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Balancing Trends in Fine Arts



Can Christian Schools Change?

Not long ago I attended a conference on school change. At one point in the conference a group of representatives of various colleges and high schools were discussing—*commiserating* might be a better word—the enormous difficulty of bringing about curricular and instructional change. One discouraged participant from an eastern college insisted that effecting change, even when obviously needed, is a sheer impossibility. She recounted how at her college, after years of careful study, planning, and discussion, a special curriculum task force proposal had been defeated by a simple majority faculty vote. Changing curriculum, she sighed, is as easy as moving a cemetery from one end of town to the other. Even good ideas, she concluded, have little chance of survival in our schools and colleges.

The fact is, in most of our schools we like it the way it is. Conservatism generally reigns with undisputed authority. New ideas, new possibilities, and new directions are quickly subjected to swift, often devastating critique, and just as quickly dismissed. At other times new ideas are placed in some kind of holding pen where they die a slow but certain death. In most cases the new is measured against the tried and trusted old. The old, meanwhile, is seldom seriously challenged or critically examined.

New ideas and insights are most easily torpedoed by simply attaching a label. For example, one merely needs to describe an innovative teaching

strategy as “New Age thinking,” and we can be sure the innovation can no longer be appraised fairly. Equally effective is to call a new idea a fad. The world of education is, as we know, alive with fads. Fads come and go. Fads rise, shine, and summarily land on the educational trash heap. So when a new idea, even one that might effectively serve the Christian educational community, is labeled a fad, it has lost its opportunity to be carefully considered and evaluated.

Now it is true that some educational innovations are products of New Age thinking. And other ideas are indeed fads. They may well deserve to be rejected. After all, not all change signals improvement, and much proposed change is driven by the spirits of our secular age.

My point, then, is not to argue for change simply for the sake of change. Rather, my concern is that Christian schools may be altogether too suspicious of any change, so that both the good and the bad are indiscriminately rejected. Such an attitude prevents us from testing the spirits to see whether they be of the world or of God. Conservatism and traditionalism, fearful of change, close us off from the call to discern the good from the bad. Like the man with the single talent, we feel safer when we bury our talent, rather than work with it in creative ways. But such an attitude blinds us to a critical and inevitable question: Do we *need* change in our Christian schools?

My answer to this question is an

unequivocal yes. Granted, not all change means improvement, and, yes, some changes are advocated by New Age thinking and fads. Nevertheless, there are some very compelling reasons why Christian schools should be much more receptive to—even eager for—change than many of them tend to be. Let me state some of the reasons.

First, there is the old adage “*ecclesia reformata semper reformanda est*”—the Reformed Christian community must always be reforming. Note that I translate *ecclesia* as “Christian community,” not simply as “church,” for this is indeed what the original term signifies. Nor should we stumble over the term *Reformed*, for while it is true that Christian education has increasingly acquired an inter-denominational flavor, the biblical perspective of the coming kingdom of God, for centuries enunciated by the churches of the Reformation, remains a timeless principle. To be biblical means to be reforming, and reformation inevitably implies change. The parable of the wineskins remains as appropriate today as it was in Jesus’ day. The call for reformation and change, then, remains a call addressed to all Christian schools—unless we dare to claim that we have arrived, that right now the Lord is perfectly pleased with what we are doing and requires nothing else from us.

A second principle to guide our perspective on change is that the Lord continues to call us humans to the work of unfolding his creation. This surely includes the world of education. It is our

task to be busy working in our school systems, improving them, reforming them, changing them, so that the will of the Lord can become ever more manifest and his kingdom rule be ever more clearly displayed. A conservative we've-always-done-it-this-way or don't-rock-the-boat mentality, on the other hand, tries to freeze into static immobility what actually should be dynamically changed and unfolded. To be closed to change, then, is to neglect a central mandate of God. To put it frankly, by not openly considering change, we may well be disobedient to the Lord.

Let's look at our Christian schools. True, many of them are doing a wonderful job of leading our children into the ways of the Lord. But let's be honest. We're not there by any means. In fact, sometimes we detect a disturbing regression.

Recently I surveyed Christian schools in several Christian Schools International districts and asked them to identify the problems they will face in the remaining years of this century. The results were depressing. Not a single school suggested it had no problems and that everything is fine. On the contrary, deep concern was expressed about the growing secularism and materialism and anti-religious attitudes among the students in our Christian schools. Family life and parent support are disintegrating. Frequently faculty and principals reported that the students' behavior appears to be deteriorating: with alarming regularity the fruit of the Spirit is replaced by selfishness, disrespect, violence, cruelty, hatred, and, in general, explicitly unchristian behavior.

Tightening control, proliferating rules, and harsher punishment do not seem to help. As one principal put it, we are fighting a losing battle.

Do we need change? Again an unequivocal yes. We need change as long as our schools are not yet the kind of caring, loving, healing communities that they ought to be, communities eager to receive the troubled, the handicapped, the rejected and neglected right along with those obviously headed for successful college careers. We need change as long as not all of our children's needs are met and not all of our children's gifts are recognized and celebrated. We need change as long as a distinctively Christian curriculum and teaching practice are not fully in place. We need change as long as there is not a clear difference between Christian and secular educational practice.

The reality, of course, is that change *will* occur. Change is inevitable. But how will it come? Will it come because we Christians initiate, promote, and guide it? Or will it come because of the subtle—or not so subtle—pressure pushing us from the outside? Sad to say, change generally overtakes us, and drives us on. Instead of our directing change, change directs us. An often-quoted cynic has said, "Christian schools do what public schools do, only ten years later!"

In the larger world of education all sorts of research is being conducted and all sorts of insights are being discovered: insights about teaching, about how children develop, how children learn, and how they relate to each other. We Christian educators, equipped with the Word and Spirit, should be at the cutting

edge. We should not only be keenly tuned into the world of research, but aggressively and communally designing and conducting our own research and development programs. As it is, much important research passes us by; only when it is accepted by secular schools and enforced by government decree will we heed and change, often willy-nilly.

What vision controls our schools? Do we seek to graduate students who are better equipped to serve the Lord than their parents were? Or is our vision myopic, tightly hanging on to traditions and practices that might well be ripe for the educational trash heap? Are we driven by a burning desire to get rid of everything that hinders our students from growing as Christ's disciples, or are we smugly satisfied with what we have been doing, relying on the old it-worked-for-me-thirty-years-ago principle?

Not everything is bleak, however. Christian schools *can* change. Some schools are eagerly exploring ways of improving their Christian distinctiveness instead of merely maintaining a stale status quo. Some principals dare to introduce radical corrections rather than merely applying a band-aid here and there. And some teachers are ready to implement a renewed and revitalized vision in their classrooms. May their numbers multiply! ☪

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Music

in Christian Schools

Directions for Growth . . .

Dale Topp

In, out, up, and down. Four simple directions, but each has profound implications for the role of music in the ongoing growth of Christian education. Although Christian schools traditionally have been best known for the upward direction of their musical activities, I believe that jumping immediately to the worship direction can, and *does*, shortcut our musical obedience to Christ's call. So let us begin instead with the outward direction.

The outward direction

We begin the outward direction for musical growth with Ephesians 4:15-16 as our guide. *Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, even Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.*"

"I just don't have the gift of music," he said apologetically. Several others in the conversational circle nodded sympathetically as if to say that they understood his plight. I wanted to scream "Nonsense!"

For too long the Christian community has accepted the utter heresy that music is a gift God gives

only to certain people. The verses from Ephesians help correct this idea. "Speaking the truth in love," we read, "we will in *all things* grow." I have yet to find a commentary that takes the position that "all things" excludes music. God created every person with an interest in music and with *at least* the potential for active and satisfying musical participation. We need to become an interacting "musical body of Christ" in which everyone's musical interests and skills are nurtured in the context of verse 16: "From him (Christ) the *whole* body, joined and held together by *every* supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up as each part does its work." The outward musical reach for the Christian is all-embracing, *inclusive* rather than exclusive. Meanwhile many Christian schools seem to accept the normal traits of puberty and adolescence as rationale for changing from the former to the latter.

By combining this passage with I Corinthians 12:21, we find such possible implications as these: The composer or performer cannot say to the listener, "I have no need for you." Nor can the classical buff take a similar attitude toward the Christian contemporary music fan, nor the band member toward the singer, nor the flexible and oral gospel singer toward

the carefully visual Psalter Hymnal user, nor the music specialist toward the teacher of other subjects. The musical body of Christ needs everyone—larynxes and fingers and arms and hearts and heads and tapping toes!

Christians reach out to each other through music, eager for the cooperative enrichment of learning new music that used to bounce off their cultural filters and equally eager to share with others the music that excites their own creative interests. Are true newcomers to our schools able to take along any of their own musical background, or must they bow to the prevailing musical culture of the school? Reaching out to others through music—equally eager to receive their contributions and to give our own—can become a highly satisfying musical experience for God's image bearers. Music and Christian community mix together well!

By itself, however, the outward direction becomes shallow tokenism. We need something authentic and deep to contribute to the sort of musical community described above. Else our community resembles a potluck dinner in which everyone brings only Halloween treats. To deepen our individual contributions to musical community, we also need the next direction—inward.

The inward direction

"... Male and female he created them. God blessed them and said to them, 'Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground.'" (Genesis 1:27b-28)

"By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested from all his work. And God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done." (Genesis 2:2-3)

"The Spirit clearly says that in later times some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons. Such teachings come through hypocritical liars, whose consciences have been seared as with a hot iron. They forbid people to marry and order them to abstain from certain foods, which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth. For everything God created is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving because it is consecrated by the word of God and prayer." (1 Timothy 4:1-5)

In Genesis 1 God calls humankind

to become involved with his creation. People familiar with the Reformed lexicon refer to this summons as the "cultural mandate." In Genesis 2, however, we read that God rests. I am indebted to Al Wolters (*Creation Regained*) for adding new meaning to this passage—that God's resting also is a signal for *us* to take over the ongoing job of creation: God had created stone, but no sculpture like Pieta; mineral ore, but no bridge like the Mackinac; hands, arms, and fingers, but no clarinets, organs, or guitars; vibrations and sound, but no *Eroica Symphony*. When God rested, he seemed to say, "Here it is—a world filled with marvelous potential. Explore and create. That is part of what it means to be created in my image. And when you experience a musical creation that stirs your inner being, I encourage you to declare it good!"

Music reaches down inside us, sometimes with incredible depth and personal satisfaction. Christians praise God for these oases of beauty in a world where newspaper headlines scream of ugliness. But some Christian brothers and sisters see this as selfish activity. "We should flee the world," they say, "and use only music that aims us toward the next world—toward heaven." Paul's words to Timothy straightforwardly

address this attitude. For example, note the phrase "*Nothing* is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving."

The fall was tragically serious but did *not* obliterate the beauty of God's wonderful creation. It shifted the focus from God's glory toward human selfishness, with dramatically devastating results. But God has not given up on his creation. Nor can we. He calls us as Christians to work toward restoration of the God-focus in our music—indeed glorying in the ecstasy of personal musical mountaintops, but always in the context of thankfulness to God. Music indeed reaches inward!

Inward and outward, a good start toward the sort of authentic community that our neighbors are seeking. Even with this good start, however, we can be—and have been—justifiably accused of elitism in some aspects of our Christian education communities, including our music. Thus we turn to what may be the most difficult direction for musical growth.

The "downward" direction

"Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me.'

"They also will answer, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or sick or in prison, and did not help you?'

"He will reply, 'I tell you the truth, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.'" (Matthew 25:41-45)

Let me, with total respect for God's Word, add some new verses to this reading:

"I was bored by the trancelike passivity of television, and you taught me to play the guitar."

"I was cringing from the trauma of sexual abuse, and you taught me to sing."

"I was hiding alone behind my triple-locked doors, and you took me to a senior-citizens' respite center where I played musical games and for the first time in many months heard my name



used lovingly, received many smiles, and experienced healthy and affirming touch.”

“Downward” is listed in quotation marks as the heading for this section because what we see as downward—reaching “down” to those with less musical skill or inferior musical taste, *Christ* sees far differently. “Comfort a suffering human being with music and you thereby comfort me,” he says. What we first see as downward soon makes a beatific upward shift in our perspective.

This is a call for Christian students and teachers, with rich musical opportunities and traditions, to come off the societal sidelines and join hands with others on the forefront of the battle against social injustice. A beautiful picture of this allegedly downward-reaching activity lies in the prism. We can think of *ourselves* musically as a prism. Although God’s light (and sound) already are clear and bright in some areas of his creation, many suffering people do not appreciate their varied hues and timbres and majesty *until* they have been filtered through fellow human beings. As we lovingly help meet their musical needs, they may begin to perceive the God who inspires us and also has been at their side all along.

We take a small step in this direction when we sing carols at nursing homes, but workers there often complain privately of the feast-or-famine nature of such involvement (Christmas vs. the rest of the year). We have so much to offer. Can we share it? Will we share it?

The upward direction

With some sense of relief we return to familiar ground, music for the upward direction of worship. We find support in scriptures rather easily for the favored activity, especially in the Psalms.

“I will exalt you, my God the King; I will praise your name for ever and ever. Every day I will praise you and extol your name. Great is the Lord and most worthy of praise; his greatness no one can fathom.” (Psalm 145:1-3)

I also wish to add to our discussion

a second and perhaps surprising verse from Galatians. *“I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me.”* (Galatians 2:20).

The upward reach of worship is what we expect from Christian schools in their music. Perhaps, however, the richest worship, the most satisfying upward reach, *occurs in the context of the first three directions.*

Worship is *not* the ballgame of the Christian life. Instead it is more like a half-time break. We serve God primarily outside the hallowed walls of chapels, churches, and Christian school devotional times. We study, rehearse, and practice to deepen our responsiveness to musical creations by gifted composers themselves created in the image of their Creator. We exchange musical perspectives with others unlike us in order to learn even more of the variety of God’s sound creation. We affirm many musical activities as part of the normal functioning of the body of Christ. And we reach “down” to those who lack these musical opportunities, finding that we thereby complete a beautiful musical community.

Such work exhausts us, however, so we need to be refreshed in worship. Since it provides deep personal satisfaction, however, we also come to worship with thankful hearts. In the context of the verse from Galatians, we come to worship to remind ourselves that we experience growth in the other three directions only because Christ works through us. With that perspective we return with renewed hope and vigor into the exertion involved with those dimensions of musical activity.

A useful exercise for my undergraduate students has been to rank four types of human activity in terms of their Christian value:

- (a) Christian practices without Christian words
- (b) Christian words without

Christian practices

(c) Christian practices combined with Christian words

(d) lack of both Christian practice and Christian words

When I first began using this exercise, I intended a ranking with (c) as highest followed in order by (a), (b), and (d). My deep-thinking students, however, argued to reverse the latter two options so that (d) would outrank (b). I think they are right. The principle we derive from this exercise is that verbalized (explicit) Christianity requires a close correlation with practiced (implicit) Christianity, and the latter far outranks the former if either is standing alone.

Although I have lived with this principle for only a few short months, I am nonplussed by its far-reaching implications! Does this mean, for example, that well-verbalized forms of Christianity in a Christian community that is characterized by triumphalism, judgmentalism, racism, sexism, and elitism are morally inferior to practiced-but-not-verbalized Christianity in a public school setting that carefully counters these negative tendencies? I may not know that answer, but the question is important! I have known supporters of Christian schools and Christian churches, for example, who seek verbalized forms of Christianity above all else and seem to assume that the practiced forms will automatically follow close behind. I have become skeptical about that expectation.

How does your school fit into this scheme? I pray that any discussions that result may help all of us come closer to following that high Christian calling that we have taken on. ☺

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Music Education in the Balance

Joel Ulrich

When I began teaching high school choral music twenty-five years ago there were times when I made quick trips to the music store or publisher-sponsored new-music reading sessions in efforts to keep up with the demands of teaching and directing five or six days a week. I'll admit that sometimes I chose music I thought would appeal to the students' current tastes.

All teaching is philosophy-driven, whether conscious or unconscious, and somewhere along the line I acquired a passion for quality and began a lifelong quest to learn from the best people in my field. I wanted to discover how they achieved such outstanding results year in and year out. I've also continued to attend clinics, workshops, and classes taught by the best in the profession, but I didn't consciously examine how I was balancing the trends in music until a few years ago when I took a nine-week sabbatical to learn from outstanding music teachers around the country.

I found that the truly great programs were led by passionate teachers who were able to infect their students with that same passion. The great programs were balanced. They touched on many

types of contemporary and classical music so that the students experienced a real music education, and they patiently taught the technical skills instead of just preparing for flashy, crowd-pleasing concerts. They built those excellent programs upon the firm foundation of a classical music education while sampling trends and styles of contemporary music, too.

My desire to be faithful as a teacher has led me to attempt to balance the trends so that students will continue to love and appreciate music, not just now, but later in life as well. Too often a music program falls into the trap of being either classical or contemporary, with no in-between.

The classicists, arguing that students must develop an appreciation for art, shun contemporary music as shallow and temporal. Those who favor contemporary music fear that classical works will overwhelm or bore their students. It becomes an either-or proposition.

Balance is the key. Music by Keith Green, Michael W. Smith, or David Maddux can be a beneficial part of a choral music program. The harmonies of Take Six or First Call require skill and teamwork. When these are balanced





with classical works that have stood the test of time, the students learn that music has a foundation, a present, and a future.

We know that in other areas of our lives we are constantly balancing. We balance work with play, laughter with crying, study with recreation, solid nutritional food with Grandma's wonderful desserts. We know what happens when any of these areas become unbalanced.

Christian educators are charged to nurture their students in the Lord and lead them to an understanding that the earth is indeed the Lord's and all the fullness thereof (Ps. 24). Such nurturing requires us to lay a solid foundation with works of great art and meaning. It's helpful to remember, though, that we aren't charged with accomplishing the whole task now. Moses led his people through the desert, but it was left to Joshua to bring them into the promised land. David began planning the temple,

but it was left for Solomon to build. Music educators lead students by teaching them music, but much of the job is left for the students themselves to finish.

Balancing requires a long-haul perspective, understanding that music that is instantly appealing may also be short-lived. Twenty-five years ago I was the renegade teacher who first introduced a bass and rhythm section of the school's performing groups. Yet, I've conducted performances of Bach, Buxtehude, Vivaldi, and Palestrina, often accompanied by an orchestra.

It's a question of music education as opposed to music pacification. A program based on well-received contemporary music might be popular, but it won't provide the basis for an ongoing music education. Students might feel they are having fun, and even worshipping joyously, but their ability to go on may be compromised if they don't gain a balanced music education.

Student partnership in the rehearsal room is a major element of balancing. Teaching music theory, note reading, and vocal technique is hard work, but it liberates the student from teacher dependency and fosters true creativity. Instead of just following the teacher's every move, the trained student eventually becomes an equal partner rather than a follower. The result is passionate performances.

After one such performance a parent commented, "It wasn't just that it was plain great. There was really something that set this concert apart from any other concert I've ever attended." The students' passion didn't come from their being technically correct, but from mastery of the technique that liberated their passion and communicated it to the audience. Their endurance and labor—stewardship of their God-given voices—empowered them to minister passionately.


The truly great teachers that I met on my sabbatical not only balanced the trends; they often bucked the trends. They responded heartily to the biblical themes such as "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth . . .," "The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof . . .," "The Lord has put a new song in my mouth. . . ."

Covenant teachers respond to the

Word of the Lord rather than the trends of society. They reject instant gratification for the long view. In the rehearsal room they are more interested in how students will feel about their music later in life than right now, but they don't make music a drag in the present either.

Concern for the musical future of the students means commitment to the classroom first. Concerts are a means to an end rather than an end in themselves. Students should leave their high school choral experience knowing their strengths and weaknesses, possessing confidence in their skills for future auditions in college, community, church, or wherever God calls them.

When the building of choral musicians, rather than the production of crowd-pleasing concerts, becomes the primary focus, balancing comes naturally. Great choral music is written by composers who truly know and love the human voice. When teachers lovingly and carefully train students' voices, quality becomes the classroom expectation. When quality is the custom, it becomes self-perpetuating leading students to reject the trite for the substantial. Balancing becomes the result rather than the goal.

Soli Deo gloria! 

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Reach for the Best

Henry Kort

If we can believe commentator Kurt Andersen, the American audience for poetry is “exquisitely” small—about four hundredths of one percent of the total population (*Time*, May 1993). This means that in a community of 6,000 people, 5,997 live without poetry. And, as Charles Osgood would say, they really don’t miss it all that much.

Yes, and it is in this environment that we teachers, rather than be accused of elitism, simply declare poetry too culturally ambitious, too esoteric, beyond the reach of our students’ experience. In its place we read a little doggerel with them and maybe a few limericks. It is sad that in our loss of nerve we fail, as Henry Zylstra said, “to enable our students to earn their heritage”—this dimension of it, anyway, and, indirectly, we fail to support those in our communities who still value poetry.

Originally, the primary purpose of the poetry category at speech festivals and school programs was to reinforce the cultural, literary aspects of our schools’ curricula. This, unfortunately, is no longer the case; now the primary purpose is simply to give the students an opportunity to perform in public. The students are allowed to memorize anything at all—doggerel, burlesque verse, nursery rhymes—anything.

In the category of music “anything” is not accepted—as can be seen by a glance at the composers of the works the students present at music festivals and at school concerts: Vivaldi, Tchaikovsky, Bach, Mahler, and the like. But in the category of poetry, presentation is the primary concern and purpose of the whole endeavor. Content, substance, is of no importance.

This, I think, is unfair to the

students. We fail to give them these opportunities of memorizing and presenting pieces of writing that are masterfully and meticulously crafted, that can stir their imagination and expand their understanding of life and of God’s creation and of God’s grace in the lives of his image bearers.

Much of our poetry heritage is too difficult for our students (grades five and six), but some of it, with a teacher’s help, can be appreciated (and effectively presented) in meaningful ways on the various levels of our students’ maturity. Here are a few poems that evoked more than a performance level of response:

One student’s imagination was stirred, for example, by the wonder of William Blake’s question in his “Tyger! Tyger!” (stanza 5):

When the stars threw down their
spears
And watered heaven with their
tears,
Did He smile His work to see?
Did He Who made the Lamb make
thee?

One student laughed outright (“I have days like that too,” she said) at the exhilaration of Edna St. Vincent Millay in her poem “Afternoon on a Hill.” The poem begins:

I will be the gladdest thing
Under the Sun!
I will touch a hundred flowers
And not pick one.

After reading Robert P. Tristram Coffin’s poem “The Pheasant,” one boy (a hunter) said, “That’s just the way it is. I saw it happen.” “That beautiful?” a girl asked. “Yes,” he said, “and that terrible.” The poem begins:

A pheasant cock sprang into view,
A living jewel, up he flew.

And ends:

Gentleness relaxed his head,
He lay in jewelled feathers, dead.

One boy no longer raises an imaginary gun at birds as they fly overhead—not after he memorized Coffin’s “Forgive My Guilt.” Below are lines 5-12:

The air ran blue as the flowers, I
held my breath,
Two birds on golden legs slim as
dream things
Ran like quicksilver on the golden
sand,
My gun went off, they ran with
broken wings
Into the sea, I ran to fetch them in,
But they swam with their heads
held high out to sea,
They cried like two sorrowful high
flutes,
With jagged ivory bones where
wings should be.

The students catch the wonderful irony in Percy Bysshe Shelley’s sonnet, “Ozymandias”—the irony between the arrogant words carved on the pedestal and the reality described in the last three lines:

Nothing beside remains. Round the
decay
Of that colossal wreck, boundless
and bare
The long and level sands stretch far
away. ©

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Art—

for whose sake?

Louisa F. Bruinsma

There was a time when a bigger house seemed the only solution to the storage problem created by all the artistic treasures my husband and I collected over the years from our three children. It was a time during which we never had enough good-on-one-side paper; it didn't take long to use up the many drafts of the doctoral dissertation or all the scrap paper from the office. I don't know how many sets of markers we have bought over the years, markers that were seriously guarded and discreetly put away well before the arrival of young visiting children who could push them too hard or leave the tops off.

The best drawings were given top level exposure: the refrigerator. Others were sent to Oma (Grandma), some were discreetly placed in the recycle box (always camouflaged to avoid offense to the artist), and the rest joined "the pile on the fridge." Masterpieces, as well as those from "the pile," were labeled with name, date, and subject and filed. Our file cabinets bulged.

We didn't buy a larger house. The space problem resolved itself. Our children grew up.

When children grow up, there is less time to play and to create. Rigorous demands of part-time employment or heavy curriculum of math and science often leave little opportunity for drawing. Besides, adolescents begin to feel that they are not good at it. For many children, students, and adults, art has to be representational to be good. Children soon realize that their playful creations are not accurate

representations of the objects or people they represent and are unwilling to take the risks involved—even to fail—in efforts at realistic representations.

Adults generally consider art as something only a few "talented" people dabble in. Few of us regularly visit art galleries or buy original art, and still fewer of us ever spend an afternoon dabbling with a paint brush or pencil. Hallmark provides birthday greetings as well as the painting over the sofa chosen to match the carpet.

Yet, the confidence with which we dare to play with style in dress or in furniture selection is daily participation in the individual expression of the artistic element in each of us. Although professional artists stand out, each person is created to exercise this God-given ability for artistic expression.

Although we may not be conscious of it, we are all influenced by color and design in more ways than we realize. That is the reason expensive restaurants give as much attention to the arrangement of the beans on the plate as to prices on the menu.

Recently some King's College students hosted a colorful meal. They added blue food coloring to potatoes, and served them with green gravy. You can imagine that the meal was eaten rather reluctantly. Even though the guests were reassured that the meal had been cooked in a traditional manner, the untypical colors made everyone a little hesitant about the quality of the food.

I am not suggesting we must serve green potatoes, but we all should put more effort into surprising one another a bit by bringing out our God-given individuality. In a mass culture it is

difficult to nurture individuality. As any parent can tell you, most students don't want to stand out, to be different. And certainly there are times when we all want to blend in. But the Creator made us all different, and the Christian school must not only nurture, but also stimulate, that unique expression of each child.

I like to think that God had a good time during his six days of creation. A look at the complex pattern of the grain in a stalk of oats testifies to a Creator who played with design. Watch a wild oat seed do its dance in a few drops of moisture, and you have to laugh with delight. Ours is a God who has fun making things. That same delight and playfulness must pervade our daily work.

But art is considered to be mostly irrelevant, cute at best, and peripheral to the curriculum in most schools, great for kids, but once they get older, of little worth toward getting a job. What counts is mastering skills and sciences. Parents show more concern if Michelle makes spelling mistakes than if her collage is slapped together with little sensitivity or care. Besides, whoever made money by painting or making music or writing stories?

The Christian school is called, however, to direct and encourage that childish delight and wonder. We must nurture students to develop individuality and uniqueness of expression. Schools that profess that each student is made in God's image have to make room in the curriculum for that kind of serious play, not as a frill reserved for Friday afternoons or withheld as punishment.

Students need to be encouraged to

play with design, with texture and with color, to be given the confidence—so evident in their earlier play years—that dares to give shape to things. They need to be encouraged to dare to create, to enjoy what they create, and to respect what they and others have created.

Art for Art's Sake

Miensi Loppers has been teaching art at West Edmonton Christian School for ten years. She has been inspiring students to play and create with results that amaze even herself. She photographs samples of each project. Paging through her photo albums is a treat; each sample shines with the energy and magic of student imagination.

She refuses credit for the results. "It's the students," she says. "It's their ideas, their work." Miensi brings alive in her students that part that makes us most like our Image Bearer and Creator: our creative-ness.

"At West [Edmonton Christian School] art plays an integral part in the curriculum," says principal Henry Visscher. A walk through the building confirms it.

In the foyer hang wind socks, part of the grade two social studies unit on Japan. Students themselves sew the casing for the wire and portray a carp, the historical symbol of the celebration of boys' and children's day in Japan. The socks are crayon batik, made with oil pastels on unbleached cotton fabric, painted over with dylon.

From a distance the bulletin board down the hall looks like a sunrise, but closer up you realize it is the display of a class set of floral designs made from a variety of dry seeds. The display was part of a grade two unit on plants, a playful variation from nature, where seeds come from flowers.

What would you see if you landed your spacecraft on an imaginary planet? Children in grade six are often apprehensive about drawing people. Drawing a spaceman overcomes this barrier because the spaceman is wearing a space suit and helmet, which can be circular shapes that are not quite as formidable to draw. The back of the art room displays the series of drawings of imaginative space creatures, all modestly but tastefully matted. The project developed the technique of creating depth by looking through the



hatch of the spacecraft. The work was done in monochrome (limited to one color and its shades or tints). Students learned how to balance and contrast shades (mixing the color with black) and tints (mixing the color with white) by limiting one to inside the spacecraft and the other to the space scene outside the aircraft. The assignment was part of a grade six unit on space.

Most students are not apprehensive about drawing stick men. Beginning with a stick man exercise, grade four students were shown how to create characters in motion, then in a unit on relationships were asked to portray fun with a friend. All class entries for the study were sent to Ottawa for a Canada-wide Winterfun poster contest. A West Edmonton Christian School student's entry won first prize, an all-expenses-paid trip to Ottawa for her and her family and art teacher, meeting the Governor General. The poster itself was displayed in the children's section of the Museum of civilization in Ottawa and reproduced on a giant billboard next to the National Art Gallery in Ottawa. This specific painting was quite boldly done with emphasis on the movement rather than realistic representation.

When Miensi asked one of the judges why this entry was chosen, her answer was that it beautifully portrayed the spirit of winter fun through the abandoned movement of the figures on

skates and the flying scarves.

Participation in art contests not only helps give recognition and credibility to independent schools, but also fosters the notion that there is public as well as personal value in art. Even though this was the second time that a West student won first place in a major poster contest, the competitive nature of contests is de-emphasized in the school.

One grade three student's design was chosen from over 750 submissions to be placed on billboards throughout the province of Alberta for use in an anti-smoking campaign. The entire class was invited to observe the silk screening process involved in making the giant billboard.

The experience motivated Miensi to have all grade three students try a silk screen project using an Inuit theme. Students created their own three-layer designs on thin paper, and with the help of a few parents and Principal Henry Visscher, the process of screen painting became a memorable experience. The impressive results were framed and are still displayed in homes and offices and in the school.

"I find it really worthwhile to include two specific themes in every grade each year," said Miensi, "and those are people and trees. Children seem most often to revert to stereotyped portrayals of these, especially trees."

Grade two students observe a tree

to look at its shape, how it grows out of the earth, how the trunk thins out to branches, then splits into twigs. "They can go inside and then draw the tree from memory," she says, "but grade five students are more concerned with 'getting it right' and benefit from drawing directly from nature. And amazingly," she adds, "even though they all sit in front of the same tree and use the same black felt pens, no two drawings are alike! I get twenty-four different trees. Each child unconsciously highlights a certain artistic aspect of the tree—for some it is the size, for some the myriads of little branches and twigs. For some the tree appears huge, for others small, for another the main trunk is the dominant feature. No two people perceive a subject in the same way. I see this in art classes all the time, and it is an aspect of art appreciation that we often talk about in class."

The effort to inspire kids to do art for its own sake need not be expensive. The art room is full of recyclable junk donated by thoughtful parents and friends. Styrofoam tops of egg cartons can be used for print making. Students make indentations from a design; paint is rolled over the design and can be used

as a stencil for print making. "Or better yet," says Miensie, "blend two of three different colors and something unexpected comes out."

"Great art," says Miensie, "is sometimes produced by people who may be considered by some as technologically backward, but in our century Western art has often turned to these so-called 'primitive' cultures for inspiration. Art does not necessarily have to be 'sophisticated' to be great art."

A study of Inuit communities in Northern Canada involved "stone carving" (plaster of Paris mixed with sand) and printing. Students refined the use of carving tools (nail files, nails,) and practiced using brayers and water-based printing ink. One student insisted his sun was not very interesting and wanted to add a face. Miensie asked him to come back to her with a sketch of a face that an Inuit would draw, and only after he had proven he understood the way an Inuit might attempt it, could he add the face. (One print from this project was used as the design of a church bulletin cover, which was distributed by the Edmonton Christian School system to surrounding churches during

Education Week.)

Grade four native studies included the study of Canadian native artist Norval Morrisseau. After studying his vivid use of contrasting colors and portrayal of "spirit" within the body, students imitated his painting style (using oil pastels instead of oil paint) by showing thoughts and eyes inside the body of figures in their art.

A grade three animal unit sent students to the library for ideas in creating realistic, close-up portrayals of insects and spiders. To initially sketch the insects, students used white chalk on colored construction paper. "It is less threatening to them because changes can easily be made," Miensie says. Because the insects were to have imaginary colors and backgrounds, it was hard to do anything 'wrong.' Students duplicated, contrasted, or continued lines and colors from the central object onto the background.

But one particular project grabbed the attention of the whole student body, staff, parents, and even the custodian—the making of marionettes. "It was magic," says Miensie.

As part of the grade four language arts program each student was to make



a marionette that would eventually serve to act out a role in their rewritten fairy tales. For the students the first task was deciding on a character. They practiced sketching an expressive face and then painted this on the wooden head. Hair (yarn) was added, and then the custodian, Rick Peters, got into the act. He cut all the little wooden blocks for the bodies, drilled minute holes in bodies and heads and made crosses for attaching and manipulating strings. The marionettes were assembled in the art class and then only needed clothes.

Miensie provided two basic clothing patterns, one for boy and one for girl marionettes, since the dimensions were to be the same. A big box of scraps, lots of sewing machines, and a parent helper for each student were gathered one evening, and the clothes were made. Miensie found the tubing used in toilet flush tanks worked perfectly as casing for the strings. Although students were not allowed to take the marionettes home before the performance, one student sneaked hers home so that her dad could drill a hole in the head for a pipe that he had made. "I had an idea," said Miensie, "that the parents had as much fun as the students in helping to make little extras and collect props."

Suitable backgrounds had to be designed and painted and props made for each play, but since the students had been rehearsing their verbal parts by this time, they were quite sure of what they wanted and did not require much help. "Everything that happened after this fell on the shoulders of the language arts teacher," said Miensie.

Learning to work with the marionettes required quite a bit of practice and fine coordination. Students had to use the different strings to lift arms and legs for walking (not "floating") and move the head expressively when talking. They used fingers, even teeth to manipulate the strings. The challenge was to have everyone make the marionettes move at the right moment and pace with very little room backstage (a large cardboard box cut open) for the human actors. "It worked on the principle that, if I make this movement, you have to make that movement," says Miensie. "It was pure magic to see the little limp wooden bodies come to life, and the effect it had



on students watching their classmates practice was wonderful."

The final production was no less demanding than any other student performance. Students had to say their memorized lines while manipulating the marionettes and helping to move sets. Lighting, recorded sound effects, and microphones were also required. "In the end," says Miensie, "it really became a theater production."

The performances were such a success that each class at the school, as well as the grade four parents, were invited to see the productions. "Kids who normally would never go on stage lost their inhibitions and shone. In fact," says Miensie, "this would be an excellent junior high project."

"You don't need to be a fine art major to do effective art classes with young students," says Miensie. "Any classroom teacher with imagination and daring can do this."

"It is important to treat children's art work with respect," she says. "Although framing is the ultimate, even matting it with a suitable color of construction paper will already enhance a piece or bring it to life." The framing of one student's work had such a dramatic effect on the artist that she did not recognize her own painting hanging in the staff room when she went to look for it. Miensie had to take her there personally to see her signature.

"If children can be guided to retain an appreciative, aesthetic awareness as they grow up, we have already enriched their lives wonderfully," says Miensie. "People often believe that they have no

artistic sense because they could never draw anything accurately or realistically 'the way it really looks.' They were discouraged as children; therefore they don't even try, and, worst of all, they (very often unconsciously) discourage their own children by imposing on them those ideas about what art should be.

"Since art requires keen observation, the artist will eventually make a careful study of proportions, perspective, the science of color. But this comes later and does not apply to young children exploring their creative talent and expression.

"Most children will probably not become great artists (or poets or musicians or composers), but this does not mean that they should not be allowed the opportunities to learn to express themselves well in words, or learn to play an instrument to the best of their ability, or become familiar with the principles of harmony, or develop fine skills in sculpting or painting.

"Since art is a way of perceiving life, it is also a tool for us to develop human understanding. Art reveals how people see themselves, their surroundings, their relationships to their fellow beings and to God. It can teach us to empathize, to see the world through the eyes of others.

"Art is not a frill to be disposed of in times of economic hardship. To practice art, to create, and to enjoy art is an integral part of our being human image bearers of our God." ©

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Our World, God's World

Roger L. Griffioen

Every teacher of social studies in the Christian school has a unique opportunity to prepare students to live as Christians in society. We do this best if two things are true: first, that we have a biblical understanding of our world, our society, and the human condition, and second, that we periodically review the changes in our society and world and redirect our performance and objectives accordingly.

At Southwest Chicago Christian School recent consolidation presented us with the opportunity to evaluate and to coordinate our entire K-12 social studies program. A committee was appointed with the following mandate:

To review the goals and materials of our present social studies curriculum, discuss the issues and practices in teaching social studies, and prepare a proposal of any changes that must be made to strengthen or improve the school's curriculum. This review should be responsive to social change, to technological developments, to increasing global awareness, and to the need for Christians to better understand themselves and the society they live in as they seek to carry out God's directive to redeem this world for him. Curriculum guides should be produced containing the following:

1. Statement of the philosophy of social studies
2. General objectives of social studies
3. Course descriptions by grade level.

A committee of teachers representing various levels K-12 organized the work in five overlapping stages as follows:

A. Introduction and Information

1. What are we doing, what are others doing, and why?
2. What are experts saying, what are recent trends, and do we agree?

B. Information and Reflection

1. Assess and interpret the actual, ideal, and possible.
2. Discuss our philosophy and purpose.

C. Reflection and Writing

1. Produce a Christian philosophy of social studies.
2. Establish general social studies objectives.

D. Writing and Recommendations

1. Establish scope and sequence.
2. Produce grade and course objectives.

E. Recommendations and Implementation

1. Develop integration and continuity across the curriculum.
2. Determine materials, staff, facilities, and scheduling.

The following *Understandings* were written and presented to the study committee as a Christian framework for our basic goals and objectives in the teaching of social studies.

There are three basic assumptions that underlie the Christian view of all reality, namely *Creation*, the *Fall*, and *Redemption*. This sequence guides our understanding of the world, the human condition, and all of history. We understand

- 1) that all things originated in God's good *creation*
- 2) that through the *fall* creation became corrupted and cursed and humans became self-serving and violent toward others and nature
- 3) that only through God in Christ is *redemption* possible for humanity and nature.

These three assumptions stand in distinct contrast to the presuppositions of the modern age which assert that

- 1) All *nature* is self-governing and is not subject to any supernatural power or control (thereby denying both creation and providence);
- 2) Human *reason* is self-sufficient and can unlock all of nature's secrets and understand all truth without any transcendent revelation (thereby denying the impact of the fall, which has clouded the mind and made

wisdom elusive);

3) *Progress* can only be assured as mankind masters nature's mysteries and powers and mobilizes knowledge for social and technological improvements (thereby denying the curse, the subsequent perversion of the human will, and the need for redemption in Christ).

We affirm that Christ is the center of history and that through faith in him comes renewal and restoration for us and our world. While secular views of history are often cyclical and generally enigmatic, fatalistic, or aimless, we see history as linear, with a created beginning, a redemptive purpose, and a judicious end.

Therefore, in contrast to the world around us, our view of temporal and ultimate reality demands that our teaching be guided by the following truths:

#1 God is Creator

We believe that the existing world was created by God, its design and composition are from God, and the laws that govern the universe were made and are maintained by God (known as providence). What we commonly call laws of nature are actually God's daily, direct activity by which he maintains and controls the universe. He is omnipotent, omniscient, and omnipresent in his creation. Furthermore, God called this creation "good," and though now fallen and corrupted by sin with resulting disharmony, futility, and death, it is still God's world and, through God's redemptive power in Christ, will be made new again. This is God's ultimate purpose and becomes our purpose as well, as we try to bring ourselves and all things under God's sovereignty and direction.

For everything God created is good, and nothing is to be rejected. (I Tim. 4:4)

In keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth. (II Peter 3:13)

#2 Humanity is culpable

Although created good, humanity has become corrupt so that vulgarity and chaos govern much of culture and society. The meaning of life is confused, and the divine norms for virtuous and meritorious work and life have been perverted by self-love and human desire for fulfillment apart from God. Human beings suffer not only confusion, ignorance, and misdirection (the position of Pelagius and modern liberalism), but also corruption, guilt, and damnation (the position of Augustine, Luther, and Calvin). The human condition is therefore beyond self-improvement or self-correction. Salvation lies only in conversion, being born again, through God's grace. We need Christ not only as teacher, example, and the light of the world, but Christ as Savior, the sacrificial lamb, the one who paid the debt for our sin.

Secular social analysis completely ignores the fall and talks instead of human education and improvement. Human beings are seen as the highest step of the evolutionary process, with sufficient development and reasoning capacity to master all knowledge, and with sufficient goodness to use it well. However, we must remind ourselves of God's assessment:

There is no one righteous, not even one. (Romans 3:10)

For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. (Romans 3:23)

#3 Christ is victorious

It is through the power of God in Christ that renewal and redemption come. It is God's will to redeem all things and to make of us and the world a new creation. This new creation will not come through human efforts or knowledge, nor will it result from the long process of evolution. We dispute the position of most history texts today, which attempt to prove "the onward march of civilization" from cave-dweller to astronaut. What the world calls "progress" is basically an accumulation of scientific knowledge,

which results in improved technology. But knowledge does not equal wisdom, and improved technology does not equal progress. Science and technology have increased materialism but have not advanced social sensitivity or spiritual values such as fidelity, honesty, equity, and justice. Furthermore, modern means of production and distribution have polluted our environment, endangered our health, and even threatened our future. Technology and materialism have disparaged the spiritual world and exploited and endangered the physical world. Human efforts only lead to futility. Renewal for humanity and the world is through Christ alone.

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come. All this is from God who reconciled us to himself through Christ. (I Cor. 5:17-18)

#4 Culture is redeemable

We believe that all humans are image bears of God and, as moral, rational, and social beings, live under the cultural mandate given by God at creation to "subdue the earth . . . and rule over it" (Gen. 1:28). This requires us individually and communally to attend to and transform creation so that the world reflects God's eternal harmony and fulfillment for the welfare of the human race and the praise of the Creator. This is the real work required of us as we live out the Christian faith. All creation and life must be brought under the rule of God's will. Thus we participate in the process of universal redemption. Each Christian, whatever one's work or vocation, must participate in reclaiming God's sovereignty over the world.

For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do. (Eph. 2:10)

#5 Restoration is inclusive

Religion and morality can never be limited to private practice but must also extend to the public sphere. We must

promote the lordship of Christ over all of life, including education, business, politics, music, art, entertainment, and all other human activity. Our commitment in the world calls for transformation of the culture around us rather than accommodation to it or isolation from it. Divine injunctions must guide every human endeavor so that society and creation are appraised with sensitivity and stewardship rather than indifference and exploitation. God's will for the world, for human citizenship and community, must be fulfilled on earth as it is in heaven, and Christ's preeminence must be established in all aspects of life.

For through him God reconciles to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross. (Col. 1:20)

#6 Evaluation is introspective

Whereas humankind is both a recipient and a participant in the process of redemption, it remains God's work in us and through us. We are, in the providence of God, both the producer and the product of history, both a subject and a ruler of the environment. As such we must develop the capacity to research, interpret, and evaluate with empathy both past and present culture in order to understand and to fulfill our role under God with proper moral choices. We affirm that it is God's image in humankind that produces human dignity and worth, and we must share divine guidance as we receive it. This we do as we see the needs of the world even as we see our own needs. Loving God above all, we must love our neighbor as ourselves. This gives the Christian school the only proper basis for "multiculturalism" and "global education" so much in vogue today.

Humility precedes empathy; empathy precedes understanding, acceptance, and social action.

A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. (John 13:34)

#7 Evil is pervasive

Optimism must always be balanced by reality. The fall has so dramatically affected the human condition that correction, redirection, and progress will be challenged and resisted to such a degree that only hard work, discipline, patience, and self-sacrifice will make us worthy instruments in God's redemption of all things. God-honoring choices for the environment and society will suffer opposition because of the tension of good and evil in the world. Nothing but God's blessing and our best efforts will promote the new creation.

For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. (Eph. 6:12)

#8 Truth is elusive

Matters are further complicated by our own lack of virtue and wisdom. Not only is the human will contaminated by the fall (leading us to theft, dishonesty, lust, anger), but also the human mind has been clouded so that our reason is faulty and limited. Judgment is subjective, and truth has become fragmented, incomplete, and often lost. It is crucial that all Christians realize our own limitations. We do not know and cannot know all the answers. Reality is often hidden in paradox and mystery,

which can be enlightened or resolved only in relation to God's eternal truth and purpose. Therefore, we work in the world with humility and prayer, asking that God's wisdom and will prevail over our own.

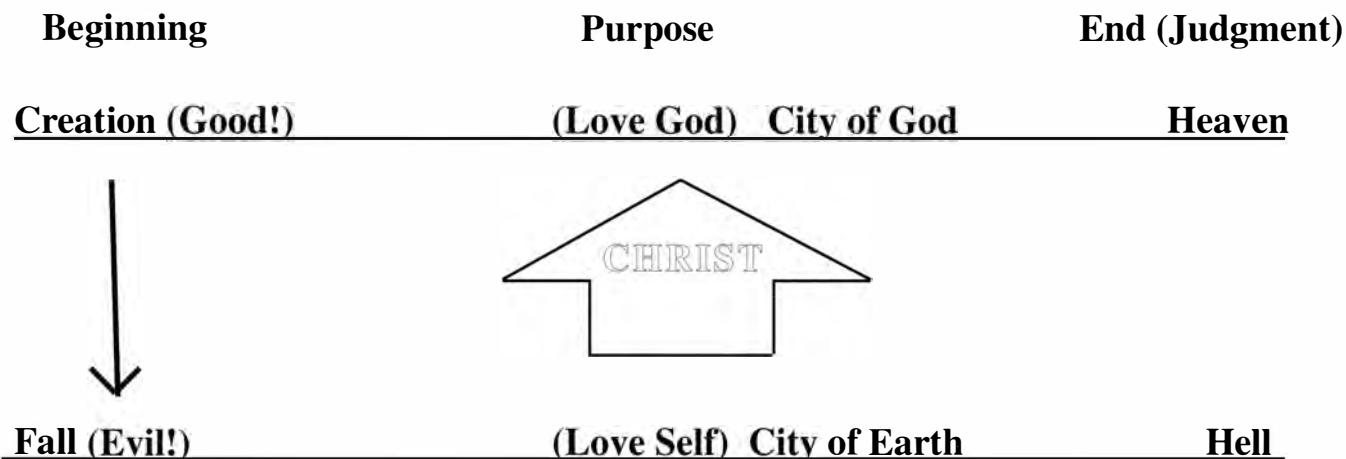
"For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways," declares the Lord. "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts". (Isa. 55:8)

For the foolishness of God is wiser than man's wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than man's strength. (1 Cor. 1:25)

#9 History is linear

Here is a cardinal principle of the Christian philosophy of history, that we know history's beginning, purpose, and end. It is not cyclical (the rise and fall of nations or civilizations), nor is it progressive (the upward march of civilization), nor is it unexplained (and malicious) fate. We believe that all temporal and empirical knowledge of humankind and the world must be understood in the light of eternal and transcendent purpose.

It was Augustine's *City of God* that gave classic expression of purposeful divine superintendence of history as follows: We were created good and in God's image, to praise and love God as citizens of the City of God. But, in Adam's fall we became evil and filled with self-love so that we now live as citizens of the City of Earth. But, "God so loved the world that he sent his only begotten Son" to redeem mankind and his world. Those recreated by Christ reenter the City of God and are saved. Others remain in the City of Earth and are lost.



"I am the Alpha and the Omega," says the Lord God, "who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty." (Rev. 1:8)

#10 Time anticipates eternity

Our conclusion then must be that our work as Christian teachers (including all teachers, as well as those who teach social studies) must be within the context of our religious faith and commitment. Each of our students must learn that true progress in the world and in life is to be measured not by fame or prosperity, but in the building of the City of God where goodness, justice, righteousness, and peace prevail. The final assessment of our efforts will be the faith-commitment of our students in the challenges of daily living. The goals we seek are beyond human measurement and the final evaluation of our efforts will be left to God. Therefore, all Christian teachers say with Moses,

May the favor of the Lord our God rest upon us; establish the work of our hands for us. Yes, establish the work of our hands. (Ps. 90:17)

Christian schools exist apart from public education because the Christian community, in obedience to God, is obligated to transmit the Christian faith

and life to its children. We desire a total life commitment as our faith-response to Christ. No educational activities are neutral; all are faith-founded. Because the social studies are so comprehensive, covering all human endeavors and all activities of all people of all times, this philosophical statement carries implications for all Christian teachers in all areas of study:

- in *science*, particularly our understanding of the divine origin (creation), as well as the composition, care, and laws that govern the universe (providence)
- in *literature and language arts*, particularly our expression and interpretation of the human condition, and our development of the use of language as a gift of God
- in *music and art*, particularly the Christian view of reality and what is the good, the true, the beautiful
- in *mathematics*, in which principles and theorems are seen more as discovery than invention, and where order and precision are viewed as representative of creation
- in *business, home economics, and industrial arts*, where work is seen as part of creation (redemptive) rather than part of the fall (drudgery)

Therefore, in all our teaching we

Chicago Christian High School's *Statement of Philosophy* and the *General Objectives* of this project are available upon request from the author:

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Requests should include a self-addressed return envelope large enough for a four-page document. The documents will be sent free of charge.

affirm this doxology with the apostle Paul:

For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory forever! Amen! (Romans 11:36) ☪

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More Bang for Your Curricular Buck

On my first day of teaching English I found that I had planned for the wrong class. Having been given ten days to prepare a class in American literature, I was surprised when my students protested, "We did American literature last trimester!"

"Oh," I parried, "What class did you think this was?"

"We signed up for Writing 4: The Research Paper."

"Very well," I replied with pedagogical majesty, "Here's how we begin a research paper."

It really didn't matter very much that I had to start teaching research paper writing with nothing but a little monogram printed in the 1940s. I had to start from scratch in all my classes, since the curriculum had existed mostly in my predecessor's head. She was an able teacher, but she hadn't left me a usable curriculum. I don't blame her though; she had arrived to a similar situation a couple of years earlier and had chosen to spend her creative energy teaching.

This episode sprang immediately to mind when I took a look at *Writers File: A Language Series to Accompany Writers INC*. Had I been given something like this 500-page ring binder when I began my teaching career, I would have had more time to teach. I would have spent less time inventing the light bulb from scratch every night. Instead of dreaming up lessons from thin air, I could have played with my kids. Oh, well.

Writers File is a companion to the

enormously successful *Writers INC: A Guide to Writing, Thinking, & Learning*, which has earned rave reviews from teachers around North America. Much of *Writers INC*'s success is due to its low cover price (\$8.00) and the fact that it can be used as the basic writing text from grades nine through twelve. That's two bucks a year.

But besides being affordable, *Writers INC* is usable. It covers pretty much everything a high school writer needs to know and is designed for easy reference. Students who use it find that they aren't wasting time learning a new system with each new teacher.

Writers File can be purchased in four editions, one for each of the high school grades. It costs \$119.95, but it can be used over and over again. The publishers grant permission to photocopy the various handouts and assignments.

This isn't just MacTeacher, like the mail order outfit that tries to sell us 180 dittos so that we don't have to think or teach all year. *Writers File* is a state-of-the-art resource file that builds on the best research about teaching writing. When used with *INC Sights: A Teachers Guide to Writers INC*, it becomes a first-rate curriculum package for high school English teachers.

Each edition of *Writers File* begins with an "Overview and Outcomes" section and moves on to sections on writing workshops, language activities, a resource folder, and other practical activities. The program is sequential, but the teacher is not locked into it.

Lessons are integrated with text: short, interesting pieces that demonstrate a particular skill.

My colleague David Seymour has been using *Writers Inc* with grades nine and ten. He found the *Writers File* to be extremely practical. "I particularly appreciate the breadth and flexibility," he said. "You can use it without being bound to it, and it motivates students to see writing as a real-life tool."

Seymour also appreciates the way *Writers File* underscores the need for self-directed learning. "It gives students the tools to integrate concrete language skills into writing."

Seymour's enthusiasm underscores the wide applicability of *Writers File* to teachers at various levels in their careers. A seasoned English teacher who works with ninth and tenth graders, Seymour also teaches a twelfth-grade Advanced-Placement English course that has resulted in many top scores on the Advanced Placement tests over the past few years.

Just as it can be adapted for beginners and experts alike, *Writers File* could be used effectively in integrated English classes that combine literature, writing, speaking, and editing, or with more segmented curricula where writing is a separate class from literature.

"Teacher-proof" curricula like vocabulary drills and matching synonym dittos tend to drag the entire class down to the level of the teacher's incompetence. *Writers File* is not teacher-proof in that sense. It could, however, be better than a mediocre

teacher who used it. In the hands of an expert teacher, it would be proportionately more effective.

Many textbooks seem to be written under the assumption that teachers are dullards who don't really know their subjects. Often these teacher-proof textbooks, with their own unique formats and approaches, tie the students to the book. They're like overprotective parents who can't bear to push the fledglings from the nest. When students encounter a succession of such textbooks year after year, they learn to "figure out what the teacher wants," which prepares them to stay in the nest. When they move on they must learn a new system for a new nest, *ad nauseum*.

Writers File is designed to assist the process of shoving the fledglings out. It prepares them to take wing and fly, which is what teaching writing is really about.

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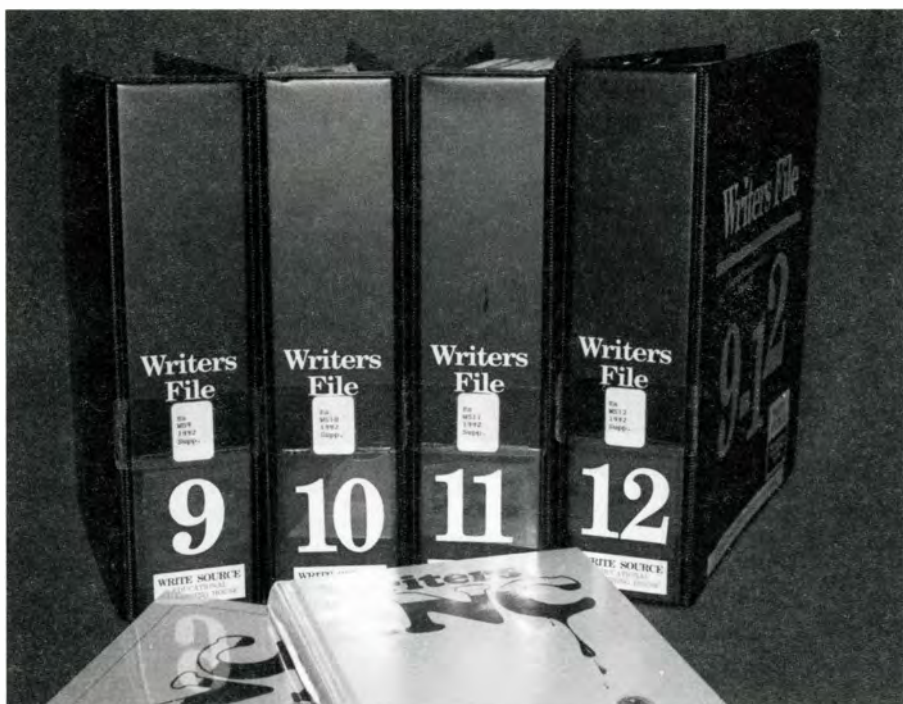
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Stefan Ulstein teaches at Bellevue Christian Junior and Senior High in Bellevue, Washington.



The Source of Write Source

Write Source materials bear the mark of several teachers and students affiliated with Christian Schools International schools.

Dordt College theatre arts and English professor Verne Meyer has worked on the project since its inception twenty years ago. Meyer is one of the primary authors of the ever popular *Writers INC* as well as *Basic English Revisited* and *Write Source 2000*.

Meyer's former colleague, Randall Vander Mey, has contributed for the past five years to the research, writing, and thinking skills sections of *Writers INC* and *Write Source 2000*. Vander Mey, who taught English at Dordt, now teaches at Westmont College in California.

Since last spring Kim Rylaarsdam and John Van Rys, both of Sioux Center, Iowa, have been writing a number of assignments for *Writer's File*. Rylaarsdam has taught high school and college writing courses. Van Rys is a member of the Dordt College English Department.

Four Dordt students of David Schelhaas have also had a part in the project. Karen Martinus, Melissa Meuzelaar, Benjamin Meyer, and Eric Van Ruler have contributed student samples of various kinds of prose.



Textbook Previews

Trent De Jong and Eleanor Mills

Textbooks are frequently difficult for students to read. If a student surveys a chapter prior to reading, however, the reading may be easier. An initial survey might be the first step in a textbook reading system, such as SQ3R: SURVEY, QUESTION, READ, RECITE, REVIEW. Typically, the survey goes something like this:

Before reading the assigned portion of text, the reader spends a few minutes surveying it. This survey includes reading the title and section headings and skimming any concluding summary. The purpose of this step is to develop some sense of what this piece of reading is about, to form a mental set, and possibly to activate background knowledge on the subject under discussion. (Bruinsma 78)

A variation of this survey step is possible when the text features visuals. For example, the social studies text

Other Places, Other Times, contains many photographs and illustrations in the section titled "Ancient Western Civilization." Many artifacts and structures associated with the development of civilization are depicted.

In order to survey the first two chapters of this section, students in grade seven were instructed to do the following:

1. Scan the chapters for "symbols of civilization."
2. Decide on a symbol to draw on a small square of paper.
3. Make a line drawing that fills the paper.
4. Outline the drawing in black felt pen.

The drawings became part of a bulletin board display that included maps of the ancient world and a time-line. Throughout the unit, the bulletin board reminded students of the items that would be studied and of their own personal interest in certain items, which

they had chosen to draw.

In the process of searching the text, students did what they usually do with a new book, looked at the pictures. They also read the captions accompanying the illustrations in the text to find out more about the pictures. They discussed informally the meaning of the term "civilization," thus developing a mindset for the more formal instruction to follow. They formed visual mental images that they could associate with concepts. Students whose learning style is mainly visual were encouraged and motivated by the success they experienced during this activity. All students experienced successes, since each one chose to represent a symbol that was simple enough to be achievable.

The activity could be extended to include a sharing time in which each student explains to the class, or to a small group, what the symbol means or what is unclear about its significance, making further study important. ①

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Trent De Jong teaches grade seven at Abbotsford Christian School in Abbotsford, British Columbia. Eleanor Mills is learning assistance teacher in Abbotsford Christian Schools in British Columbia.



I have some students who delight in putting down other kids. I have talked to them, quoted Scripture, and told them I would not tolerate their hurting other people in any way in my classroom. They continue to practice these putdowns freely outside the classroom and subtly inside. How can I change this behavior?

I too, wish there were easy solutions to this problem. Perhaps we can't change the behavior, but we can make it less desirable. Classroom rules are necessary to ensure every student the right to a safe environment, a place where students will not be hurt in any way. The savagery of destructive putdowns surpasses that of "sticks and stones" for some kids. Consequence for such behavior must be administered; however, many times it is not. The subtlety of twisted meanings, interpretations, and intent can cause the teacher to doubt the validity of the accusation or even the possibility of proving it, especially to the parents of the offender.

"Children learn what they live." We might be fighting against what they've lived with and learned at home, but our job is to make certain they aren't learning these negative behaviors in our classrooms, hallways, lunchrooms, and playgrounds. About fifteen years ago student evaluations taught me a valuable lesson: the laughs I got from kidding a few self-confident students did not excuse the hurt inflicted on the helpless victims. Sadly, I still see teachers who "kid" with students, using putdowns as a means of humor and excusing this verbal warfare by saying, "They know the difference." Students don't always know the difference, even when their friends or parents practice this gameplaying, let alone a less familiar adult authority. If we practice negative ways of communicating, our positive role modeling becomes more difficult, even fake. If the teacher is just kidding around, why can't the students too? The children will learn what they live in our classrooms.

Basically we must teach the acceptable behavior to replace the

unacceptable. The classroom rule needs an addendum: "If you break it, you fix it," whether it is a piece of property or a fragile ego. The students have power over the behavior and the responsibility for finding a solution. Too often we bail them out or dish it out; either way, the students don't own the responsibility. Granted we might need to give suggestions for fixing the problem, but the students practice the positive behavior, reinforcing or learning to live the acceptable way.

From the youngest on up, we can involve kids in activities to better understand how cruel words can be. Verbalizing a putdown while tearing part of a paper doll and passing it on to others to do the same may influence elementary students. Teachers can remind them that the "rips" don't always occur at school and that sometimes kids come to school already "torn apart." With my adolescents, I use a large heart made of red construction paper. I crumple the heart with each putdown I've heard kids complain about from parents and peers. Then I ask them for "putups" to straighten the heart back out. The creases, however, remain, reminding us that sometimes the wounds aren't easily healed.

These illustrations promote discussions and learning that no threats or mini-lectures can accomplish. They also demand patience; some negative behavior patterns have been practiced for years, so relearning and living new ones take time. But how exciting to be teachers rooted in God's Word, to know "that the tongue has the power of life and death," to see that students and teachers can make a difference in the lives of others by the way they speak!

I am an English teacher who becomes extremely frustrated about the inequity in teacher loads. I watch other faculty members go home with little or no homework and wonder how the principal can justify the difference. How does a teacher cope without sounding like a complainer?

As an English teacher I also

experienced similar thoughts. For years I routinely made a writing paper due on Friday so I'd have the entire weekend to correct for return on Monday. Major writing assignments were due before vacations so I didn't have to listen to "When are we getting them back?" I robbed myself of family life, social life, and church involvement. Yet, no one on staff, not even an administrator, admonished or admired me; probably they didn't even notice. The quiet, unobserved work of reading, rereading, suggesting, correcting, and just enjoying when possible could be done at home. The more visible coaching of athletes, actors, or musicians, even if for only a seasonal performance, seemed more appreciated and often compensated as well.

Comparisons easily initiate feelings of inequity, which, if unchecked, can grow into self-pity. Part of coping has to be understanding, and understanding the principal's position is about as easy as he or she understanding the English teacher's job. I believe most administrators avoid the problem out of ignorance or inability to fairly correct the situation. I am aware of one high school principal, however, who relieves the writing teacher of any extracurricular activities; he is willing to try alternatives to equalize the apparent discrepancy.

In spite of the "squeaky wheel" theory, complaining does not enhance understanding of the problem; neither does rebellion. Discouraged by mounds of papers and sleepless nights, some writing teachers simply quit assigning so much; others buy into some new method that expects little from teacher or student. Guilt from not doing enough or the burden of doing too much can kill the excitement of teaching writing.

The greatest discovery for me was coming to understand my own adventure into this field of teaching writing. I simply enjoy doing what I do, and I want the students to know that and experience it. I write with the students now, and together we discover the joy. We share ideas in prewriting discussions, and students can't wait to hear or read what classmates write. Too

often, I believe, we teachers rush the final product and fail to savor the process. Fortunately, writing isn't a fall sport; we have all year to work at it, to play with words and ideas, to share with one another. Class applause actually becomes as meaningful as a teacher's comments and grades.

Colleagues might seem to "have it made" at times, but I remind myself that I'm actually the "lucky" one. The transforming of thoughts into creative imagery is a reward no objective test can match.

I teach in a school that is struggling financially. Teachers have been denied raises to compensate. Quite honestly I wonder if our students need all the "extra" courses offered, especially elementary physical education. Our students are actively involved on the playground and many participate in extracurricular sports programs. The lack of P.E. in grades K-8 never prevented me from being well-educated and physically fit. What do you think?

What I think is based on what I read. In the United States the President's Council on Physical Fitness and Sports indicates that our children and young people are dangerously unfit. Gail Weldon, director of physical therapy and athletic training for the 1984 Olympics, says, "We must change our view of physical education. It must become fitness education. . . ."

In all fairness I want Christian school teachers involved in the area of physical education to be heard. Carol Buikema, who recently received her master's degree in physical education, responds as follows:

Unfortunately, the question is being asked often in education today. Money, or the lack of it, is frequently the stimulus. When teachers, administrators, and school board are requested to "tighten their belts," the special areas (P.E., art, music, and media) are the first and hardest hit.

P.E. is targeted first because many teachers say, "I can throw and kick a

ball; therefore, I am qualified to teach P.E." The P.E. curriculum, however, involves a specific developmental progression through a wide variety of motor skills that are added and refined as a child matures. One college course in teaching elementary P.E. does not equip teachers to know and understand at what age skills should be introduced, and how to diagnose and correct specific skill problems. To build consistency in the program is extremely difficult with classroom teachers. Commitment, interest, and time become issues. P.E. is often the first thing to go if time is short, the weather is bad, or the teacher doesn't feel like teaching it. At best, the school is left with a sporadic P.E. program.

The elementary level is the most critical for a quality physical education curriculum. There is 100% participation versus less involvement at the middle and high school grades. In general, elementary children are still interested in and more willing to try new activities. The earlier correct skills are taught, the less chance of developing poor motor patterns. People often say that extracurricular activities would fill the gap if P.E. were eliminated. Unfortunately, that view presents problems. Extracurricular activities are skill specific; they do not focus on a variety of skills as P.E. classes do. Children also choose activities in which they are assured of success, which does not help develop their weaker areas. Although it may seem so, not all students participate in extracurricular sports. Unfortunately, the children who need motor skill practice the most are the ones staying home. Extracurricular activities are good but are not filling needs for all children.

Our society has made quality P.E. even more important in our schools today. In the past, children learned motor skills from watching and playing with parents, siblings, and neighbors in organized physical activities. Single parents, both parents working, relatives miles away, isolationism, and technology all have a role in limiting the exposure of children to opportunities for motor skill development outside of

school.

Trading P.E. for a pay raise one year does not guarantee a pay raise next year when the board eliminates the art teacher. As each special teacher is cut, the teaching responsibilities increase. When these cuts occur, willingly or mandated, the quality of education decreases. Teachers do suffer, but ultimately, the children do too.

Barb Landhuis, an elementary P.E. teacher and a high school varsity volleyball coach, relates some student anecdotes that reveal another side of the issue:

Chad had a difficult time sitting still in his seat. First grade just seemed too demanding after kindergarten. The highlight of his week was P.E. There the teacher approved of his moving about. It was a place that allowed him to express himself freely without feeling as if he had failed again.

Angie had similar experiences. She had always had difficulty understanding math and social studies and needed extra help from Support Services. But in P.E. she experienced success. Because of her locomotor and manipulative skills, she could relax and not feel like a social outcast, as she often felt in the classroom.

In contrast, Jess had no difficulty in the academics, but hated P.E. in the first and second grades. It seemed as if everyone else could run faster, jump higher, or throw farther. It wasn't any fun and she hated being forced to develop physical skills. Later in high school she realized her P.E. classes had helped her to feel more comfortable with herself and more at ease in social situations whether or not physical activity was involved.

Studies have shown that there is a direct correlation between academic success and motor development. P.E. is one of the building blocks necessary in elementary curriculum. Educating a child physically improves his or her self-esteem and self-confidence, which carries over into the classroom. Thus the responsibility of teaching a subject that affects so many areas must be taught by a qualified P.E. teacher. ☐



Does Kevin Fail, or Do We?

Dear Kevin,

I'm writing to you because I'm frustrated. No, I'm not frustrated with you; I'm frustrated with what has happened to you this year and, I suspect, previous years. Let me explain.

When I found out you were going to be in my homeroom this year, I checked your file before school began. I noticed that you had been going to the resource room often for extra help with your studies. I asked Mrs. Richards and Mrs. Griffin about you, and they had nothing but wonderful things to say. They told me you were a kind, sensitive, and caring young man. I get the feeling they each have a special place in their hearts for you.

They mentioned that you enjoy sports and that you played on the volleyball team last year. They also told me about your low grades—that's why you needed some extra help from them. I've noticed this year that the grades on your report card haven't been the greatest. I've also sensed that you dread the days when I hand out report cards to everyone in our homeroom.

Kevin, I know you try hard, and your parents know you try hard. I feel bad when the report cards come out and there are mostly D's and F's on yours. The other teachers feel the same; they've told me many times. I wish school were a place where you could feel successful. We tend to measure success and achievement on how well students can deliver information from the textbooks or the notes we give them. All of these worksheets, book questions, quizzes, and tests are supposed to tell us who the smart students are, and I imagine you don't feel too smart very often.

Do you remember this past fall when we got new soccer goals? Do you remember that Saturday morning when we put them together? Well, I suppose it was more that I put them together and then you put them together correctly! You proved to yourself and to me that you were smarter than I. I was really excited for you—you experienced success at school. But I was also sad that there wasn't a place on your report card where I could put a grade for that success.

We have tried to recognize things other than the grades you receive in class. The boxes on your report card envelope deal with behavior, attitude, and effort. We can write comments on there also. Believe it or not, your grandparents (and possibly your parents, too) were judged on how well they did in the three R's: reading, writing, and 'rithmetic. Pretty limited, huh? Now we've got grades for music, physical education, art, and other "specials." Yet I wonder if those grades carry the same weight as, let's say, English or math.

I attended a meeting last summer where teachers from various schools in our area talked about learning and grades. One speaker told us that for a long time schools were very concerned about two main things: how well their students did in anything to do with English and math. Those two items are still ultimately valued in some places today. For instance, I'm going back to college for another English degree, so I had to take a test with just English and math in it. (I scored better in math, but don't tell our principal.) Anyway, this speaker suggested a different way to look at how students learn. She talked about multiple intelligences and listed seven ways students know things. Two of the items dealt with students' ability to put things together, like the soccer goals, and the way they get along with people and work well in groups.

As I listened to her, her ideas made sense to me. I've attended other meetings with teachers where speakers talked about various gifts God gives to students. Some students are better in art, some are better in science, and some are better in athletics. We say that we understand this, but it seems as though we still value the grades in certain classroom subjects much more than others. I still catch myself referring to "good students" as those who have high grades in the "important" classes, and that's wrong.

Romans 12 talks a little bit about people who have different gifts and abilities. I Corinthians 12 teaches us that every person in our school adds something very important to the student body, even those who get poor grades. That passage states that the weaker parts of the body are really indispensable. In school the "weaker parts of the body" are often thought of as students who don't do well in academics. I'm not sure our system of measuring does a good job of indicating how indispensable they really are.

Remember the parable about the three guys who got some money from their boss? Each one got different amounts. Two of them worked hard with their money, but one of them just buried it—did nothing with it. That money is a lot like someone's gifts and abilities that God has given them. You need to continue your hard work and good effort. You may not experience *our* measure of success when you get D's and F's on your report card, but be encouraged. If God has a report card for what he requires of you, then you're pulling straight A's, and that means much more than any grade you got in English this year.

Mr. Fennema

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

The New Name

*Mary Elizabeth Robinson
as told to Betty M. Hockett*

"Some day I'm going to have a mama and a daddy all my own," said one of the girls in my first grade class during Friday Show 'n Tell. She went on to say, "I'll have a room of my own, and my brothers will get to stay with me."

I knew the depth from which that spoken hope ascended. Abused in several ways, the little girl had lived in a foster home since the age of four.

The next few Show 'n Tell sessions featured the same scene. She stood before the class, hands fidgeting, and spoke her hope for the future.

Often belligerent, this girl poked and snarled at others. Sometimes she tipped back and stuck her feet inside her desk. I always knew, though, when she expected the arrival of prospective parents. Perfect behavior became the order of those days. Afterward, if they turned her down, she quickly reverted to her obnoxious behavior.

Before Christmas I asked the class, "What would you like for Christmas that doesn't cost any money?"

One by one the children stood beside my desk and answered the question. When her turn came, this little foster child casually dangled her pencil from her fingers like a cigarette and said, "Well, I want to have a mama and a daddy, a room of my own, and my brothers to get to stay with me."

By this time I knew I had to have help with the situation. "Honey," I said,

"I've been praying for you, and I'm going to keep praying. I'll ask my church to pray also, that you'll have your mama and daddy and that your brothers can stay with you. We'll pray you get that room of your own, too. And I want you to remember that God cares. He'll hear and answer your prayer."

Later that week I pleaded with my friends at church, "You've got to help me pray." I told them about my first grader and the dream she spoke of so intently. Then I added, "This is a little girl who needs to know that God cares about her life."

We all prayed.

Less than three weeks after that, a couple became interested in the girl. They had lost their adopted daughter in a car accident the spring before. Wanting to have more than one child at a time, they soon adopted the little girl and her two brothers as well. This family's large ranch on the other side of the state had plenty of room for everyone.

On one of the last days she spent in my classroom, the newly-adopted girl asked me, "Teacher, what is your name?"

"Mary."

"Mary what?"

"Mary Elizabeth."

"Would you please write that on a piece of paper for me?"

I did as she asked. All that day, she practiced printing Mary Elizabeth. At the end of the day she said to me, "My new mama said I could have a new name. And I would like to have your name."

It took several seconds before I managed to gather words into a coherent statement. "Honey, you don't want my name. It's a lovely name because it's Jesus' mother's name. But Mary's a common name. Maybe some day you would rather have a name like Crystal or Christine. Something more up-to-date."

"No, teacher. I want to have your name."

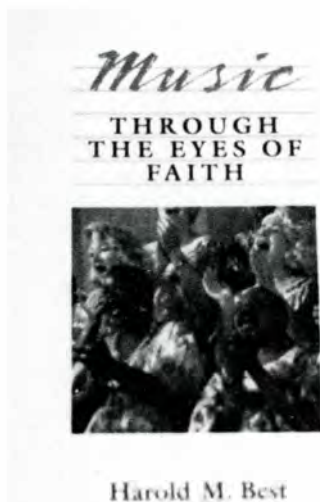
I could barely see through my tears. I drew the little girl in a tight hug and whispered, "I'd be honored for you to have my name."

The new Mary Elizabeth and her brothers left our school on Valentine's Day. I'm sure that day became a special day for her, a day for celebrating a new beginning.

Now, sometime later, I think fondly of my namesake who lives with her new mama and daddy and sleeps in a room of her own, and whose brothers live there, too.

I'm reminded again that a teacher's job includes more than just putting information into children's minds. We should be there for every need, touching them, praying for them, and helping them understand that there's someone, even besides their natural parents, who really cares about them and wants them to have a wonderful life. ❊

Betty M. Hockett is a free-lance writer from Newberg, Oregon.



Music Through the Eyes of Faith

by Harold M. Best

Harper San Francisco. 1993. 225 pp., \$10.00 USA, \$13.50 Canada.

Reviewed by Abraham Bos
associate professor of German;
associate academic dean at Dordt
College in Sioux Center, Iowa.

Music Through the Eyes of Faith deserves the attention and study of teachers in all levels of education as well as of people involved in church education and worship committees.

This book is part of a series published under the supervision of the Christian College Coalition. Its title parallels other titles in the disciplines of biology, business, history, literature, psychology, and sociology. These books not only serve those who teach these disciplines, but they assist and encourage all educators in their communal task to formulate a Christian approach to their own discipline and to understand and integrate a diversity of disciplines. This study will assist college students and beginning teachers to design and articulate an approach to their discipline and also to develop a method of communicating important issues in the discipline to

colleagues and students.

The author deals with a wide range of topics, issues, and themes. Among them are "God's Creation, Human Creativity, and Music Making," "Musical Pluralism and Diversity," and "The World of Christian Popular Music."

Some of the chapters deal primarily with issues important to the educator while other chapters treat issues in the area of church music, of more concern to church leaders. Readers could select chapters that address their own particular interests or profession and find the book to be useful and helpful. However, because repeated themes are developed throughout the book, I would recommend reading the entire work. The author intersperses examples and stories throughout. The book is not overly technical. Most of the terminology will be understood by the general reader. An excellent feature of the book is its inclusion of subheadings and numbered main points.

One of the major topics of the book is the notion of musical pluralism. Just as there is diversity of cultures and languages, so there is diversity in music. Best writes:

In a period of, say, a media-filled week, all of us will "hear" Muzak, adult contemporary, classic rock, classical, jazz, swing, rag, blues, Broadway, hard rock, soft rock, straight rock, jazz-rock fusions, rhythm and blues, house music, hip hop, rap, country, gospel, Christian contemporary, New Age, bluegrass, hymns, Scripture and praise songs, anthems, ethical, and folk. (69-70)

All of these types of music, he says, have a place and a function; all of them encompass a range of good and bad examples. How do you begin to choose from this wide variety of music? How do you make appropriate judgments concerning quality? How does the teacher build connections and rapport with students whose preferred music is one or only a few of the many kinds of music? The author provides significant approaches to these questions.

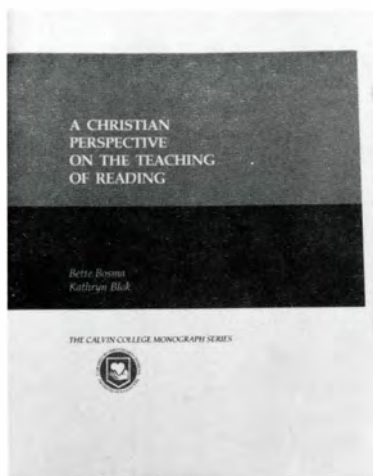
In the eighth chapter Best describes and evaluates the world of Christian popular music. Part of the significance of Christian popular music lies in its close relationship to North American popular culture in general. Most of the students in our classrooms are deeply involved with and influenced by both North American popular culture and Christian popular music. Best writes,

While young people physically inhabit homes, schools, malls, and perhaps churches—eating, sleeping, studying, socializing, and doing occasional religious things—their existentially "real" locale, the place where their "authentic" sense of being and identity are created, is largely fabricated by their connection to the stars of the electronic media. This latter world, artificially near, artificially intimate, is where the supposedly real connections are made and where the working values are shaped. (161-162)

Among the fourteen subheadings in the eighth chapter is "CCM, Corporate Song, and the Singing Voice." Without going into the details of singing technique, the author advocates an approach to singing that is consistent with the nature of the human voice and vocal health. He encourages schools and churches to establish or reestablish music curricula and music practices that promote corporate singing.

Teachers know that they must meet students where they are in order for effective learning to take place. Therefore, it is very important to the music teacher and all teachers to be open to students and their world in order to open up students to an understanding of their music, the diversity of music, and the diversity of the creation as it is presented in the various disciplines of the curriculum.

Best recommends a love for one's neighbor (students), an openness to a diversity of music, and a studied and discriminatory search for excellence and quality. This book, our students, and our disciplines deserve our attention, our critical empathy, and our best effort. ¶



A Christian Perspective in the Teaching of Reading

by Bette Bosma and Kathryn Blok

Calvin College Monograph Series,
Grand Rapids, Michigan. 1992. 62pp.

Reviewed by James K. Rooks, Assistant
Professor of Education, Redeemer
College, Ancaster, Ontario.

The teaching of reading is and has been a highly polemicized field for the last forty years; there are few signs of any kind of emerging consensus. The pervasiveness of what Jean Chall called "The Great Debate" is evident in the failure of Bette Bosma and Kathryn Blok, highly respected former Calvin College education faculty members, to rise above the debate in their articulation of a Christian approach to teaching reading. While not strident in their views, Bosma and Blok ignore and mishandle some critical issues. Despite this flaw, the monograph will be useful for helping Christian school teachers reflect on a Christian approach to teaching reading.

Bosma and Blok take a broad and helpful view of teaching reading, arguing convincingly against the pragmatic approach of trying to find the quick fix. The proper starting point, they state, is to focus on the reading process—what reading is, who the

student is, and why reading is being taught. In answering these questions they weave together interesting information on the history of reading instruction, the stages of reading development, and the recent contributions of cognitive and developmental psychology to understanding reading. Bosma and Blok draw on articulations of a Christian philosophy of education by Beversluis and others to share their approach to teaching reading. With well-chosen quotes, they help us hear the dissonance or resonance of popular approaches to teaching reading with a Christian view of language and the learner. They remind us that language is a powerful gift from our God and that our teaching must give recognition to our students as unique, whole, creative image bearers of God.

The first half of the monograph lays out the foundation for a proper understanding of students and reading; this underpinning sets up the answer to the practical question of how we should be structuring our reading program. A good reading program must have six minimal components; the authors articulate the nature of each of these components and the contribution each makes to reading development. They include examples from Christian school teachers who are creatively and effectively implementing these components. This last section is very practical and helpful. All teachers would do well to examine whether their current reading program includes all six of the minimal components given by Bosma and Blok: 1) teacher reading aloud, 2) guided reading, 3) responding to literature, 4) independent reading, 5) strategy instruction, and 6) content area reading instruction.

The six components serve as a general framework for shaping a sound reading program in a variety of settings, using a variety of different resources and approaches. The monograph is an excellent tool and gives us practical help in the shaping of effective Christian approaches to teaching reading.

Yet with all that is good about this

monograph, I have serious misgivings about some of the basic underpinnings of this work. What bothers me is that Bosma and Blok seem to accept and continue the erroneous and destructive polemic set up by Ken Goodman and popularized in his book *What's Whole in Whole Language*. Most reading teachers know of Ken Goodman; his influence on the teaching of reading has been enormous. Goodman (and I might include Frank Smith here as well) has convinced a good share of the reading teacher world that teaching children the skills needed to read words stands in opposition to teaching children to read for meaning. Learning to read, according to Goodman, is easy—when it's natural, whole, and interesting, but learning to read is hard when it is artificial, fragmented, and dull. (See *CEJ* articles and the book *Language Arts in Christian Schools* by Robert Bruinsma for more on Ken Goodman.)

Bosma and Blok's continuation of this dichotomy is not hard to detect. It did not escape the reading of the series editor, who endorses the polemic with these words: "Toward reading they (Bosma and Blok) adopt a large, whole, broad point of view, stressing the making of meaning rather than the mere skills of identifying words, syllables, and sounds."

Moreover, Blok and Bosma's acceptance of the Goodman polemic is explicit:

In teaching reading our purpose is not to train the child to master the skill of identifying words or syllables, but rather to construct meaning from print. (vii)

Rather than master the mechanics of reading, students learn to monitor their comprehension of a passage. . . . (11)

Although the emphasis on phonics-first is still found in many classrooms, the research findings of the metacognitive theorists (Brown, 1985; Palinscar, 1984) are supporting the move towards teaching reading as a strategic process rather than

mastery of a set of skills. (11)

I have sympathy with the authors' perspective: learning to read is not the two-step process that was once imposed (first learn all the skills and phonics rules and then learn to read for meaning and enjoyment). And the authors, experienced reading teachers, undoubtedly know how to balance phonics and reading for meaning in their own classrooms. However, their monograph does not bring out that balance. Thus, it does not stand on its own as a reliable guide for primary reading teachers. By what it says and fails to say, it serves to perpetuate two damaging myths: one, that a grade one teacher who believes in the importance of children being taught skills to identify words does not care about having the children learn to read for meaning and enjoyment; two, that learning to read is an easy and natural developmental process—that is, we need not concern ourselves with those children who are making slower progress in grades one and two because they will come around and start to read in the later grades.

Probably Bosma and Blok do not subscribe to either of the myths as I have so baldly stated them. My fear, however, is that the readers of their monograph might not reach that same conclusion. While referring to the work of Jean Chall and Marilyn Adams, this monograph fails to give proper recognition to an important theme in the work of these two influential reading theorists. That is, in the initial

process of learning to read, it is of critical importance that children attend closely to the letters and the words.

Children need to gain an awareness that there is a systematic correspondence between the letters they see and the sounds they hear. Not all children do that easily and naturally without specific, sustained interventions that teach letter-sound correspondences. Therefore we must explicitly teach sound-symbol correspondences and phonic generalizations. While wishing to take a broad approach and promote understanding of basic issues in reading, Bosma and Blok fail to explore the critical area of the nature of English as a written language. Learning to decipher the abstract, complex symbols of our alphabetic language can be very difficult for students.

My argument here is not about the tremendous gains the whole language methods have brought us in encouraging meaningful reading of real literature; in recognizing the fruitful interaction of speaking, listening, reading, and writing; and in legitimizing children's learning about reading outside of formal instruction. A Christian view of the learner and a desire to help students see the wholeness of God's creation compel us to embrace these aspects of whole language. My quarrel is with the monograph's implicit acceptance of the misconceptions promoted by Ken Goodman and Frank Smith: any kind of direct phonics instruction is bad because learning to read can be a natural

process for all children—as easy as learning to speak. The danger of this view, especially for weak grade one readers and for all beginning readers in general, is very great. These flawed assumptions compromise the usefulness of this monograph for primary school teachers. Bosma and Blok fail to bring into the discussion a large body of cognitive research that repudiates some key tenets of the work of Goodman and Smith. I especially regret the way Bosma and Blok seek to link a Christian perspective with the Goodman polemic.

There is not room here for a full-blown discussion of the problems with the purist whole language approach to teaching reading—the misunderstood role of context, the downplaying of the importance of the graphic cues, and the exaggeration of the irregularity of English orthography. (I refer interested readers to the articles by Adams and Stanovich cited in the bibliography for more on this point). And while I am unhappy with the lack of warning against whole language excesses, I nevertheless applaud the project of the monograph in trying to help Christian teachers take control of their reading programs. Research on classroom practice paints a bleak picture of teachers struggling with their reading programs, relinquishing many decisions to the authority of the school's published materials, and lacking the confidence to control and structure their reading program to meet the needs of their students. Bosma and Blok's work is a reason for hope and optimism; its provision of a framework for developing a strong Christian approach to teaching reading is worth serious consideration.

We should accept Bosma and Blok's invitation to read the monograph and engage in intelligent discussion and consideration of our reading programs, at the same time being wary of the tendency to downplay the importance of a firm grounding in the sound-symbol correspondences—the key to learning to read in our alphabetic language. ☺

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READER RESPONSE

Editor,

Your October issue was an outstanding, thought-provoking one. Congratulations. I was tempted to respond to some of the articles in an elaborate manner, but let it suffice for me to say the following:

A Wrinkle in Time was written in 1962. L'Engle's autobiography, *A Circle of Quiet*, was written ten years later, in 1972, and was printed in 1975. It is clear that in the intervening years something of great consequence occurred.

Wrinkle is one of the most original and creative books ever written for children and adults. But when it lists Jesus Christ amongst a multiplicity of other "saviors," we can not but classify it as blasphemous. Yet we ought not let the matter rest there and withdraw the book from our libraries, for, as mentioned, something happened in the ten years between 1962 and 1972. Let me quote from *A Circle of Quiet*:

Then something happened, something so wounding that it cannot

possibly be written down. Think of two of the people you love most in the world; think of a situation in which both are agonizingly hurt and you are powerless to do anything to help. It is far easier to bear pain for ourselves than for those we love, especially when part of it is that we cannot share the pain but must stand by, unable to alleviate it.

Canon Tallishardly knew us at all, then. But he stepped in. What he did is involved with all that I cannot write. The point right now is that this was the moment of light for me, because it was an act of love, Love made visible.

I dare say unabashedly and unequivocally that my personal, most favorite children's book is L'Engle's *Dance in the Desert* (Doubleday Canada, Toronto, 1969), with the illustrations done by the amazing Symeon Shimin. This book clearly confesses our Lord Jesus as Lord of all, a Lord who came to live with us, and to die for us.

When I read about the John Knox

Christian School in Wyoming, Ontario, taking *Wrinkle* out of the school library, I felt quite worked up about it; it reminded me of witch hunts and book burnings. Yet at the same time I could sympathize. For read by itself, without the benefit of having read additional works by the author, one could well conclude that such a book might not be right for the instruction of God's little ones. Not that I agree with that viewpoint, either, for we can teach as well from secular books as we can from Christian ones, especially when the literary quality of the book is beyond question.

It would be my hope that the board of the John Knox Christian School would rescind their motion, and place the book again in the hands of the children, perhaps with the stipulation to staff that the rest of L'Engle's story, in part outlined above, is made part and parcel of the teaching of the book.

Frank DeVries
Victoria, B.C.

NEWS

Timothy groups help Eastern Christian ninth graders adjust

Shanti Jost

Timothy leaders make the first few days of school a little easier for incoming ninth-graders.

Timothy leaders are all juniors. In addition to being leaders, they are peers and friends to new students.

The Timothy Project at EC was started in 1992 by student assistance counselor Leslie MacGray. Juniors are invited to be part of this group because they have demonstrated sensitivity and caring toward others. They are also

respected by their peers.

Timothy leaders meet in small groups with incoming ninth graders on the first day of school. The project has been a tremendous success, and students volunteered positive responses.

Ninth grader Janita Greene transferred from Dawn Treader Christian School in Paterson. She appreciates what Timothy Project has done for her. "It was helpful for me to be in a small group. I felt relaxed and it helped me get to know students." What Janita likes most is being recognized by the Timothy leaders and their friendly acknowledgment in the corridors: "Hi, how're you doing?"

Principal Jan Lucas has been very

supportive of this program. He says, "Timothy groups provide a smooth transition to high school life. The fact that students help each other is valuable." ☺

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