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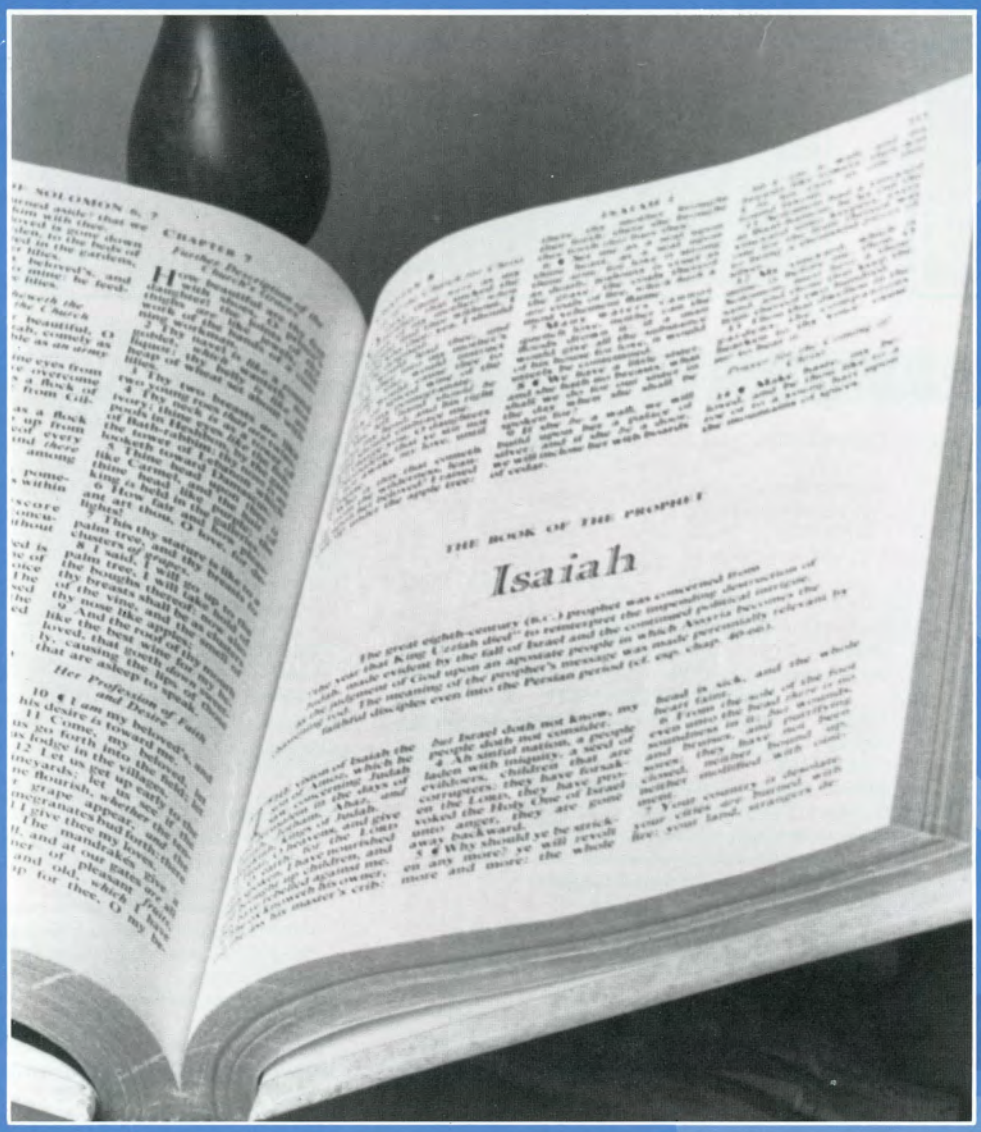

Christian School Bible Curriculum

A Bible Teacher's Prayer

Anonymous

God, I feel so down today. I stand amazed that you can use me. I'm a sinner, and you wish *me* to teach other sinners *your* ways? God, you'd better tell me with your Holy Spirit if I am to be successful. Father, take my inadequate teaching and make good things happen.

Father, another thing: I'm human. I need compliments and thank you's and pats on the back. But God, teenagers aren't into that—so let me feel your pats. Let me be more interested in how you are being treated in my class than how I am being treated. Help me to crucify myself and glorify you. If my weaknesses and failures can give you successes, then do it! Sometimes I'll want to talk rather than listen. Please, Father, shut me up.

God, I know that some days I'll feel like Jeremiah and want to weep—provide the handkerchief. I know some days I'll feel like Elijah and want to hide—coax me out of the cave.

Father, I'll meet all kinds of troubled students this year: the couch potatoes who will measure my class by how entertaining it is, the atheists and agnostics who will want proof and be argumentative, the charismatic who'll want to experience religion and will evaluate my class by how many "highs" I provide, the legalists who will want the black and white rights and wrongs in pretty little note form. They'll want quick answers and no discussion. They want life simple with absolute rules and they'll want me to put words in *your* mouth.

There will be the materialists, who will turn me off because I won't help them gain things, and they'll be so tired in class because they milk six hours a day. Father, money is *far* more important to them than their Maker.

The hedonists, lovers of pleasure, who will see my class as in interruption between "keggers," certain athletes, who will want to get my class over quickly because there is a game tonight, the oversaturated Christians, who have been raised in church since diapers, will shout, "Boring—I've heard it all before!" And they'll sit next to new Christians who do not know the story of David and Goliath.

Father, there will be girls more interested in their clothes and makeup than in your Word. The mall will be far more enjoyable for them than my class. There will be boys more interested in meeting girls in the hall after class than in anything I'm saying.

There will be the learning disabled who quit trying in classroom a long time ago and are numb to failure.

The abused will sit comatose in my class from the hurts inflicted at home.

The apathetic will sit in a lazy stupor.

The hoodlum will seek to disrupt.

The shy won't want to be recognized and will seek to melt into the wall.

The lonely and unpopular will want more attention than I can give.

Father, I have to touch all of their troubled lives and also find enough time to deal with the majority of "normal" kids. But even with the "normal" I am outnumbered. Father, I get them for forty-five minutes a day, and every day they get hours of music, movies, TV, and magazines that say what I'm teaching is dumb and that you are an idiot!

It's been another tough year, hasn't it? Secret tears shed because what I said in class from your Word was so true and beautiful, but seemingly that day no one listened. Secret thoughts in bed about whether I'm wasting my time, my life! Even satanic doubts that creep into my mind whether you even exist!

God, I need you, to endure. "My help comes from the Lord, the maker of heaven and earth." Give me enough hurdles to stretch my muscles, but also give me enough visible successes to keep me going. Every once in a while, let me hear the soft whisper that you care and I am serving you. And Father, if I ever hurt more than help your cause—please take me quickly. Let the young people come to you through me, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

God, give me grace. You know I need it!

Amen.

Lorna Van Gilst, Editor

EDITORIAL

Not Everyone Can Teach Bible

After breakfast one morning long ago, my father riffled through the pages of the old leather-bound Bible looking for the morning's passage in Obadiah. "Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah," one of us chanted smartly.

"That's what you learn in a Christian school," Dad responded. "In my school we never learned the books of the Bible."

It was true, in Christian day school we learned lots of Bible facts and Bible texts. The difference showed each summer in Vacation Bible School. When it came to Bible knowledge, we Christian school kids easily outsmarted the public school kids, though we were far too smug about it.

Some years ago the question arose at our Christian school teachers convention whether Christian school kids were bombarded with too much Bible study, since they got a healthy dose both at church and at school. I asked then, and I still ask today, can one ever study the Bible too much?

Probably so, if Bible study means simply absorbing Bible facts. Of course, I would like my students to know that Hezekiah gained fifteen bonus years of life. But more than that, I would like them to know that Hezekiah holds a place in the Davidic line of Christ, that the Bible is the story of God's faithfulness to his people, that God's story is our story as children of God's covenant. How our students understand their place in God's story has everything to do with how—and how much—we teach Bible.

"Any good teacher can teach Bible," a principal once told me. Probably so, if good Bible teaching consists of teaching Bible facts. A good teacher can motivate most students to learn Bible facts. But so can Bible trivia games.

I hear complaints of frustration from several Christian school Bible teachers who aren't very thrilled about teaching Bible, or teachers who are begging for help planning their Bible curriculum to make it relevant in students' lives. I have heard some high school students say, "The Bible teacher is okay, but class is so dull. I don't really like to go." I've heard students say, "Our teacher thinks all we want to talk about in Bible class is sex and dating. We're tired of talking about that every time."

Not every teacher can teach Bible. And not every small school can hire a teacher who has gone through seminary. Ideally, though, a Bible teacher should know—and love to know—Hebrew and Greek culture, for the Bible, even more than classical literature, is couched in language strongly influenced by culture, by the authors' purposes, and by the readers addressed. That is not to say the Bible is limited to readers of particular eras, but certainly the writers had specific readers in mind as they wrote.

Recently I worked as a stylist with a team of Bible translators who have spent years as theologians studying and teaching the Bible. Time and again I had to ask the team, "What does the Greek say?" "What is the Hebrew context?" "What characterizes the writer's style?" "What are the conventions of this type of writing?" "To whom was the writer addressing the book?" "For what specific purpose was this author writing?" And while helping with the project, I read the Bible in a way I seldom do otherwise, reading whole books at a time, rather than only chapters or portions of chapters.

Studying God's Word with these lifelong students of the Bible, I gained a deep awe for the Bible writers' use of the conventions of literature—of story and poetry and drama, of metaphor and imagery, of style and purpose and audience, and of how this story of God's faithfulness weaves down through the ages and into our lives. I thought of those Christian school students who have told me that Bible classes are dull, and I wished I could capture some of the power of the Word I was experiencing and share it with them.

We need teachers who can help students make connections that relate God's covenant of grace to their own lives. Too often we make the Bible more of a resource for reaching heaven than a source of redeemed living. Asking students merely to look up texts that might solve life's problems and give us happy lives makes the Bible a how-to book rather than the Word of God.

Certainly, Bible courses ought to help students know what the Bible says and how it relates to personal happiness. But finding one's way to a reward in heaven is a dangerously self-centered approach to studying the Bible. Christian schools need Bible teachers who are carefully trained to open the Word for students and help them understand the story of God's faithfulness and his call for us to live every day on earth as citizens of Christ's kingdom.

Faith and Action

A Christian School Bible Curriculum

The third question of the Westminster Larger Catechism asks, "What is the Word of God?" The answer: "The Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments are the Word of God, the only rule for faith and obedience."

Daniel J. Kunkle

This straightforward question and equally clear answer present a very usable framework for the development of a Christian school Bible curriculum. Instruction in Bible in the Christian school should contain these four components: 1) a chronological historical-redemptive study of the Old Testament, 2) a comprehensive analysis of the New Testament, 3) a systematic study of the doctrines of the faith, and 4) a conscientious application of biblical truth to real world situations in a way that produces Christian action. We will look at each one of these components in turn.

Old Testament Study

In Luke 24 Jesus makes it clear that Moses and the Prophets (the Old Testament) are about him. Further, in II Corinthians 10 Paul explains that the experiences of Israel were written down for Christians' benefit. We ignore these admonitions to our own hurt. Students in the Christian school must become diligent students of the Old Testament. This instruction in the Old Testament must go beyond the simple "Bible story hero" model. Students need to see the bigger picture. They need to see how "it all fits together." They need a chronological historical-redemptive approach to Old Testament study.

This kind of study involves three things. First, the entire Old Testament fits together because God has chosen to deal with his people through relationships called covenants. Beginning with Adam, then with Noah, Abraham, Moses, and David, these covenants form the linch pins of God's redemptive work in history. Each succeeding covenant builds on the provisions of the one(s) before. Students have to see these connections; otherwise Old Testament study becomes nothing more than a disconnected series of religious biographies.

Second, the entire Old Testament is about Jesus, not just a few isolated "Bible prophecy texts." Christian school students need to see this. It is impossible to understand fully the Person and work of Jesus apart from an understanding of the Old Testament background, that which he came to fulfill.

Third, the entire Old Testament exists for us as new covenant believers. Christian young people must see themselves in Scripture. The Old Testament is given to us for that very purpose. Old Testament Israel grumbled and complained; I grumble and complain. Old Testament Israel wanted an earthly king; I need a divine-human King. The Old Testament is about me and my need, and it is most assuredly about God and his provision.

New Testament Study

When it comes to New Testament study, the gospels and the book of Acts are a good place to start, but not a good

place to end. Too often too much time is spent in Christian school Bible classes drawing maps of the journeys of Paul and rehashing the basic outline of the life and ministry of Christ. Certainly, these things should form a component of the study of the New Testament in a Christian school Bible curriculum, but New Testament study must go beyond these things to tackle the difficult doctrinal and ethical issues addressed in New Testament books like Romans and I Corinthians. The most common complaint among Christian school students when it comes to the Bible curriculum is that they study the same things over and over again. Young people need and want to be stretched by the meat of Scripture as well as to be nourished by its milk.

Doctrinal Study

I will say this boldly and without apology. Christian school students need to study systematic theology. This is not a dirty word, nor is it a concept that has outlived its time. There are basically two ways to study the Bible. The first is to come to a particular text and ask questions about the meaning of that particular portion of Scripture. The other method of Bible study is to ask the bigger question, what does the entire Bible teach about a given subject. What does the whole Bible teach about God, Jesus, man, the church, the Bible itself? This is the work of systematic theology.

Christian young people need both kinds of Bible study within the Christian school curriculum. Systematics is not an artificial order imposed upon Scripture. Rather, it simply reflects the nature of the way people think. If Christian schools are about the business of training young people to think Christianly, then we must enable them to think doctrinally.

Faith in Action

James is clear; faith without works is dead. A Christian school Bible curriculum must go beyond the *what* of belief to the *how* of action. This needs to be both an ongoing component of a Christian school Bible curriculum and a designated independent part of it. As students study the Old Testament, the New Testament, and Christian doctrine, they must continually ask, "How does God desire for me to apply these truths to my life?" "What thoughts, words, and actions do I need to change as a result of God speaking to me through his Word?" The study of the Bible is deadly without the opportunity for application.

Beyond this regular approach to application of Scripture to life, the Bible curriculum should contain a course that focuses squarely on issues of applying God's Word to life situations. Components of such a course might include media studies, Christian social action, apologetics, philosophy, and ethics. Most people are not particularly good at what is called transfer of learning. Christian school Bible teachers cannot assume that simply because they tell their students what is true, these students will be able to transfer that truth to the way they live their lives. They need help in learning how to do this.

A Final Word

The Bible curriculum in the Christian school is obviously of great importance. Yet, it is worth reminding ourselves that what makes a school Christian is not the quality of its Bible curriculum nor even that it has one. A Christian school is a place in which every curriculum is a Bible curriculum in that every course of study acknowledges the Word of God to be the only rule for faith and obedience.

A Christian school that has fully integrated the Bible into every area of learning would be no less Christian if there were no Bible curriculum at all. This is not to deprecate the importance of the Bible curriculum in the Christian school. Rather, it is to place the Bible curriculum in its proper context. The Bible is the most important book a person will ever read or study, but the study of that book extends beyond the confines of the Bible class. A quality Christian school Bible curriculum will include the components noted above, but it will also point beyond itself to the study of every area of life under the authority of God's Word.

Daniel J. Kunkle has been teaching Bible at Phil-Mont Christian Academy near Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, and is currently in a graduate teacher education program at Villanova University.

Kunkle's students participate in IAWTASAT (I Always Wanted To Ask Somebody About This). About once a month they discuss the questions in class, thus uniting biblical teaching with practical application to issues important to the students.

A New Bible Study Program for Christian High Schools

Herman Proper

The teaching of Bible to high school students is as important now as it has ever been, and it is time to give it more determined and active support.

This is the conclusion reached by the three Canadian districts of Christian Schools International (CSI), and they have set out to give it that support. Specifically, they are in the middle of an ambitious *High School Bible Project,* which will produce a program of Bible studies consisting of a course in Old Testament for grade 9 or 10 and a course in New Testament for grade 11 or 12.

A Short History

Most of the Canadian high schools of CSI offered one or two courses as a Bible program, but several problems needed to be addressed. Since programs were small, few teachers had specialized training in Bible or Bible teaching. The attitude that "any Christian teacher should be able to teach Bible" sometimes caused a rapid turnover of Bible teachers. Since no current standard program was available, teachers often had to design their own courses. A concern arose about continuity of program and consistency between schools in a district.

Christian Schools International was in the process of releasing its program, *The Story of God and His People,* but that program stopped at grade 8. Therefore, the membership of the Ontario Alliance of Christian Schools (District 10 of CSI) mandated its board to develop a standardized high school Bible program to meet the needs of its high schools.

Since that time, District 10, in consultation with the other two Canadian districts, has developed the philosophy and framework of the program and the proposal to write two teacher guides for a high school Bible program, one in Old Testament studies and one in New Testament studies. This project was approved by the Canadian Curriculum Council in November 1992, and funding was approved in April 1993 by the Canadian Christian Education Foundation.

An Extension of CSI program

The program is an extension of CSI's *The Story of God and His People*, retaining the philosophy and best features of that series but adapting and adding features so that it suits the specific developmental needs and conceptual abilities of adolescents.

The program consists of two courses that provide a cycle through the Bible, similar to the original series. Emphasis, however, is placed on different books of Scripture such as the prophets and the letters. The heart of the program is still "the Bible, the story of God and his people." This phrase captures the Reformed understanding of the Bible as God's revelation of himself and as the story of God's redemption of his people and his restoration of creation. This approach to the Bible as a subject retains both the

historical and literary frameworks; each context is considered necessary for understanding the text being studied.

The Bible series aims and objectives have been kept but extended to shift the emphasis from "the teacher presenting" to "the student reading" the Bible as the story of God's acts and words. The concept of the kingdom of God and the knowledge and abilities needed to interpret the Bible have been added to the aims.

Special Features of the Program

The inductive approach to teaching Bible

Why will the program consist of a *teacher guide* but no *student text*? The basic reason is that the main teaching approach is to have the students study the Bible directly, learning to read and understand the text of Scripture for themselves with appropriate help and direction. This program is a study **of** the Bible, not **about** the Bible (just as a literature teacher would have students do a study **of**, and not **about** *Hamlet).*

A post-hole survey

Another cycle through the Bible could become another "flat" review of known stories and facts. This is not the intent. A "post-hole survey" keeps the whole sweep of redemptive history in mind but stops to "dig in" for detailed study at key passages. Passages will be chosen that have special significance for the history of revelation and redemption, and that represent the range of literary genres in the Bible.

Teacher-directed but student-centered pedagogy

The learning activities are the heart of teaching. A variety of activities will be used, all carefully designed with a view to what the *students* will be doing in order to learn. The natural rhythm of learning and students' various learning styles will be built in by using the "Model for Learning" developed by Harro Van Brummelen (1988).

Meeting adolescents' needs

The developmental characteristics of adolescents, and particularly their faith development, have been given special attention. Students may bring with them familiarity with the Bible but too little knowledge, and the perception that Bible courses are another version of catechism requiring the correct rote responses as dictated by the authority in question. At the same time, they are full of questions about faith, life, and meaning. The program will give them room to explore and to think as they work with the text of Scripture to understand what it says (exegesis) and means today (application).

Resource-based

Students will use many resources, including computerized Bible study programs, as they develop their understanding of the Bible's message and compare their interpretation with those of other students and scholars.

Already under way

Hilda Roukema, Bible teacher and vice-principal at Toronto District Christian High School, has taken a leave of absence to write the program during the fall and winter of 1993-1994. She is working closely with the project director, Herman Proper, who is Education Coordinator for the Ontario Alliance of Christian Schools. Various scholars and classroom teachers will review and test the drafts. Publication of the two teacher guides is expected in the 1994-1995 school year.

The philosophy and framework of the program are described in the 60-page OACS *Religious Studies Guideline* (September 1993) complete with a content outline of the program and an annotated resource list.

Knowing God's Word and having the understanding and ability to read its meaning for today can anchor and guide students in their way to Christian maturity. This program can help.

Herman Proper is secondary education coordinator for the Ontario Alliance of Christian Schools in Ancastor, Ontario.

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The Discipline of Childlike Prayer

Larry Wielenga

One of the greatest heartfelt joys I have had as a father has been listening to my children pray. Although I hope to have taught them something of the importance of prayer, I believe I have learned as much if not more about the simplicity and beauty of prayer by just listening.

I must admit to burying my face or at least smothering a smile on occasion as Mugsy the dog, Ernie the fish and Uncle Joe all received the same request for blessings in the same line. And then there was the request for forgiveness that contained at least a dozen "manys" before the confession ended with the "many sins." Probably most heartening was the list of things to be thankful for, including grandparents, a warm house, not getting the flu, Lake Okoboji, friends, bicycles, sunshine, hamburgers, Jesus, and a variety of significant others in a child's life.

As I reflect on the education I have received from my children, it becomes clear that their prayers exhibited a simple trust in God's power, his goodness, and his willingness to love them. Their prayer responses reflected a sense of dependence in personal relationship with the God who can and will provide, protect, and forgive them.

A second heartfelt joy in my life is teaching high school students about themselves and the God who loves them. Young people in their teens can be vibrant, inquisitive, and inspiring in their journey through some of the most formative years of their lives. In that journey, it seems that three desires always rise to the top of the priority list of important elements to a young person who is growing and maturing: the desire for accepting relationships, the desire for independence, and the desire for security. It is a time when prayer should be the essential ingredient in their daily diet as they not only wrestle with their desires, but do so in the middle of a busy life of homework, work, extracurriculars, family, friends, and church life. But when I ask my students about their prayer life, even the most dedicated young people recognize that they don't spend enough time in personal relational prayer with their God. The simplicity of the childlike prayer of dependence, security, and trust often gets smothered by all the other challenges our youth culture demands by way of time, energy, and commitment.

In an effort to help young people develop the disciplined prayer life that can be so influential and supportive during these formative and challenging years, we use a simple project called the CPT prayer exercise. The project's main focus is to encourage young people to "fix their eyes on Jesus" (Heb. 12:2) and follows the simple pattern of confession, petition, and thanksgiving as taught by Jesus himself. The ultimate goal is to help young people grow in their relationship with the Lord and return to or remain in that simple childlike trust that is so important during adolescence.

Students are required to fill out a simple prayer planner for twenty-eight days and are encouraged to continue after completion of the required project. They keep track of completion by recording a CPT on their calendars. They are assured confidentiality in that I respect their honesty and only require that they turn in the calendar for credit for the project. The discipline required for completing the project helps kids understand their need for prayer and the power in prayer.

After completion of the project, students are encouraged to share the impact of prayer in their lives and on the lives of those they have prayed for and with. Growth in relationships, lifted guilt, broadened perspectives, and open, honest dialogue are some of the positive benefits that have resulted from this simple project. But probably the most heartening result occurred in a student who said that he was learning to trust Jesus with every part of his life through the simple prayer relationship this tool helped initiate.

It is truly a joy to recognize and experience the simplicity and power of prayer. In a world that becomes increasingly demanding of our youth, any tool that can help young people stay focused on the power, goodness, and love of their covenant God in the person of Jesus Christ is well worth the time and effort. Leading young people into the discipline of a childlike prayer life is one of the most rewarding and encouraging blessings I have experienced as a father and a teacher.

Larry Wielenga teaches Bible at Unity Christian High School in Orange City, Iowa.

Faith and Literature

Roy M. Anker

The integration of faith into one's discipline is not an easy matter; to be sure, one can set forth cliche upon cliche and really sound orthodox and smart enough. The effort, I think, should be to try to think somewhat differently about it, to venture fresh formulations, thinking one's way most cautiously to understanding the *what* and *how* of integration.

In Walter Wangerin's delightful and wrenching fantasy novel, *The Book of the Dun Cow,* the head rooster of a coop crows each day the canonical hours for his flock of dithery hens. For the hens, these seven holy crows mark and explain and, in so doing, "bless" each day, "giving it direction and meaning and a proper soul." In short, the canonical crows orient all creatures, including the crower, telling them where in time and the world they are. Ultimately, those daily songs of laud and vesper give sense and shape to the hens' small world. By those songs, the chickens (and who isn't one?) confront and succumb to a pressure from beyond time, a pressure that defines the very ways and ends of their lives. They live in a peculiar, charged atmosphere, as John Updike has said of his boyhood home: they live in God's time, in God's sight. Things are not as they seem but a whole lot more.

It is the predicament of all Christian people, but especially the Christian scholar-teacher among them, to at once resemble both the rooster and the hens: alive in one world and trying to live by another. After all, our ordinary common life in one world is rife with the baggage of the Fall: confusion, wrongness, hurt, and incompletion. In this terrible fix and because of it, in an incessant search for understanding and nurture people seek solace, faith, wisdom, love, and hope, both for our present and would-be journeys. From any perspective, including a Reformed Christian one, it is fair to say that literature culls out and teaches those words and tales that best contain, define, evoke, and dramatize the mysterious world in which we find ourselves alive. The "stuff of literature" relentlessly probes and examines the fundamental conditions of our being, the "bad news," as Frederick Beuchner calls it, of human life.

Literature does this by telling stories of one sort or another, and that comprises its chief means: fables, epics, sagas, novels, tales, poems, riddles, jokes, or whatever countless forms the imagination fashions. So prevalent are they that it is easy to wonder if the human creature is, first and last, a story-telling and story-craving creature and, second, if human appetites for story reveal some of God's image in us (God likes stories too). It is easy to make a case that God is pre-eminently a story-telling God and that divine habit is a foremost attribute of God's nature and God's speech to humankind.

To put the matter another way, we read (and watch) stories for diversion and entertainment, but at the same time, amid the pleasure of those tales, we often find far more than we expect, namely, vivid imaginative renditions of human experience that assail and haunt with urgent pleas to make sense of the perils and to embrace the glory of living. In other words, if the literature is very good—and "good lit" need not be either

fancy or intellectual—it presses upon us the vital questions and affirmations of a multitude of imaginative voices that, by the clarity and "affect" of their work, beckon our intellectual, moral, and religious attention. Great stories and poems probe fundamental human questions that haunt writers and audiences—even us, ordinary readers far removed from a work's time and place of composition.

The chief interests in most stories, as it is for the hens back in the coop, are questions like "What's going on here?" "How will this turn out?" or "Where are we, anyway?" For many scholars and critics, lasting literature comes from humankind's almost instinctual effort to make some sense of existence. For example, we know soon enough that we are alive, breathing and aware, physical and psychological creatures. We carry around that startling burden of self-awareness—that we call consciousness. What does that mean? Modern novelist Thornton Wilder defines the matter well in his comment that humankind seems shaken into existence, "like dice from a box" (*The Eighth Day*). In much the same terms, a character of contemporary Christian novelist John Updike argues that human life began "when some dumb ape swung down out of a tree and *wondered* what he was doing here" (*The Centaur*, italics mine). Or, as the old folk song has it, "we wonder as we wander out under the sky."

Along the same line, as a last example, the Bible sees people in general as sojourners, wayfarers, exiles, and aliens upon the earth (very much like Cain), alive and awake and devoting life to searching simultaneously for answers to riddles and for rest from humankind's incessant quest. We search, in other words, for a home wherein we might find light, warmth, safety, and rest, images that recur throughout Scripture and evoke the inmost character of the kingdom of God. It is to these mysteries and curiosities that great literature invariably turns, probing the circumstances and meanings of human life. Author Madeleine L'Engle contends that the

> questioning of the meaning of being, and dying, and being, is behind the telling of stories around tribal fires at night; behind the drawing of animals on the walls of caves; the singing of melodies of love in spring, and of the death of green in autumn. It is part of the deepest longing of the human psyche, a recurrent ache in the hearts of all of God's creatures (*Walking on Water: Reflections on Faith and Art).*

It is easy to make a case that God is pre-eminently a story-telling God . . .

Given its centrality in human experience and its capacity for delight and reflection, literature provides a remarkable "integratable" discipline in which the relations between it and belief are difficult to avoid.

It is easy enough, to be sure, to identify and pose the troubles and the questions. Most often we would simply like to forget them. The hard part lies in being the rooster, sounding loudly, clearly, and joyfully how what one professes has anything to do with what one confesses. That is a lifelong business of realizing (making real) the bright and gladsome manifestations of Christ, the Son of God, in the dark and tear-sodden place which is our world. For one, it is part of our faith that the sober appraisal of human life leads to asking the honest questions about which Christian faith most cares: what's going on here, what sort of world is this, and what should one's life be and do? Indeed, John Calvin seems to encourage this posture in his own high valuation of liberal education: those who have "either quaffed or even tasted the liberal arts penetrate with their aid far more deeply into the divine wisdom" (*Institutes,* I,5,ii). Literature instructs readers in discerning the shapes of evil and grace, clarifying always the nature of creation and fall.

While plainly announcing my bias for literature, it is nonetheless legitimate to suggest that there seems to be a fittingness between the sorts of inquiry that take place in literary study and a central emphasis within the Reformed tradition. More than some Christian traditions, the Reformed tradition generates an expansive, full embrace of creation, one that is simultaneously celebratory, prophetic, and transformative. And the sorts of questions that fuel its enterprise also animate the literary enterprise. What has literature to do with Geneva? Much.

First, the venerable John of Geneva suggests that the close study of the liberal arts—by which he meant history, rhetoric, classics, and the like—apprises the student of two fundamental conditions of human life: first, the glory of creation, of which Calvin sings in the early portions of the *Institutes* and, second, the blind corruption of humanity, which not even the bright holy glory of creation can dispel or redeem. If two themes resound through literature, these are probably *the* two. From Homer to Theodore Roethke (twentieth-century Michigan-born poet), and just about everywhere else, these two themes afflict the poet. An alternately beautiful and terrifying world provides the setting for humankind's ecstacies and desecrations—a strange place to live indeed. Within this we wrestle and search. In other words, there is Creation and Fall, and common grace affords a glimpse of the splendor and goodness of the first and the noetic darkness and moral squalor of the second. We sense that human life should

be more than it is, and yearn for it, but know not how to arrive there.

When I teach World Literature, we start with the first chapters of Genesis in order to detect and feature these themes, and they then inescapably recur throughout the course (Dante, Voltaire, Kafka, Tolstoy, and so on), culminating with Alan Paton's profoundly attentive and moving novel of South Africa, *Cry, the Beloved Country,* which offers as precise and penetrating a portrait of the nature of redemption and faith as any I know of.

This depiction of the human circumstance—Creation and Fall—not only shapes the poles of experience in Western literature, but also very much shapes my own "sensibility," to use an old-fashioned term. These are fair descriptions of what it is like to be alive religiously on this globe. Modern writers, both literary and philosophical, talk about alienation and fragmentation, *ad infinitum,* all of which are permutations of the enmity and darkness that erupts in the Fall. When I teach film these themes invariably surface because of their presence in the material and of my disposition to dwell on them. Any director worth his or her salt cannot avoid them, and these explorations of darkness offer some of the towering accomplishments of American (and European) cinema.

On the other hand, a central emphasis in my teaching is the artist's effort to catch the original glory of Creation, beauty, harmony, intimacy, and delight in words, images, and stories. That is an easy and glad task when artists proclaim their deep love of a creation framed by the Holy God. That is less and less the case as we approach the present. Very often modern artists in literature and cinema struggle to depict a radiant Mystery that at once perplexes, exults, and fascinates them, a Something akin to Paul's suggestion that the Romans worship a god they cannot identify.

Of course, all this analysis and questioning of the human predicament rests on the assumption that the clearer and sharper our questions, based on honest scrutiny of human life, the more readily, cogently, and demandingly the Good News addresses us. After all, God first made and then came to a particular world so to embrace those made in God's own image. In apprehending the nature and holy intentions of the creation, as depicted in Scripture and in literature, and in assessing the nature and toll of our distance from God, we apprehend the fittingness and necessity of the incarnation to offer any understanding or hope for a sorely fallen world.

Barely any work of literature can twitch without in some way alluding to some facet of the Incarnation.

The other gift of literature, pushed hard in integration and in pedagogy, is the matter of faithful attention and discernment, patient and arduous, activities to which Scripture regularly commands its readers. This happens, I think, in two ways: first, by teaching and showing students how to pay attention and discern, of which analysis and reflection are chief forms. The task of writing puts this sort of pressure on students to examine and label what they see in a text and, always, in the larger world. This is an exacting and endless task but a most essential one. A second related gift is that the careful study of literature can push us to listen, as Frederick Beuchner suggests, to our "own lives for the holy and elusive word that is spoken to us out of their depths" (*The Sacred Journey*). As we read stories of others, we become attuned to our own stories, attuned to discerning the hints and guesses, the tokens of grace, that surround and imbue our lives as we search for faith, hope, and love. In other words, the study of literature teaches how to pay attention, to watch and wait, to sharpen our seeing and our hearing to discern both pain and love, the seeming absence and real presence of God.

As we traverse our way through these stories, and through our own, we ponder where we might find God's presence, whether it be in Job or Kafka. In modern literature, the absence of God cries out, pushing us to look all the harder. The unexpected and improbable intrusion of grace into such a world inevitably intrudes into one's reading. Western literature (and film) is soaked—steeped—in overt and implicit dramas of redemption and incarnation. Barely any work of literature can twitch without in some way alluding to some facet of the Incarnation, so central is it to the way in which the West, even in a secular time, conceives of itself.

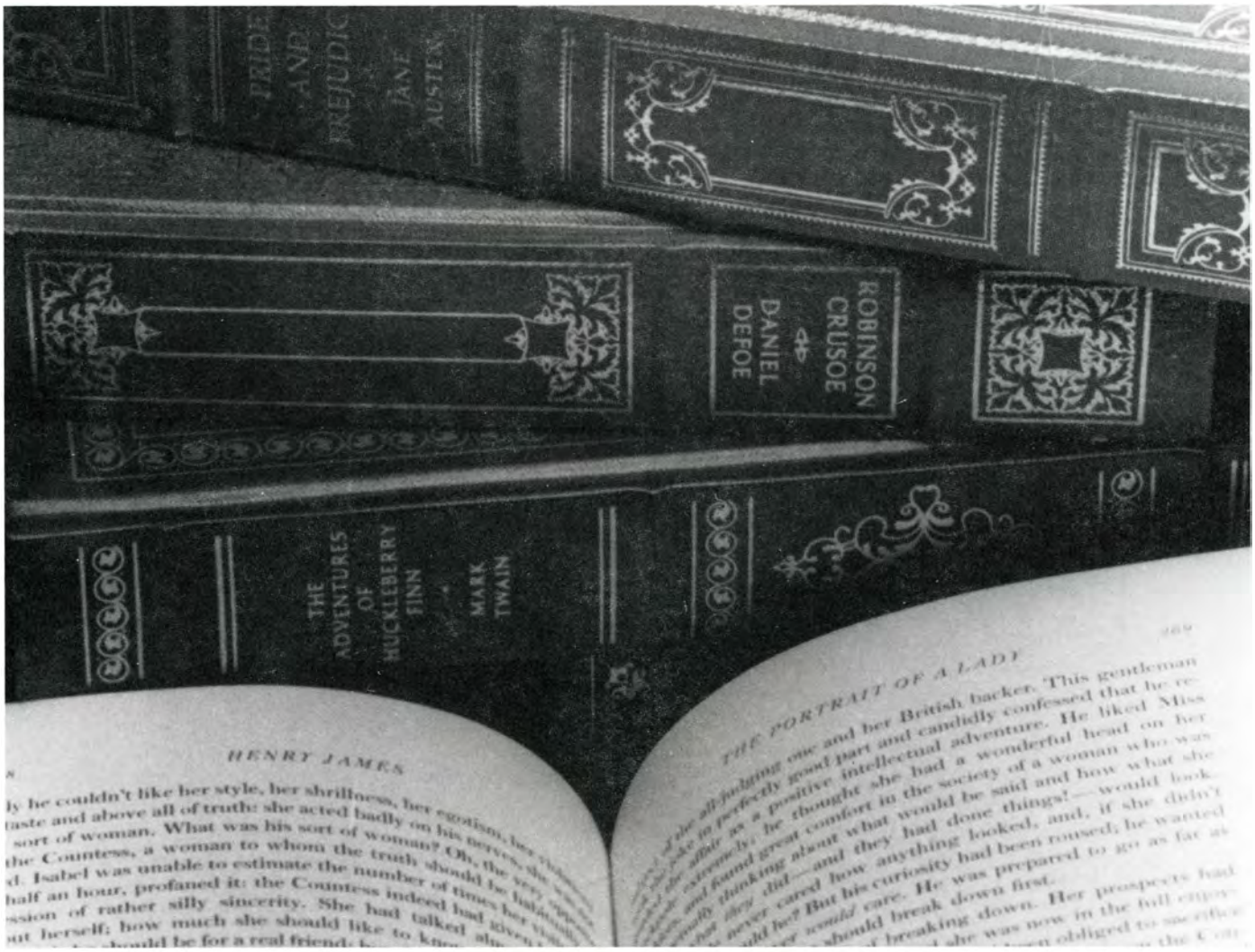
It is not in the least difficult, then, to push literature students to examine not only the mere presence of Christian allusions in this or that work but, more importantly, the writers' or filmmakers' notions of incarnation and redemption. For example, some of the most popular and powerful films of our time tell stories of abandonment *and* incarnation, albeit "cloaked" retellings of Jesus' life and what it is that Jesus brings to the world. Such literary journeys can clarify and revive the life of faith, imparting not only new understanding but deepened commitment and passion. In exploring the nature of the Incarnation, we move from the experience of Creation and Fall to the pivot point of human culture and history, namely, the saving love that redeems and betokens the onset of God's "shining" kingdom, a place of radiant and ecstatic love and celebration (Dante, *Paradiso).*

This same vision or "sense of things" animates my scholarship and writing. In this, I suspect, my "sensibility" is Reformed. To put it another way, the goggles through which I see the world refract experience into

the above-described Reformed categories. I tend to put these within the broad historic tradition of Western Christianity. Most of these hallmarks are as attributable to Augustine as they are to Calvin, although their emphases depart markedly from some theological tendencies in Aquinas, Luther, and Wesley. Calvinism, for example, manifests a very tough assessment of human nature, a recognition that is then carried over into its sober notion of sanctification (as T. S. Eliot called it, "a lifetime's death in love"). Neither the rationalism of Aquinas nor the perfectionism of Wesley seem to gel with this assessment of human frailty. This perspective shapes my own perception of history, as I try to write faithful and sensible accounts of American religious history. So also Calvin's hymnic praise of the glory and goodness of the Creation. This extremity of this exultant "original" state of being, so well evoked by Calvin, explains for me the persistence of a profound human longing to find some "home" amid its painful exile from intimate harmony of God's kingdom. And so it goes.

Why bother with scholarship or teaching? Well, that too has its Reformed Christian wellspring. The usual phrase is "for the kingdom," which is both grandiose and worn-out. Nonetheless, there is considerable existential heft in the notion, one that affirms the reality of God's loving common grace and the radical kenotic in-breaking of the Holy God. One's professing and writing—ne'er the twain should part—must arise from and witness to the long wrestle to reconcile the benighted wayward self and world to the Almighty Love that will not leave humankind alone.

Roy M. Anker is English professor at Calvin College in Grand Rapids, Michigan.



Schooling Among the Tiv

Louisa F. Bruinsma

West Edmonton Christian School principal, Henry Visscher, was granted a leave from serving as principal at West Edmonton Christian School and volunteered to spend three months with Worldwide Christian Schools as a consultant for the schools among the Tiv of Nigeria.

Tight budgets, delinquent accounts, limited furniture and fixtures allowance, meeting the payroll, discipline, class size, Christian perspectives in services. You can hear concerns over these matters expressed in discussions throughout Canada and the United States, and certainly in discussions at meetings of the finance committee, education committee, and board of the Edmonton Society for Christian Education. These same issues are also addressed by Christians a world away, among the Tiv of Nigeria.

Henry Visscher, having served as principal and teacher for twenty-seven years, desired to be of service in another setting for a short period of time. "I wanted a change," he says. "Our family and finances allowed for that change at this point in our lives."

The 1987 tornado in Edmonton kindled Visscher's desire to be involved in disaster relief services. "But that meant waiting for a disaster to happen," says Henry. A look at the list of affiliated organizations in the Christian Schools International directory sparked a curiosity in Worldwide Christian Schools. "We were not aware of the organization until then," says Henry, "but the name of Executive Director James Lont was familiar because he had been director of the Young Calvinist Federation." After reading the brochure, Henry found the idea of becoming involved in outreach in education appealing. "From there it was open doors all the way," says Henry. "The Lord definitely guided us into his assignment."

Policy of the Edmonton Christian Schools offers a variety of leaves of absence. Henry was approved by the Board for a half-year leave without pay. Internal staff redistribution, including the appointment of an acting principal, provided coverage of his duties during the leave.

So it was that Henry Visscher and his wife, Angeline, volunteered their services to Worldwide Christian Schools, working with six secondary schools, each with a student body of about 350-550. As the first educators to volunteer for World Wide Christian Schools, they were able to provide counsel for principals and encouragement for teachers. Henry conducted seminars and workshops from a Christian perspective. He modeled teaching in science, math, economics, and social studies while Angeline was involved in remedial work in language arts.

"The schools have no electricity or running water," says Visscher. "No need for maintenance budget or a caretaker. There is not even a garbage can because there is no garbage in the classroom.

"Students need to provide their own scribblers, books, and pens—even their own desks. You could always tell when a new student was coming to school," he says. The student could be seen in the village carrying a desk to school on his or her head.

Students wear uniforms, probably because of the British influence, but the practice helps teachers identify their students. Teachers do not know their students by face or name because of large class sizes. Uniform color identifies the school.

"During our entire stay, I never saw anyone take a lunch to school, maybe an orange or banana, but no lunch," says Visscher. "A local woman fried some yams over an open fire in the school yard. That comprised the 'cafeteria.' Most students had a few kobos to spend on fried yams or cassava (a root vegetable).

"There are no teacher contracts: the annual student tuition fee of $15-20 goes to the teacher as salary. Since many parents cannot make the payments, the principles struggle with the dilemma of increasing the already large class size to ensure more income for teachers' salaries. Sometimes teachers go without pay for two or three months.

"A lot of work has yet to be done to develop a Christian perspective in education. Teaching methodology is basically limited to lecturing, note taking, and testing. There is no duplicating machine, so no hand-outs. Only one school had a limited library of about 250 books that had been left by missionaries or donated by various schools. The rooms are totally bare, with no pictures on the walls," says Visscher.

"Students are required to work on the school farm as part of the agricultural science program," he adds. "Sweeping the classroom and school yard is also part of their daily duty. For punishment they may have to cut the grass with a cutlass (crude scythe)."

Punishment is meted out not by the teacher, but by a mature, responsible, strong academic student called a prefect. The prefect is given authority to discipline peers for such violations as not having shirts properly tucked in, coming late for class, or behaving improperly. The cane is used and considered effective only if there is

contact with actual skin, usually the back of the lower legs.

"I broke down once when I saw this discipline in operation," says Visscher. "There was a student who came to school with what was considered a 'secular' hair style (shaved closely up to the top). He was caned by the prefect. Other prefects also assisted in further disciplining the student by shaving off all his hair. The disciplining occurred on the school grounds, visible to teachers as well as to students. The lack of teacher involvement reflected their approval of such discipline practices.

"They take literally the biblical passage that to spare the rod spoils the child. My comment to the staff was, 'How would Christ have disciplined this student?' After I questioned their approach, I know that they were reviewing their practices. In fact, one of the teachers later confirmed that the principal 'had been influenced by Visscher.'"

The authority relationship of master-servant is also evident between men and women. "During our stay in rural areas of Nigeria, a woman never once sat down with us to eat," says Visscher. "Whenever we visited a home for a meal, the woman would prepare and serve the food, then sit in the kitchen to eat with the children while we sat with the man as his guests.

"This same master-servant model hindered the development of collegiality in staff relations," he says. We sensed that principal-staff discussion was more monologue than dialogue. We encouraged all staff, including the principal, to sit in a circle and share their concerns as well as insights in staff meetings.

"I grew to appreciate the dialogue we enjoy as staff," says Visscher, "where principals do not dictate, but where teamwork is encouraged and healthy interaction among people is fostered. Education in their culture means that you don't have to work; you're the boss." The Visschers tried to model that to be in authority means to serve, just as Christ exemplified in his life. When students were required to work in the corn fields, Henry joined them, even when it made them uncomfortable.

What was the greatest anxiety for the Visschers? Not malaria. Not even the many bugs that were only a mosquito netting away from them each night. "Our greatest anxiety was driving in a Nigerian car, on Nigerian roads—with a Nigerian driver," says Visscher. "Car parts are hard or impossible to come by, so many cars have worn out parts and bald tires. Several of the cars we rode in needed to be push started. The roads are filled with pot holes, and there is no such thing as a white line down the middle.

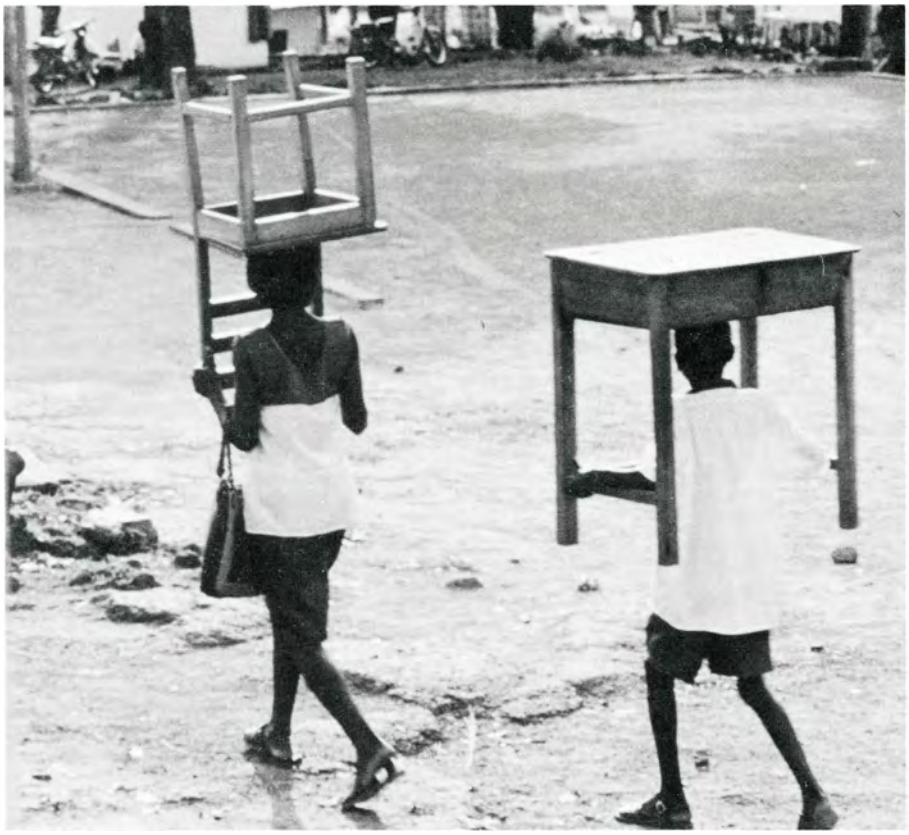
"The Nigerian people are fairly easy-going people," says Visscher, "but give the Nigerian the power of a car, and it seems all their aggressions suddenly surface. We earnestly prayed for safe road travel and experienced the necessity of being totally dependent on our Lord."

Despite these traveling experiences, the Visschers have nothing but praise for the hospitality they received. "We were treated royally—like Prince Charles if he were to visit the West Edmonton Christian School. We were like dignitaries. Children would peer in the windows so they could see a white person. We got the best of what they had, whatever it was; sometimes it would be twenty oranges, or ten bananas. One even brought in a portable generator so we could have electrical power for a couple of hours in the evening. Many insisted on carrying our school bags—something we had to allow because it was their way of showing gratitude. They are a loving, hospitable people and were very appreciative of our assistance.

"They love to be 'snapped,' so we went through rolls and rolls of film. At one point someone asked to have his picture taken with my hand placed on his head to bless him! I placed my hand on his shoulder instead, making us fellow brothers who wish to serve the same Lord.

"They expressed surprise at our willingness to stay in their village for a whole week. At the end of our stay in each village, a farewell ceremony was organized, and we began to realize that what we did for them was something special; and they expressed their gratitude in many special ways," says Visscher. "Being there for an entire week, living alongside them, was really appreciated. It allowed us to have a direct, concrete hands-on impact. Suggestions for punctuality, maximizing room use, efficient use of

Angeline and Henry Visscher were the honored recipients of ceremonial Tiv dress.



A new student arrives at the school.

time at staff meetings, and effective time-tabling cannot be made by a superintendent who visits for a half day once in a while.

"Our visit among the Tiv truly was a blessing," adds Visscher. "When you do not have easy access to medicine, when you don't know whether your vehicle will get you to your destination, you learn to depend more on the Lord, daily. We experienced more of a culture shock when we returned than when we left. Our Western life-style is so hectic, so materialistic, and so isolating. On the one hand we grew to appreciate the material wealth we experience in Canada. But when we see how easy it is to take for granted something like flush toilets without appreciating them as a luxury, we wonder who's better off. Nevertheless, it was a privilege to minister in this way to the Tiv, to be able to serve God while serving others, wherever that may be."

Louisa F. Bruinsma has served as the director of development and editor of the Bulletin for the Edmonton Society for Christian Education.

NEWS

Group plans DAYSTAR CONFERENCE

Participants of the 1993 Chicago Conference proposed the formation of DAYSTAR, an international Christian schooling network. The purpose of DAYSTAR is to explore forums for sharing ideas and resources among educators on a regional, national, and international level.

The conference opened with conferees presenting a variety of perspectives intended to help shape the structures of the network. Participants, individually and then in small groups, identified how their school or institutional needs could be met by DAYSTAR.

The responses to the group process necessitated a shift in the intended agenda. The remainder of the conference was directed toward identifying "do-able tasks." The tasks were categorized and the need for a steering committee emerged as a priority. Prior to dividing into discussion groups, a historical review of the Curriculum Development Center was given to provide insight on the growth, development, and demise of an organization. The discussion groups then provided the steering committee with direction in strategic areas, the highlights of which follow:

ORGANIZATION – This group recommended the formation of an ad hoc committee to develop a framework for exploring specific areas identified by the conferees, teaming with CSI, support structures for DAYSTAR, and the financial feasibility of DAYSTAR.

CONSULTING – Concerns expressed by this group included the importance of face-to-face contact, the training of consultants, and the feasibility of DAYSTAR as a clearinghouse for consultants.

NETWORKING – This group proposed a 3-D model: database, dialogue, and development. They recommended investigating existing systems, exploring the efficiency of a variety of technological alternatives, and exploring the use of videos.

RESEARCH – A priority of this group was developing a directory of available resources. They also recommended a column in *Christian Educators Journal*

to list available research findings and opportunities.

1994 CONFERENCE – This group laid the groundwork for the 1994 conference, which will have a two-pronged approach: the discussion of "A Vision with a Task" and the launch of the DAYSTAR network.

The group scheduled the DAYSTAR Inaugural Conference for July 20-23, 1994, at Trinity Christian College in Palos Heights, Illinois.

Election Candidates Invited into Christian Schools

Louisa Bruinsma

Every Christian school likes to know it is represented by a politician who is sensitive to its well-being, especially when new education legislation is being considered.

Schools in Edmonton recently decided to make sure that provincial politicians have a good understanding of the "independent alternative" of Christian schools, so they arranged for candidates from each provincial party to visit—the week before Alberta's June 15 election.

Candidates met with parents over the lunch hour, toured a school, and met with students. The meetings were educational for the politicians, and parents also benefited.

"It was good to meet the candidates face to face," says Janet Greidanus, who attended all three candidate meetings hosted by East Edmonton Christian School (EECS). "After meeting them, you could get a feel for their integrity and make a better judgment on how to vote."

Students were glad to finally be able to put a face with the names they saw on lawn signs. "Students really enjoyed the visits," says EECS principal Hans VanGinhoven. "They asked good questions about the deficit, [MLA] salaries, and why candidates wanted to be MLAs." Afterwards many children discussed voting issues at home, and some reportedly tried to sway their parents' opinions.

Candidates, many of whom had never been inside an independent school, admitted they were impressed by them. Evidence of computer labs, good libraries, and serious studying certainly made them aware that independent schools provide valid alternatives in the educational enterprise.

"I was very, very impressed," said Liberal candidate Julius Yankowski. "There is a good feeling in the school, a good Christian feeling. It is obvious that people really care there."

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Christian Schools Address Principal Shortage

Bert Witvoet

Schools affiliated with Christian Schools International (CSI) are, numerically speaking, doing well. Over the past five years there has been steady growth so that today CSI counts 450 elementary and secondary schools in the U.S. and Canada and a total enrollment of about 92,000 students.

But CSI schools are experiencing a leadership problem. As late as May of this year eight percent of the schools were still without a principal.

CSI director of support services Dan Vander Ark admits that no formal study has been done of causes underlying this dearth of candidates, but he has his own informed notions.

Reasons for reluctance

Vander Ark lists four possible reasons.

1) Boards have high expectations for leaders, expecting them to be both managers and visionaries;

2) teacher families are more and more two-wage-earning families, making it necessary for a teacher to assume more of the workload at home, thus being unable to invest time into becoming and being a principal;

3) a beginning principal has to be willing to move and teachers are less willing to move, partly because of the second wage earner's commitments and partly because teachers want to stay close to their extended family;

4) teachers are reluctant to become the scapegoat in a support community that has seen a fair deal of controversy.

But CSI has decided to do something about the leadership problem. Although the 1993 CSI convention held in Kalamazoo, Mich., this summer was rather low-key compared to the international conference held last year in Toronto, it focused squarely on the important issue of developing Christian school leadership.

At this conference Vander Ark unveiled plans for an intern program that teams up pairs of potential principals with mentor principals.

Teachers may apply for this program and principals are asked to recommend mentor and intern candidates. "CSI will select fifteen pairs and fund the program," says Vander Ark.

Needed qualities

He lists at least four important criteria for becoming an intern: being a gifted classroom teacher, being respected as a leader by others, having strong skills in writing and speaking, and being able to articulate a vision for Reformed Christian education.

A mentor, on the other hand, is expected to be someone who seeks to nurture others, who is skilled in working with people, who is willing to take time to guide, and who is judged to be a good administrator and leader by colleagues.

According to Vander Ark, finding "committed servant leaders who dare lead the way is crucial to the future of the Christian schools." He himself is committed to guiding the intern program and making it a priority.

Reprinted with permission from Christian Courier, *September 3, 1993.*

Homosexuality

We Can't Ignore It

James Van Howe

I was doing my student teaching at a public school in Grand Rapids, Michigan. One girl in my seventh grade class was very annoying, always talking, always demanding so much attention. Physically active and unable to concentrate on her school work, she had been held back one year and, as a result, was much larger than her classmates. She clung to me and followed me around when others were seated. She constantly talked—loudly. She insulted classmates. Her clothes were old and sometimes torn. She seldom smiled.

Sometimes when you meet a student's parents, a little light goes on and you realize why a child acts a particular way. It was that way with Judi's mother. Only this was more like the bright sunshine than a light bulb. At the first parent-teacher's meeting of the year I was introduced to Judi's mother, and to the woman who was living with Judi's mother. Judi's father had left, and her mother had found comfort in the arms of another woman. Perhaps Judi was clinging to me because of a need for a male role model in her life.

Teaching at a Christian school in Chicago, I had a student named Clifton. I was a rookie and he was in the eighth grade. Everyone in the class, including his naive teacher, realized that there was something different about Clifton. His mannerisms were quite distinct from the other boys in the class. He had absolutely no interest in sports and he spoke with a high-pitched voice, emphasizing his point by waving hands loosely in front of him. He shared an amazing amount of information about the latest fashions.

He endured the ridicule of the "real men" in the class and was aware of the talking that was being done behind his back. He seemed to be handling his differences quite well. I did my best to prevent overt hostility being directed at him, but I'm sure as a first-year teacher I wasn't always aware of the hurt that others were imposing.

The public high school was a difficult place for Clifton. It was a time of torment in his life. Later one of Clifton's classmates told me that part way into his sophomore year Clifton had killed himself.

About the same time that I had Clifton as my student, my friend Mark talked me into running. We trained together by running around the parking lot of a shopping mall; once around was a mile and a half. There were weeks that Mark and I ran together every day. He was always so encouraging, and I became a stronger runner. One week we logged 62 miles together, including one twenty-mile training run. We talked about various subjects over the hours of running; we even recited poetry to each other. Most of the poems were funny, and we discovered that it's not a good idea to laugh very hard while you're trying to run.

I ran my first marathon with Mark. We ran side-by-side the entire race. After twenty-two miles I wanted to stop; I wanted to walk for a while. In his quiet, unassuming way, Mark encouraged me to continue just as he had done during training runs. "Come on, you can make it," he said. We crossed the finish line together.

I continued to run with Mark. I ran more than 500 miles with him. I thought I knew everything about him, and then a local newspaper printed a story about his arrest for indecent activities with an undercover police officer. I was totally shocked to find out he was homosexual.

At that point I had some important questions to answer. Do I continue to show love and support to my friend? Will my reputation be suspect if I continue to run with him? Had he betrayed me? Could I forgive him? What would be my response to this news? I decided that Mark needed me to be there for him, not just praying for him or sending money to Christian counseling agencies. I continued to visit with Mark, we shared meals, and we continued to log many miles together. I believe I needed to mirror the love of Christ to a hurting and confused fellow sinner. Perhaps if I had been more sensitive to Clifton too, he would be alive today.

Homosexuality is not a topic that can be ignored by teachers or students. We need to convey information to our classes and discuss homosexuality. First we need to make an emphatic statement that engaging in homosexual activity is a sin (Romans 1:26-27). It is something that is against God's created order.

Unfortunately the discussion often ends at this point—it's wrong, it's disgusting, I don't want to talk about it any more. But this should be only the beginning of the discussion. Too often the entire *topic* of homosexuality is one

that Christians would rather ignore; certainly the homosexual *people* are ignored as well.

Are homosexuals to be allowed into our schools? What if the parent of a student is a homosexual? What if a homosexual applies to teach at our school? What are our responsibilities to the parents of covenant youth if their child discovers homosexual tendencies?

We need to examine the attitudes that we have for effeminate men and masculine women. Are we assuming a stereotypical attitude concerning such people? Certainly a better approach would be to deal with people as persons created in the image of God—created with the capacity to love in an appropriate way, the ability to create, the willingness to sacrifice, the ability to be compassionate. We need to see these attributes in others and teach and model them ourselves.

We need to talk about and think about *our* reaction when we are confronted personally with someone who is a homosexual. Homosexuals should *not* be excluded from the body of Christ; they should *not* be treated like the lepers of the twentieth century. We have to ask the important questions! Are they confessing their sins? Are they seeking help? Are they openly living in sin? Is there a genetic connection that leads to homosexuality? More important, how would Jesus treat this person? What kind of a response would he have?

Let's initiate these discussions to bring feelings, attitudes, and issues out into the open. Let's enable our students to answer God's call to reach out to all members of God's creation.

James Van Howe teaches Bible, social studies, and computer courses at Mount Vernon Christian School in Mount Vernon, Washington.

Teacher

Moderation?
Paul had it right when he said
all things to all
children, parents, administrators, colleagues....
It's bearing all things,
like strings,
extended
(always tuning).
It's
holding a child's hand . . .
and then letting go.
And what will move this one,
more praise?
or those
constant reminders of
excellence?
It's believing all things
that one can
obey the
strict rhythm . . .
and sing with the heart,
teaching
truth,
solid foundations . . .
and giving them chances to build,
faith in action–
discipline,
direction . . .
and freedom to choose.
It's learning to sing like

Jesus
stretched
between
justice and mercy–
immodest,
immoderate
enduring
all
love.

Sharon Verduin

Planning a Personal Retreat

Nancy Wade Zappulla

Since the old adage insists that confession is good for the soul, I'd like to indulge in some before you, my comrades in the Christian school movement. I took *a whole weekend* off, away from family, school, and home responsibilities—and without guilt. How did I manage this? I took a personal retreat, right in my own home, and God taught me lessons about balance and truth that I might have missed in other circumstances.

Faced with the opportunity to arrange a free weekend, I decided to focus on some writing, a pastime I find difficult to work around everyday responsibilities. God opened many unexpected doors to provide for my daughter's care and led me to a three-day oasis during which I accomplished more writing than I have ever done during a comparable time. Add to that treat the fact that my regular weekend tasks were also completed, and you can see the miracle of this occurrence! Here are some of the things I learned during this retreat:

1) It is crucial to decide on the goal of your retreat. I wanted a chance to write and spend uninterrupted time with God. For someone else, the need might be to plan units for school or perform some major cleaning chore or just to be alone. Knowing why you're retreating will keep your focus sharp as you plan activities.

2) The location of your retreat can vary from your own home or apartment (my choice) to a cabin, a hotel, or a friend's guest room. The important issue is to be alone when you need to be, while not incurring large expenses or being constrained due to unfamiliar routines. Find a place where you and the Lord can meet, a place that fits your planned activities.

3) Plan your time, not rigidly but wisely and with an eye to your goal and your personal cycle of work. If your goal is something cerebral, then alternate a walk or a shower or even vacuuming with writing or sewing or prayer. Use your prime time of energy to work on your goal, and then vary other undertakings around that time. Plan meals that contribute to your goals and needs, and eat when you need to. For this short period of time, you may want to create a new schedule for work, sleep, and food far different from your usual routine to enable you to achieve your goal.

4) Schedule unstructured, intimate time with the Lord Jesus during your retreat. Talk to him as you clean those closets or rewrite for the fourth time or take a leisurely bubble bath. Lay out before him those dreams and concerns, and take time to sit silently with him. Invite him along on that walk, ask his specific guidance on those lesson plans, show him that cross-stitch project. This one-on-one with the Lord will quiet your spirit and invigorate your hours.

5) Plan on having some unadulterated fun. Remember, fun is neither unprofessional nor unchristian, so during your planning, plan to be silly. Wear clothes that are comfortable or fit your activity, and don't worry about how you look. Go to a funny movie, and indulge in junk food. Sing aloud, dance to funny music, talk to yourself, laugh at yourself—if it is fun, sprinkle it throughout your weekend. Don't worry about getting carried away; years of adulthood will restrain you.

6) Know when your retreat is finished. Tear up your list of accomplished tasks, share your experience with a friend, or take yourself out to dinner—provide yourself with closure. Reflect upon the retreat as you wind things up. Did you try to do too much? Were you uncomfortable with all that free time? What did you discover about God? Actively end your retreat, and, as you are packing up that easel or saying your goodbyes, begin to think of the upcoming week. Say goodbye to your special time away, and begin to turn your heart toward family and weekday pursuits.

Impossible, you are thinking? This single mom spent $35 for those special touches for my retreat, wrote three essays from start to finish, and had our apartment ready for the new school week—while spending three surprisingly fulfilling days with Jesus. We teachers and administrators spend our lives in the most miraculous ministry to which anyone could be called by Christ, and yet we rarely follow his example in getting away from the people. I challenge you to dust off your special dream project and look for that perfect oasis for your personal retreat. Use all of the creativity that goes into your students and classrooms, and get away with your Creator. He's waiting for you.

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

One Christian's Defense of Whole Language

Adrian Peetoom

At the November 1991 annual convention of the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE), a sizable group of Whole Language educators spent a full day on the topic of "Dealing with the Far Right Challenges to Whole Language." For much of the day, forms of censorship and intimidation, often initiated by born-again Christians, were described and critiqued. The following is an edited version of one of the four formal presentations.

In so far as Christians are part of *Far Right* challenges to Whole Language (WL), they are an embarrassment to people like me. I consider Whole Language insights a promising channel of helping me see my Christian faith represented in pedagogy and school culture. That some of my brothers and sisters see those insights as the work of the devil makes me sad.

I'm neither a born-again nor a fundamentalist Christian, in an institutional sense. I come from what is commonly called the Reformed wing of Christian church spectrum. But I do hold on to the fundamentals of the Christian faith, and were I to address a born-again/fundamentalist audience, I would say what I shall say here. I would hope that we share essentials, and I would invite them to see the consequences my way.

I'll try to point toward the case favoring Whole Language from a Christian point of view. Whatever secular or religious impulses may have helped anyone else to develop attitudes towards WL, I see many promising links between my Christian faith and Whole Language convictions.

New Beginnings

I see the need for Christian educators to accept, unconditionally, the WL premise that all students are learners. We don't demand that children trade in their mother tongue for English, their physical handicaps for perfect body parts, their mental and psychological burdens for purified psyches, the color of their skin for our tone, their class for ours, their gender for ours, their manners for ours, before we consider them gifted learners. I have understood my own Whole Language mentors—people like Holdaway, the Goodmans, and Jerome Harste to name but a few—to say that from the perspective of a teacher, each child begins each day with a clean slate of hope that much good learning is possible and will come about.

I'm not saying that my practice is as good as my hope, of course. I am saying that this attitude is part of what drives me to keep developing toward perfection.

This totally accepting every-day-a-new-beginning attitude toward the learners I meet has been demonstrated for me in the stories of Jesus, in any of the gospels, but particularly in the gospel of John. Jesus preached:

> For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his son into the world *to condemn the world,* but to save the world through him. (John 3:16-17, all quotations from NIV—italics mine)

So, what does Jesus *do?* In chapter four, Jesus meets a woman at a well just outside her village. The woman has nothing to commend her, not even to herself, as the story makes clear. This tale is drenched in signs that mean to put down:

**Samaritan* means *race- and class-despised*

**woman* means *gender-inferior*

**married five times and now living common law with a sixth man* means *promiscuous and sexually out of control*

**the well was built by patriarch Jacob,* and that means that *by rights it belonged more to Jesus than to that village*

**the woman got water at noon,* an unusual time to go to the village well, perhaps indicating that *she wasn't tolerated much by the other village women* to go at the regular time toward evening.

This woman is a loser. Even Jesus' disciples try to hurry him away from the full way he attends to her. In vain. While Jesus later tells these same disciples to abandon any town that does not accept their preaching—shake the dust off their feet as a sign of contempt—Jesus ends up staying with these despised Samaritans for two days, and he restores the woman to full village dignity (John 4).

Some time later the religious leaders of his day, the scribes and Pharisees, bring him a woman caught in the act of adultery, and when Jesus is through with them, he looks up to the woman to tell her: "Then neither do I condemn you . . . "(John 8:11).

In a third incident Jesus and his disciples pass by a beggar blind from birth. The disciples ask Jesus, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, for him to have been born blind?" Jesus responds, "Neither he nor his parents sinned . . . he was born blind so that the works of God might be displayed in his life" (John 9:2-3).

I'm not talking systematic theology here, I'm talking simple harmony with John 3:16-17. In these three examples, Jesus does what he said he would: reach out not to condemn, but to save.

I, his educator disciple, can do no less. So let me talk about Andy. I saw him again a few weeks ago when my wife and I attended a school

Remembrance Day convocation. For about three weeks I had worked in that school the year before, in Andy's grade five. Now he sat on the stage with a new grade five, for he had been retained. This year's class led the whole school in a number of songs, and I watched Andy. He stood with the whole class, yet subtly apart from his peers. He sang with his whole class, yet his lips barely moved with the words. He didn't look sad or happy, just . . . vacant.

When I spent time in his class, I watched Andy much of the time as I tend to watch those who do not seem to belong or who seem to accomplish less than their peers. Small and sickly looking, Andy always wore dirty clothes, and his hair was seldom combed. He smelled bad almost every day. When his class sat on the mat to listen to a story, Andy sat on the mat artfully situated to be as far away from all his peers as was possible within that small space, touched only by a wall of air. Andy, one of nine children, came from a fairly dysfunctional welfare family. He hung on to the outside of this class, not only physically, but in terms of sharing, reading, and writing.

Yet he would smile back when I smiled at him. He was no troublemaker (perhaps it would be better if he were). In spite of the best efforts of his loving teacher, Andy was silent, silenced, as the Samaritan woman was.

The tradition of our schooling has no definitions for Andy, no pedagogy, no equality. I'm not saying that the current practice of Whole Language has already developed effective strategies either, not even WL strategies energized by Christian faith. All I'm saying is that Jesus would have me reach Andy so his eyes would light up with real life. Jesus teaches me that Andy belongs, and I must seek ways to make his belonging come true pedagogically. And my Whole Language mentors also say that Andy belongs.

The John examples express *redemption*, one of the most dominant motifs throughout the Bible. Redemption means that while my flawed past is acknowledged, it will not be held against me. Redemption provides a clean slate, a new beginning, a promise of hope, a new dawn, a morning star, a Scrooge on Christmas morning. And Scriptures are clear on this: human beings are totally, indisputably, without exception, equally in need of redemption. It is this universal need that makes us altogether equal in the essential aspects of our humanity. Redemption points to classrooms in which each voice must be heard, each story told, for no one can claim privilege.

The concept of redemption is grounded in another important biblical motif, namely that of *creation.* The concept of creation is equally significant to anyone who takes the Bible messages seriously.

> Then God said, "Let us make humankind in our image, in our likeness, . . . male and female. . . ." and it was so. God saw all he had made, and it was very good. (Genesis 1:26, 27, 31)

Given this bottom line, whatever it is that we are entitled to because of being human, all human beings are entitled to it equally. There is nothing that is not ours equally when it is part of our createdness within the whole of creation.

Seen together, creation and redemption hang out his clear message: whatever claims we want to make for privilege, for instance for teacher privilege or school board privilege, we'd better not make them on the basis of any created reality, nor on the basis of redeemed reality. When it comes to privilege, there is nothing in the essentials of humanity that will set one person ahead of another, not even a teacher above a student. No one is disqualified from taking equal part in human life, for so God ordained it first, and so God himself redeemed it later.

Hence my Christian faith would of necessity have me feel warm toward pedagogical forces similar to Whole Language. *WL, too, says that learning is an essential part of being human.*

Called to Be Learners

I have always seen children as human beings called to be learners. Anyone who is a parent has evidence available. I used to sit across from my wife, Johanna, as she breastfed our babies and then put them on her lap to talk to them. I often watched how the back of our child's head would exude the intent and effort of learning: talk and love and bonding and sounds and belonging. I see that intense learning, that living for learning, demonstrated again as I see my grandchildren growing up. This makes sense to me: the special gift of God to children is their immense drive to learn. Children have no choice but to learn. It's what they are created to do.

But not necessarily learning the same way or the same things. Learning is a given, but not learning a specific *what*. Specific *what's,* and all *what's* are specific, are variables of learning shaped by culture, history, geography, material circumstances, time of life, previous accomplishments, family (to some extent), maybe genes. I can no longer learn how to interpret snow the way an Inuit boy learned it when he was young. I'm told my brain will no longer permit me to become an accomplished theoretical mathematician, for at a crucial time in my life my mind wasn't bent that way. I shall never become fluent in Chinese, though I could have up to six years of age.

But I was created to learn, and I have that in common with all other human beings. And even when the Fall threatened to undo my learning "me," redemption restored it to its potential. Because of Jesus, I may get up again, every day, in the sure knowledge that I am entitled to my learning "me." What's more important, as a teacher I *must* get up every morning being totally convicted that every child I meet is fully entitled to his or her learning self. For learning is a created gift, a badge of created/redeemed equality.

Of course, learning is always learning a *something*. As a teacher set in a time period and a culture, I will have access to a range of *what's*. For years those *what's* were a series of artificially tight school disciplines and sub-disciplines, skills and subskills. We're wiser now, more fluid in our demarcations, less restrictive about linking one curricular area to another. But it remains true that school, by its very nature, teaches some things and not others.

Fortunately, there are enough *what's* easily available to ensure that all children have enough options and choices, and are able to focus on things that interest them and catch their fancy.

In any case, the range of a child's interests tends to reflect the community the child grew up in, and in many cases that community is reflected well enough in the neighborhood school, in a general sort of way.

But it's at this point that I want to get back to that remarkable gospel of John. It's filled with stories about people who weren't making it, who were not given options by the religious brokers of their days, and often not even by Jesus' disciples who were sort of lower-to-medium respectable citizens. It's filled with stories of the Andys of life. So what's the point of these stories about losers? Simply this, I believe they remind us that our actual beliefs come to the surface when we are asked to deal with the unusual. When all the folks around us are like us, our beliefs need no articulation. When some of those we meet are not at all like us, then we have to reach inside for where our secrets live. When we meet Andy, we need to deal with how to teach him.

As Connie White tells us in her superb *Jevon Doesn't Sit at the Back Anymore,* she was challenged to her core by Jevon, over all the other students in her class who took to her methods well enough.

When some of my students, or even one lost sheep, indicates that in my class what there is to learn is of no interest and cannot engage them, then I, not those students, find myself in crisis. Then *I* must change to find that part of creation that will make sense to my student . . . and to discover how it will make sense. I have no privilege as learner over the student even though I am a teacher. We are created and redeemed equal.

I must return now to another main Bible motif, the Fall, or sin, for now it links to that challenge I talked about. When some children indicate that the comfortable structures of my life are of no great importance to them and I am Christian-duty bound to cast about in the pond of *what's* for those parts of creation that will engage them, I am reminded of the words of Psalm 146:

> Do not put your trust in princes, or mortal men, who cannot save.
> When their spirit departs they return to the ground;
> on that very day their plans come to nothing (3-4).

Each child has the capacity to be a teacher's mirror, showing the adults what is really important.

That any child can be my teacher may be hard to take, but it is true. Each child, each learner, is able to understand and perhaps have dominion over part of a creation. That, for me, is rock-bottom faith. More than that: creation is so incredibly complex that it will take the combined efforts of all learners from all generations to grasp enough of its intricacies. It is incredible, actually, how much knowledge humankind has assembled already. It's equally incredible how little we know. Paul puts it this way in I Corinthians 13:

> When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put childish ways behind me. Now . . . [and the force of *now* is this: even now that I am a child no longer] . . . we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror . . . Now I know in part . . . . (11-12)

So who am I ever to deny any child his or her own growth toward an adulthood that is still but a dim reflection? And is there anything Andy might be able to teach me?

Whole Language is about teacher modesty toward students. For me that modesty reflects some fundamental biblical motifs. It's why I've become a Whole Language advocate, even though I part ways on some issues with my more secular friends.

Responsible Learners

I need to add a caveat. I hear some of my WL friends imply, if not state, that in the end it will be the school's (teacher's) fault if any child leaves school blocked from productive learning. All kindergarten children love learning, and when half of a grade five no longer does, it's our fault, the fault of teachers (parents, schools), so they say.

I've said this kind of thing myself, and would say it still, but only as a heuristic device for waking up an audience. The heart of it I don't believe, for it tends to elevate the notion of childlike innocence into a principle of religious faith, lifts it up to be an idol. I pity the children who have become the idols of their parents.

Proverbs is *the* Bible book about education. Many parents who support the Far Right challenge to Whole Language may well point to key texts in that book, to sparing the rod and hating the child, for instance (13:24).

But, ironically, the book talks more about learning than it does about teaching. Notice how Proverbs constantly addresses learners with these pieces of advice:

*Learn (e.g. 7:1-3)
*Learn the rightthing (e.g., 16:16-24)
*Learn from the right teachers (e.g., 13:20)

The whole of the book makes no sense without keeping in mind that the learner is responsible for his or her own learning. The learner has choices. The learner has options. The learner decides.

And that thought, too, points to the central Whole Language notion of equality. Children who are considered victims are no longer equal. Equality is assured only if everyone of us, adult or child, stands before God the Creator as full subject, that is, as fully responsible decision maker. That's why Andy must decide some day who he is to be. No teacher can save him. No classroom visitor can either. No peer can. Some day, he must decide for himself how to be saved as an active learner. In the meantime, I can pray for him, and pray that his teacher teaches him with the WL faith that he will want to learn.

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The Rating Game

Stephan Ulstein

Teachers who use films as part of their curriculum are likely to be criticized for lowering the standards of the Christian school. Twenty years ago just using any movie, even if it was *Snow White* or *The Robe,* would invite trouble. Not going to movies was almost a part of the catechism.

That changed almost overnight with the advent of the video cassette recorder, which went through three distinct stages of acceptance.

First, the VCR was going to be used to tape high-quality educational and inspirational television programs. That ended when every home had an enormous stack of poorly labeled tapes that nobody watched.

Second, it was going to be used to play only G-rated films from the video rental store. But there weren't that many G films available, and as the kids got older they didn't want to see *Dumbo* for the twentieth time. So it became PG, then PG-13.

Finally, teenagers found that they could watch virtually any film, if not at their house, then at a friend's. Seeing a scary or sexy movie became a sort of rite of passage for becoming popular. "You haven't seen *Pretty Woman* or *Basic Instinct?*" was the jeer that became a challenge to a kid's maturity.

The Trojan Horse in all of this is the Motion Picture Association of America system. Many parents assumed that the MPAA could be relied on to give the stamp of approval for clean, non-offensive movie fun.

The movie ratings system has achieved the status of canon law among some Christian groups. Movies rated G are sanctified as good family entertainment while those rated R are forbidden. Some Christians who watch PG films consider themselves more pious than those who watch PG-13.

The problem with this approach is that it sees film as a consumer product. We are bored by our lives and want to be entertained. We purchase a ticket or rent a video to assuage that boredom. But we want that entertainment to be palatable. It must not offend or challenge us. It must be morally positive or morally neutral or not *too* violent or obscene for our children. So we rely on the MPAA rating system to give us consumer product information.

Several years ago a friend took her fifth grade son to see the movie *Airplane II.* She went because the boy insisted it was the movie all his friends liked, and because it was rated PG. Five minutes into the film she left, dragging her furious son by the arm as he clung to the seat backs. The offending scene featured two attractive women approaching an X-ray machine at the airport gate. As they passed the machine their torsos appeared *sans* clothes.

My friend complained to the manager and got her money back. As she told me this story, I asked if she'd read any reviews. No. Had she spoken to any adults who had seen the film? No again. She bought her ticket solely on the basis of the PG rating.

Likewise, I was recently criticized for showing the 1990 version of *Lord of the Flies* to my eleventh grade English class. The film contains no sex or nudity. The violence is on a par with what one would see on network television. The R rating seems to have been assigned on the basis of some profanity and the overall *tone* of the movie, which like the book, is one of original sin gone amok.

The parent who criticized me had not seen the film and was unfamiliar with Golding's Nobel Prize-winning novel upon which it is based. His criticism was that "even the heathen in Hollywood see this as objectionable, so what are you doing showing it in the Christian school?" He had an ironclad rule that his kids would see no R-rated films. Unfortunately, his child was dishonest about this matter and watched the film anyway.

I understand his concern, and I respect his right to limit the kinds of films his children watch. However, I don't agree that studying *Lord of the Flies* in a Christian school is less moral than watching the PG-rated *Airplane II* at a party. The MPAA ratings are not enough of a guideline.

It is surprising how little people know about the rating system they use as a guideline for their children's spiritual and moral well-being. Many people treat the rating system as though it came down from heaven on a golden thread.

To get a clearer handle on the MPAA I called Barbara Dixon, the Association's public relations representative in Washington, D.C., and asked for an information packet. She sent me a free copy of *The Voluntary Movie Rating System: How It Began, Its Purpose, the Public Reaction,* by Jack Valenti, President and Chief Executive Officer, Motion Picture Association of America.

This twelve-page pamphlet is an essential for any teacher who wants to use films in class. It explains how the ratings system came about and what its goals are and are not.

The current ratings system was established in 1966, shortly after Valenti took over as president of the association.

Until that time the MPAA gave a seal of approval to films that conformed to the production codes established in the 1920s by former Association president Will Hays. The "Hays Codes" explicitly stated what could and could not be shown in movies: no homosexuality, no graphic violence—hence the cowboy movies where a shotgun blast to the heart produces no blood—and no sex. I was unable to find a copy of the Hays Codes and Ms. Dixon had never seen a copy.

Once Valenti and the big studios had agreed on the ratings system, the National Association of Theatre Owners joined with the MPAA in a voluntary agreement to screen only those films that had been submitted to the MPAA for rating. This was seen as a way to let parents know something about the films that were being shown in regular commercial theatres. It did not affect art or porno theatre owners, who could show whatever they wanted to. However, many foreign filmmakers submitted their work to the MPAA so that it could receive a wider audience.

Most video producers carry the original rating on the box, although video retailers, like theatre owners, are not required by law to abide by the ratings.

I asked Ms. Dixon questions that were not addressed in the pamphlet. She explained that the ratings board position is a job like any other. People apply in the ordinary way and are hired to do a job. There is no contract length.

Ratings board members cannot be involved in the film industry or have family members in the industry. They must be parents. The ages of current members' children range from eight to twenty-five. Current board members range in age from thirty to seventy.

The job application contains no information about race or religion. Educational background varies. One current member is a doctor; another is a lawyer. Applicants must demonstrate that they can judge a film as to its suitability for the average American family viewer. They are not asked to decide whether a film is good or bad, only to what degree the content of the film might be offensive to the average American family.

With 250 million potential viewers in North America, that's a big job for eleven people. The board members watch a film and then discuss its suitability, taking into account such factors as strong violence, sex, nudity, aberrational behavior, and drug use. A distinction is made between sexually- and non-sexually-oriented nudity. The rating is decided by a majority vote, which explains why films sometimes seem inappropriately rated.

Given the broad mandate of judging the acceptability of films for a quarter billion viewers, the eleven board members do a pretty good job. However, there are some built-in problems.

Watching several films in succession can be rather disorienting. I know this because, as a film critic, I often see three or four films a day. Most of my fellow critics agree that one's judgment suffers when bombarded with film after film. Not only do one's critical judgments start to fade, but the threshold for objectionable material changes. Anybody who's been in the military knows this. Language that would curl a civilian's hair becomes part of the sailor's daily world. Likewise, people who see film after film develop a tolerance for language and behavior that the "average American family" would abhor.

Changes in society reflect judgment as well. The average 1990s film has far more gun violence and far less sex and nudity than the average 1970s movie. But the 1970s movie that earned a PG rating still carries the rating in the video store, even though it would be an R film today. Likewise, some of the "Mad Slasher" films of the 70s and early 80s carry an R for their fusion of sex and sadistic violence in the video store, even though they would surely be tagged NC-17 if they were released now.

The MPAA ratings are very helpful to parents who are looking for a guide to entertainment, but they do not address at all the artistic, intellectual, or spiritual value of a film. These values can be determined only by reading reviews, talking to people who have seen the film, and, in many cases, seeing a film for oneself before having kids see it.

What teachers and administrators must explain to parents is that the setting of a Christian school classroom is very different from the family living room. *The Lord of the Flies* is not the kind of film I would rent if I wanted to relax in front of the television on Friday night. It's troubling, complex, and morally challenging.

For Christian teachers who want to challenge their students, blind acceptance of the MPAA ratings as the final arbiter of appropriateness and value is indeed a Trojan Horse that confuses with false promises and keeps us from our true task. Uncritical acceptance of the MPAA ratings will only teach our students to follow blindly the dictates of eleven people in Los Angeles whom they've never met.

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Sports Card Math

Kim Franklin and Eleanor Mills

When planning integrated units, math is often neglected or included very superficially. What if a unit were planned with math as the focus rather than literature, social studies, or science? What would it look like? Would students gain a new appreciation of the usefulness of math in their lives? A teacher development seminar, "Integrating Curriculum for Low Achieving Students" by Jerry Conrath, inspired the two of us to work out a plan for a math unit in which students could use information from their sports card collections. We used hockey cards because hockey is such a popular sport in Canada.

Goals

1. To apply math operations previously learned (addition, subtraction, multiplication, division)
2. To read large numbers
3. To use the process of averaging (for example, average points per year)
4. To develop an understanding of statistics
5. To construct and interpret graphs

Other areas in the curriculum that can be part of the integration:

1. Critical thinking
2. Creative thinking
3. Strategic thinking
4. Writing
5. Reading
6. Spelling
7. Vocabulary
8. Art

Examples of two issues that could be examined using the information on hockey cards:

I. Is hockey playing a rewarding career?

Hockey players are revered as heroes. Hockey playing is perceived as being personally and financially rewarding. Is it really?

A. Setting the Stage

1. Brainstorm
   a. What do you think you know about the advantages of being a hockey player?
   b. What do you think you know about the disadvantages of being a hockey player?
2. Gather, sort and classify information from hockey cards, newspaper articles, books.

B. Acquiring Knowledge

1. Use basic operations to acquire information about length of career, injuries, salaries, expenses.
2. Use averaging to compare salaries and expenses.
3. Use estimating to approximate expenses over the extent of the career.
4. Use graphing to determine trends in salaries.
5. Practice reading large numbers and writing them in alternate forms of notation.

C. Establishing Personal Meaning

1. Read about a career you might like to pursue and write a comparison of that career and a career playing hockey. Compare
   a. Skills required
   b. Training or education required
   c. Personal rewards
   d. Financial rewards
   e. Risks involved
   f. Opportunity for Christian service
   g. Length of career
2. Predict and write about career possibilities for people whose hockey-playing career has ended.

D. Acting, Owning, Participating

Consider the original question: Is hockey playing a rewarding career? Assume a "yes" or "no" position. Write a statement of position, with supporting reasons.

II. What factors might influence decisions in building a hockey team?

A. Setting the Stage

Brainstorm: What makes a good hockey team member?

B. Acquiring Knowledge

1. Use averaging to compare scoring, penalties, salaries between players.
2. Use graphing to compare performance among teams and among individuals.

C. Establishing Personal Meaning

Write about a team or group of which you are a member. Which qualities necessary for a good member of a hockey team are important in that setting? Which qualities are not important? What additional qualities are important?

D. Acting, Owning, Participating

1. Imagine you are building a hockey team. What will you do to build a good team?
2. Pretend you can take over one of the hockey teams. What are its strengths and weaknesses? What would you do to improve it?
3. Put yourself or a friend on your team and create a card for this player.

As students work with math in this unit, it is our hope that they will begin to appreciate the many uses for the gift of numbers God has created. They can see a variety of relationships in the realm of numbers. They can also see how an understanding of mathematical processes can help them in decision making and can enrich a hobby like card collection.

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I teach in a Christian school where most of the faculty graduated from a nearby Christian college. I am a graduate of a Christian college of a different, but quite similar denomination. I hear cutting remarks from my colleagues alluding to my alma mater, hinting that my education was inferior. They say they are just kidding, but I don't know them well enough to be sure, and it feels uncomfortable. Am I being too sensitive or should I confront them?

Alma mater rivalries have existed for generations, and perhaps these inside, derogatory comments have been routine in your school for years. I understand that your colleagues' lack of sensitivity can be painful for you. A new teaching role is difficult enough without your having to contend with verbal innuendoes.

Most likely, ill-intent was not the motive, and the comments probably got a good laugh from most of the faculty. Sharing common traditions can bring cohesiveness to a group of people working closely together; but our Christian schools are becoming more diverse in staff and student body, and we need to detect the pitfalls to some of the kidding we practice unthinkingly.

Regarding your response I would say that, ideally, teachers should be upfront and honest with colleagues. Realistically though, faculty lounges are not idyllic settings, and mustering the courage and tact to confront might not produce immediate or desired results. Approaching the principal sometimes is an awkward attempt to remedy the problem. If a principal demonstrates an amiable and helpful attitude and checks frequently to assure the new teacher's comfortable adjustment to the school and community, then confiding in him or her seems quite appropriate and could be very assuring. Also a caring teacher on staff might be able to provide the inside scoop and needed advice without any risk of reputation or alienation.

One teacher on our staff makes my life miserable. I think she is undermining my ideas at faculty meetings and making derogatory comments behind my back. I'm not sure why; perhaps it's because of my age or relationship with my students. I've tried to ignore the situation and be friendly for the past year, but no change has occurred. Being part of a small staff, I really can't forget about it either. What should I do?

Your problem needs resolving whether it is unfounded, inflated, or substantiated. The phrase "I think" indicates your uncertainty of your colleague's intent, and doubtful motives confuse the issue. Regardless, if a misunderstanding exists, both parties suffer, especially in a small faculty.

Biblically we are asked to go to the offending party first. That takes courage, but probably not more courage than going through another year like the past. Sharing your feelings is safer than falsely accusing, since the colleague possibly meant no ill; perhaps her demeanor or personality has a condescending attitude that other faculty members condone. When you meet with her, she might be as surprised as other teachers sometimes are who learn at parent conferences that a student thinks the teacher hates him or her. And even if some jealousy or revenge exists, she could deny it; but the confrontation might prevent future attacks. The game is over, but not the responsibility. Prayer for each other and the faculty as a whole will keep the focus on unity.

If the above approach does not prove workable, then the administrator needs to get involved, mediating in a manner to allow for confidential resolution, to compliment the strengths of both you and the other teacher, and to promote your serving one another and the students in love.

I have students who seem obsessed by horror movies. They watch them, talk about them, and even draw pictures of "blood and guts." When I show my disapproval, I feel as if they are laughing behind my back. How can I deal with this current trend that is particularly popular with adolescent boys?

Teachers are not the only ones concerned about the increased interest in horror films. Parent groups, TV networks, and national organizations, including the National Council of Churches, are studying the issue. Astounding statistics and vivid descriptions regarding such movies exist, but in order to counteract this trend, we must understand the appeal, the reasons teens are hooked on horror.

Peter Orr, managing editor of *Fangoria,* a magazine dedicated to horror and gore in movies, suggests three reasons:

1. The challenge. Teens seek after them for the thrill of being scared; they even have contests to see who can watch the longest.
2. The fascination. Kids wonder about mysteries such as death, even when it is graphic and violent.
3. The rebellion. Adolescents upset parent or adult authority and standards in search for their own identity.

These are highly motivating and seemingly valid factors; all three characteristics fit the students referred to in the question.

Dr. Robert Gould, professor of psychiatry at New York Medical College, says horror movies are an emotional experience for junior highers. "Anything that's scary, that gives you an excitement and a feeling other than your usual feeling, is often very enticing," he says. He sees no positive value in horror movies. Kids become desensitized, and some, perhaps, even aggressive or hostile.

Recognition of the problem now causes many to point the finger, to place the blame, but to avoid the solutions. Public TV producer Harriet Kozkoff accuses the other networks of using movies with violence and sexual arousal to maximize profits. CBS executives recently cited MTV's "Beavis and Butt-Head" as a typical example of the cable industry's contribution. Video games, as well, are indicated as perpetrators. Ronnie Gunnerson, editor of *Video Marketing Newsletter,* admits that kids eleven to fourteen yours old rent violent R-rated horror films in higher numbers than any other age group. Obviously if the kids will "buy" it, Hollywood will sell it.

As educators we could easily disown the problem. After all, this viewing takes place outside of schools, in the home or theater. However, the fact that it affects our students, perhaps mentally and morally, puts it back within our realm. For many, this so-called obsession might just be a stage of development that they will harmlessly pass through; for others, it might not be so simple. Several years ago, we were warned similarly about the Satanic effects of games like "Dungeons and Dragons." For many kids, and teachers I might add, the game was one of creativity and fantasy, but there is no denying that some young people experienced dangerous and even fatal escapes.

We could combat this threatening vogue of entertainment by preaching, emphasizing that we must fill our minds with those things that are good. All the kids who never watch this "stuff" would agree, and the others might roll their eyes; but we presented the truth. This comment is not intended to underestimate the power of God's Word, but we must understand the mind of the adolescent who will snicker, ridicule, and rebel if it is crammed down the throat. We should not, however, shy away from the Truth, but lead them to it.

Students this age are eager to discuss the frustrations of being an "inbetweener" and the ways kids try to fill the voids, the uncertainties associated with this time in life. Readily they will list drugs, sex, and alcohol as common diversions for escape and thrills; but with a little prodding, they will mention many others that they might not consider so threatening or harmful, the ones they practice. If given the opportunity, adolescents will probably give all the same reasons Peter Orr did for the viewing of horror movies. Then they are ripe for the discovery of suitable ways to deal with their needs. Scripture search becomes an adventure and God is real in their lives.

In spite of all the exposure our kids have today on TV, movies, and videos, I am amazed that the exposure to real horror like that of the holocaust victims can still bring tears to the eyes of even the toughest kid. I've also seen them cry as they talk about the death of a grandparent or a life-long pet. At those tender moments they don't seem to be desensitized.

Working for improvement in the media may be admirable, but we can't promise our kids a better world; we can't protect them from temptations. But we can equip them for the challenging choices in the Christian life. We need to be in constant prayer with and for our students and each other.

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

Address questions to:
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Soccer, Maniac Magee, and Dan

Jeff Fennema

Dan, a student of mine in seventh grade last year, had recently moved to our area. He was quiet and courteous, and it didn't take long for him to feel comfortable in his new school.

One of Dan's journal submissions caught my attention during the year. He tied together a theme from a book he had read, *Maniac Magee,* with an experience on our junior high soccer team that fall. In his journal he dealt with the issue of race and community.

Soccer

Our sports teams are part of a Christian School Junior High League made up of schools generally from the western and southern suburbs of Chicago. All participating schools except one are populated predominantly by white, middle class children. The one school not fitting that description is Roseland Christian School, mainly composed of African-American students.

Roseland Christian School resurrected its soccer program last year, and we were scheduled to play at their campus. I felt it necessary to talk with my players about this prospect because I sensed some uneasiness about the trip. Some of the uncertainty hinged on the potential of theft, vandalism, gangs, and gunfire. These are popular stereotypes of life in the "inner city." While these circumstances do exist in Chicago, we talked about how this was a tiny segment of daily life. A casual wariness remained, but the myths and rumors had been halted.

As our team bus approached Roseland Christian, we saw a huge banner strung across the front of a building welcoming Lansing Christian School. The coaches and players warmly greeted us. The entire mood was one of hospitality, not hostility, as once may have been seen. Our game was competitive and friendly, modeling the ones you read about in articles on Christian theory and athletics. I think the Lord was pleased that day.

Maniac Magee

Maniac Magee, written by Jerry Spinelli, is a book that deals with race and community in a hyperbolic, tall-tale fashion. Jeffrey "Maniac" Magee is an orphaned runaway who fits comfortably into both sides of town, the "black" neighborhood and the "white" neighborhood. Each group carries stereotypical opinions of the other, and Maniac Magee can't figure out why. Through various feats he wins the confidence of individuals from both sides. With that trust he tries to bring the two groups together.

Jerry Spinelli won the Newbery Award for children's literature a few years ago with *Maniac Magee.* This book is part of our in-class library, and many students have commented on their enjoyment of the book. Some have simply relished the action in the novel, and some have appreciated the message it relays. When Dan read it, he pulled it together with his own experiences.

Dan

Dan had first played for the soccer team, then read *Maniac Magee.* The students I teach are required to write in their journals once or twice a week regarding the novels they are currently reading. Dan's submissions were somewhat insightful and well-articulated. This entry, however, floored me.

He described how the book reminded him of the time we visited Roseland Christian School, with two cultures coming together. He then took it a step further in commenting about his time spent in Detroit, attending a multicultural school in which the understanding and acceptance of others was valued highly. Dan saw this as a goal and thought our trip to Roseland Christian School was a step in that direction.

And a child shall lead them

I will never forget our visit to Roseland Christian last year, and I hope none of my soccer players will forget it either. Our brothers in Christ made us feel extremely welcome in a place we knew as being "different." I wonder how welcome their students feel when they travel to places they know as being "different."

I also wonder if we knowingly or unknowingly shield students from other cultures or experiences because they are "different." We may talk about it in our classrooms, but discussion is not the same as being there. Some schools have student pen-pals with students from other schools and other cultures. Some schools even use electronic mail for this purpose. Some schools trade classes for a day. Perhaps multicultural schools could be asked to take a leadership role in cultural awareness at Christian school conventions.

Jeffrey "Maniac" Magee was a kid who tried to bridge the gap in his community. He and Dan have a lot in common. Both are very rich, not in areas of wealth or possessions, but in life experiences. They both present a global and Christ-like view of community. Don't we as educators owe that to our students?

Jeff Fennema teaches seventh grade language arts and coaches at Lansing Christian School in Lansing, Illinois.

The Day Cousin Bob Phoned

Sonya VanderVeen Feddema

It's not every day that Cousin Bob phones. In fact, he had never phoned me until Wednesday during the second half of my Family Studies class.

I had assigned each of my grade twelve students in that class the task of teaching a seventy-five minute class period, which was divided in half by a ten-minute break. On Wednesday, Thomas was in charge of teaching the other students about adolescent peer pressure. After the break, as Thomas continued on with his presentation, he talked more and more slowly.

Just then Ann, the school secretary, knocked on the classroom door. She walked up to me and said softly, "Mr. VanderVeen, your cousin Bob's on the phone. It's long distance."

"My cousin Bob?" I asked. "Thomas, continue on. I'll be back in a second. Ann, I'll take the call on the phone across the hall in the science prep room." I left the door ajar and walked to the phone, my mind preoccupied with thoughts on how to critique and grade Thomas's presentation.

"Hello," I said. "Hello?" I spoke loudly to make myself heard above the noise spewing from my classroom across the hall. The students obviously were in ecstasy because of Thomas's presentation. Their thirst for knowledge astounded me.

"Hello," I said again. The dial tone dribbled monotonously into my ear. Irritated, I banged down the receiver and returned to my classroom.

Whatever had excited the students while I was gone had them dumbstruck when I returned to the room. Looks of glee melted into serious academic gazes. I had never heard a class of students quiet down so quickly.

As Thomas continued his presentation, I had the distinct sense that I had missed an impressive part of it while I was on the phone with cousin Bob. Cousin Bob? I thought. I don't have a cousin named Bob.

The lunch bell rang and I dismissed the class. After lunch I went to choir to sing with students and a few other teachers. I sat down in my usual seat beside Jorin, a grade twelve student. We watched silently as the choir director led the sopranos. Jorin glanced sideways at me several times, then cleared his throat.

"Ah, sir," he said.

"Yes, Jorin."

"I have something to tell you."

"What is it?" I prompted.

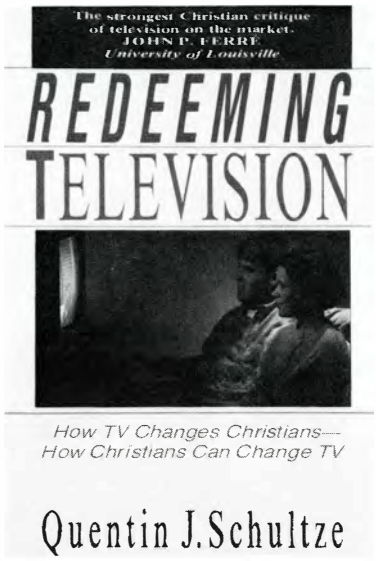
"I'm cousin Bob," he blurted out. "Thomas was running out of things to say during the first half of class. So at break we decided I would call you from the pay phone downstairs in the hall. To buy him time."

It was then I remembered that Jorin had walked into Family Studies class a few moments after I had.

I sighed in relief. I'm not losing my mind after all, I thought. I knew I didn't have a cousin named Bob.

Jorin smiled sheepishly at me. And then we laughed. The joke was on me, but I didn't mind. Sharing the laugh only strengthened the bridge between my students and me.

Sonya VanderVeen Feddema offers here the experience of her husband, a teacher at Beacon Christian School in St. Catherines, Ontario.



Redeeming Television: How TV Changes Christians, How Christians Can Change TV

Quentin J. Schultze

Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press. 1992, 190 pp. $8.99 (paperback).

Reviewed by Steve J. Van Der Weele, Professor Emeritus, English Department, Calvin College

To understand the urgency of the television phenomenon, one should perform an exercise the author undertook while writing this book. He took a walk in his neighborhood and noted—not surprisingly, perhaps—that almost every home radiated from its windows the bluish glow from the television tube. He reinforces this urgency by his observation that "in only forty years television has captured virtually all the discretionary time of millions of North Americans" (179). All teachers need to understand, therefore, that they are dealing with minds whose views of reality are being shaped by the thousands of images that impinge on their consciousness with some regularity. Schultze aptly describes the electronic media as a Trojan Horse, a guest that seems innocuous and benign but asserts itself progressively as a dominating force until it quite overwhelms those who show it this questionable hospitality.

For all these cautions, the title of the book is accurate. The controlling argument is that the cultural mandate requires responsible management—not whole rejection—of the electronic gifts that have come into our possession. But neither is there much room for improvement on Schultze's own clear-eyed appraisal of the TV industry—his list of "holes in the soul." His description of that industry consists not only of rhetorical concessions made to strengthen his basic argument. Rather, he incisively exhibits the profit motive of commercial television, the manipulative effect of TV images, the distortions that occur as the camera focuses almost exclusively on the human face. He acknowledges—and this is useful information for us as teachers to remember—that TV dramas concentrate on showing character through action, and that this medium cannot do justice to motives as well as stories and novels can do in print.

But Schultze is just as severe with the TV audience. Viewers succumb far too readily to the temptation to use TV as a relief for boredom, to satisfy the desire for amusement, and to substitute TV stories for the rich stories of our own tradition—stories that define and identify us. In short, too many people watch TV naively, uncritically, inattentively; they become "grazing videots," passive viewers who, for all the visual images they absorb, are visually illiterate and undiscerning. They also tend to formulate their values on the basis of this secular medium. This form of sloth reduces TV to the level of a national jester.

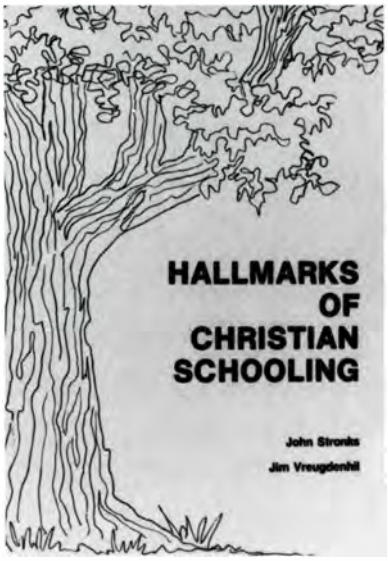
Even critics of TV frequently fail in their efforts to evaluate TV properly. They often fail to recognize the mendacity of commercial television. They too often engage in "knee-jerk moralism"—finding offense in superficial episodes rather than in what is probably the greatest source of immorality in life as depicted in television drama, namely, materialism. They fail to discriminate, to formulate standards for their home and for their community; they fail to distinguish between superficial inoffensiveness and the genuine art that is compelled to deal with the moral ambiguities that no human being can escape.

But for all these insufficiencies, Schultze's book constitutes a clarion call for the redemption of television. As incisive as the book is in critiquing this industry, it just as robustly calls on the Christian community to transform television and to empower it to achieve its true potential. He takes issue with such academic critics as Malcolm Muggeridge, Neil Postman, Virginia Stem Owns, Jacques Ellul, and Merry Mander, who, as a group, find little relish of salvation in TV. Television has powerful resources: to tell stories, to instruct and communicate information, to promote change, to embrace stability.

Schultze's program calls for hard work and meaningful involvement. We need to learn to detect instantaneously the fraudulent, the superficial, the trivial, the blasphemous. We must exercise ourselves in discerning the deeper spirits, the controlling motives in terms of which a given program proposes to make sense out of reality. And we must become articulate about what we view so that we can influence the larger community in a constructive way.

But we must do more than become discriminating viewers. We must, in due time, send writers, producers, actors, and reviewers into the heart of the industry itself. As one writer has observed, the contest between the kingdom of God and of this world is being staged in the very homes of our TV-viewing land. Neither unballasted hope nor cynicism will suffice as a response to this situation. We need to work in small ways and large to redeem this medium, at least in part. Its openness and fluidity make for real possibilities to achieve *shalom* for ourselves and our

The book is well-researched and effectively presented. The scriptural passages that open the chapters are always apt and indicate how thoroughly the author has attempted to think Christianly about the TV phenomenon. It is a lively, penetrating work, so organized that it can structure courses in visual media at various pedagogical levels. Schultze earns his right to say, "The touch of the Creator is apparent through our culture and society when Christians live redeemed lives."



Hallmarks of Christian Schooling

John Stronks, Jim Vreugdenhil

Ontario Alliance of Christian Schools, Ancaster, Ontario
1992, 87 pp., $7.50 (U.S.), pb.

Reviewed by John Bolt, Professor of Systematic Theology, Calvin Theological Seminary, Grand Rapids, Michigan

Like other recent statements such as *12 Affirmations* (with which it invites comparison, both in its collaborative genesis and format), this small volume is an exploration of ten foundational principles for Christian day school education. The authors rightly observe that such regular re-examinations are essential. "If Christian schooling is to preserve its mission, every generation must adopt the founding principles for itself" (1).

What strikes the reader about the treatment of a wide range of contentious educational issues in this volume is its careful *balance.* Not afraid to engage in critique, the authors avoid reactionary extremism, and their position is not susceptible to neat, simple categorization. A typical example of this judicious discernment is the assessment of three contemporary educational models—the traditional, the progressive-inquiry, and the transformational (holistic, praxis). Though more critical than *12 Affirmations* was of Christian appropriation of progressive and social transformational trends in education, *Hallmarks* also repudiates traditionalist intellectualism in favor of "holistic" education. Here a thoughtful "twist" is introduced. While the school properly nurtures the total person, not just one dimension of the child, it is said to be responsible for only part of the nurturing process rather than its totality (29).

Thus, the fourth hallmark insists that "the Christian School honors and protects the distinct roles of the partners in education in its organization and practice." Honoring the primary parental duty and right to educate leads to a repudiation of "school-based management models" in which school staff members control "all aspects of the educational enterprise" (38). In sum, a Christian school is defined as "an independent institution with its own task. Its mission is to encourage informed learning for productive skills and healthy attitudes for responsible action by students. The school does not replace the family nor usurp the family's nurturing accountability; rather, the school, in its own unique and limited way, helps educate children for a life of responsible discipleship" (27-28).

While the balance and mature wisdom found here is commendable, the brevity on occasion is mildly exasperating. Time and again one wishes that the authors had the opportunity to flesh out striking insights and pithy observations such as the linkage between Christian self-esteem and self-identity (44), the clever inclusion of *analytic* knowing along with *experiential* knowing in their definition of "holistic" (59), and the suggestion that "Philippians 4 is perhaps the best guide in the choice of content" for the curriculum (61). This volume is thus an invitation for further reflection and discussion as well as a helpful guide.

Published by and for the Ontario Alliance of Christian Schools and dialoguing in large measure with the Ontario educational scene, this very readable statement would nevertheless be a profitable basis for reflection in any Christian school community. It is both current and foundational, challenging as well as affirming. It does, as the dedicatory page affirms, give grounds for "moving ahead with confidence and joy." It is must reading for all who wrestle with the ongoing responsibility of providing relevant and biblically normative Christian education today.