arise because stories are such powerful purveyors of attitudes, values, mythology, and religion. This awareness underlies *Sitting at the Feet* throughout. Thus, several contributors plead for a sensitivity toward a culture not their own when storytellers retell stories to children. As Patricia C. McKissack puts it, "... It takes nothing from one culture to respect another" (66).

But stories, after all, are gifts, and when authors and storytellers retell them, they enlarge the audience of receivers of those gifts. Thus, stories, all the writers insist, are transferable and, thus, powerful agents as well for multi-cultural literacy. Roderick McGillis, in his chapter "Repetitions: Oral and Written Story," makes his case by examining an archetypal story about the woman who, by becoming too greedy, loses all she has. He heard one version of it from his grandmother, heard another from the American storyteller Donald Davis, and read still another, "The Fisherman and His Wife," from the Grimm collection. McGillis's essay—a fascinating piece of research—traces the various metamorphoses this tale underwent (including various roles for the husband) during a millennium of storytelling world-wide. Despite the

many nuances, the basic story, involving the folly of thoughtless and excessive wishing, and the spiritual poverty that nourishes such overreaching, has remained surprisingly stable. Similarly, we learn, Cinderella tales exist in all literatures, as well as St. Nicholas tales, and variations, even, of the Three Little Pigs.

So, who owns these stories? The human race, really, say these writers. To bypass stories from another culture through undue scrupulosity is to impoverish audiences, deny the needs, desires, and anxieties of the human condition, and refuse the opportunity to enrich and embellish story lines. Although a storyteller should do the research, assemble as many variants as possible, and respect the culture from which the story derived, he or she may merge cultures, bring tellers and readers and audience together (especially, but not exclusively, children), and, where possible, heighten the interest and value of the story. Nancy Van Laan records how she worked carefully with an Indian chief and other members of the tribe, eliminating rambling, inchoate sections of their stories, and improving the artistry until one day, when she read them her version of the stories, her Indian friends wept, saying, "You are truly one of us. Your eyes have seen through our eyes" (18). And Paul Goble has been adopted as a member of an Indian tribe for his sensitive rendition of their stories. Thus, like immigrants, stories can adapt to new contexts and environments.

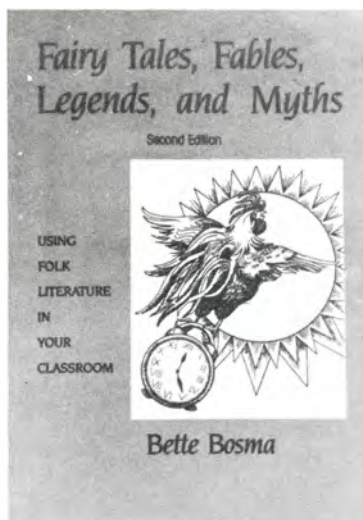
The real enemies of these tales, as several writers remind us, are not those who sensitively and imaginatively rework and retell good stories. The people to watch out for are those who fail to respect either audience or tale, culture or craftsmanship—those whose interest is primarily commercial. Those who create pseudo-heroes, who appeal to syrupy sentimentality and unconvincing plots—these are the betrayers of children, who, after all,



learn through their books the feel of the world they will some day inhabit. And television, the automobile, (computers, too?) together with those who wreak havoc on the land and on culture, are inimical to the highly essential activity of storytelling. Julius Lester speaks for all the contributors when he says, "If you love the tale and tell it with love, the tale will communicate. Tell the tale as you would, not I, and believe the tale" (from his *Tales*, quoted by Hugh T. Keenan, p. 88).

My discussion so far has been limited to the first three divisions of the book: "The Native American Folktale," "The African-American Folktale," and "The Retold Western European Folktale." Part IV, "The American Tall Tale," has a value independent of the answers to the basic question put to the writers. The five excellent essays—Bette Bosma's "Tales of Humor and Exaggeration" in particular—remind us of the history, the legacy, the origins, and the peculiarly American qualities of the tall tale. In their analyses of the uniquely American adventure, these writers illuminate the pathos and tragedy behind the often delightful hyperbole, the deep human needs, suffering, and hardship that often underlie the body of stories, and the struggle for identity in the hostile environment of pioneer days. Thus, these essays provide a valuable contribution to American cultural history.

It must be said, finally, that, through the artistic passion for their craft, these authors give us much more than the editors asked of them. The essays, individually and cumulatively, constitute a resounding affirmation of the importance of all literature, of the arts generally, and of the crucial role the imagination plays in the lives of individuals, and even of whole cultures. At a higher level still, much of the wisdom of this book is immediately relevant to the communication of biblical narratives to our children. ☉



### **Fairy Tales, Fables, Legends, and Myths, 2nd ed.**

by Bette Bosma

New York Teachers College,  
Columbia University. 1992. 189 pp.,  
\$15.95.

Reviewed by Mary Van  
Ravenswaay, fifth grade teacher at  
Sioux Center Christian School, Sioux  
Center, Iowa.

Many teachers today are looking for creative methods to open the doors of learning for their students. One way to do this is through the use of folk literature in the classroom. A most delightful book, abounding with ideas and methods of implementation, is Bette Bosma's second edition of *Fairy Tales, Fables, Legends, and Myths*. Containing more than fifty lesson plans, innovative teaching ideas, and recommended literature, this book encourages an interactive view of reading that stresses the vital communication processes of speaking, listening, reading, and writing as they relate to every area of the

curriculum.

Recognizing the rich quality of folk tales and the wide range of readers that they attract, the author strives to familiarize adults with choice folk literature and to heighten children's appreciation of these stories.

Bosma begins her book with what she considers to be the importance of folk literature for children:

Folk literature is worth reading just for fun. The stories contain adventure, humor, and rich language that the children can enjoy. In addition, the reader can enter into another culture and recognize the universality of the wishes, dreams, and problems of people around the world. . . . Guided reading of folk literature, directing attention to this story structure, helps the child become a better reader (1).

To find beneficial use for folk literature in the classroom, a teacher needs to differentiate between the four types of folk literature: fairy tales, animal tales, legends, and myths. The four types were chosen by the author because they encompass the majority of tales in print and because they represent fairly distinct categories.

An entirely new and helpful chapter added to this second edition is "Using Literature in Multicultural Education." Incorporating folk tales from other countries into the classroom helps students understand how people from all over the world respond to literature and use it as a means of entertainment. These stories help reduce stereotyping while promoting a better understanding of our own continent.

Bosma presents many practical strategies to help teachers assist their students in understanding stories and to lead them into critical reading. Actual lesson plans are given for making predictions, recognizing structure (setting, plot, characters), developing vocabulary, understanding figurative language, making comparisons between variants of the same tale in different

cultures, analyzing and evaluating conclusions, and understanding themes, both stated and unstated. A plethora of charts, diagrams, and story maps illustrate ways to enhance student understanding and promote group discussions, both of which lead to the exchange of books and more thorough reading.

Closely related to making children better readers is the art of making them better writers. Bosma provides ideas for teaching writing through the use of folk literature as a model of form, theme, and content. Folk tales provide thoughtful exercises in writing because of the many levels of meaning they possess.

One of the strongest qualities of this book is that it allows teachers to use a

wide variety of creative activities in the classroom. Involving children in art, music, puppetry, pantomime, drama, storytelling, or improvisation as an expression of folk literature encourages them to be active rather than passive learners. Bosma not only suggests creative activities, but she also cites actual classroom examples in which this approach to folk literature has been successful. She has consulted with many classroom teachers from lower to middle elementary grades and has observed in many classes. The final chapter of the book is an account of how a fifth/sixth grade class from Grand Rapids uses folk literature in its reading and writing program. The wealth of ideas presented

in the first part of the book comes to expression in this chapter. The reader finishes the book confident that the strategies really do work for the benefit and enjoyment of each child.

Bosma concludes her book with 180 helpful book suggestions that are annotated for teacher use. More than half of these titles are new to this edition. Appendixes that organize the folk literature by region, culture, and tribe, and present "idea webs" for folk literature provide a framework from which the teacher can plan meaningful lessons.

*Fairy Tales, Fables, Legends, and Myths* is a most enjoyable book and a useful tool for classroom teachers in the primary through upper elementary grades. ☺

## *The Impact of Evolutionary Theory: A Christian View*

by Russell Maatman

Maatman, Dordt College emeritus professor of chemistry, explores the influence of evolutionary thinking on a wide range of subjects from psychology to art. Included in the discussion are analyses of the scientific enterprise, evolutionary theory, and differing views of the nature and place of human beings. Paperback, 300 pgs., biblio., \$12.95



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### DAYSTAR

A group of educators within the CSI family announces the Inaugural Conference of DAYSTAR, July 20 - 23, 1994, at Trinity Christian College, 6601 West College Drive, Palos Heights, IL 60463. The conference will explore "A Vision with a Task," published by Calvin Center for Christian Studies, and will launch DAYSTAR Educational Network.

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