

# CHRISTIAN EDUCATORS JOURNAL

Quarterly journal for Christian  
day-school educators

**A Tribute to  
Henry J. Baron**







Lorna Van Gilst

# INTERVIEW

## Henry J. Baron- CEJ's Searchlight

**D**r. Henry Baron announced in October that this would be his last year as full-time professor of English at Calvin College in Grand Rapids, Michigan, where he has taught literature, media studies, composition, and English education courses since 1968. Father of five children, Professor Baron and his wife, Ruth, a third grade-teacher at Creston-Mayfield Christian School, have opened their home to students, teachers, and others. In recent years they have become family for a teenager from El Salvador.

Born on a farm in a northern province of The Netherlands, Baron came to the United States at the age of fourteen. Growing up in Lynden, Washington, he tried to erase his Frisian roots. In recent years, however, he has developed a keen interest in Frisian culture and language, translating a number of Frisian poems and, more recently, a World War II novel titled *The Trap*. Earlier in his career he helped develop two series of literature anthologies for junior high school students in Christian schools, as well as several other language arts curriculum materials,

including *"Dirty Books in Christian Schools: Principles of Selection"* published by Christian Schools International.

*The following interview conducted by the editor enables you to hear Baron's own voice:*

**LVG:** When did you first join the CEJ Board, and what was your role?

**HB:** It was in January '73, I think, when I was asked to replace Fred Walker as one of Calvin's representatives. Somehow, they forgot to relieve me of my duties ever after.

In the fall of that same year I was first elected to chair the board. And after 1980, that turned pretty much into an annual re-election ritual.

But I look back on all those years with CEJ with a good deal of pleasure. I think I've worked with more than sixty board members, some of whom stayed for more than one term and made tremendous contributions. Almost all of the present board members are on either a second or third three-year term. These people volunteer to give up a good chunk of a Saturday to guide and supervise the work of CEJ. Some of them have to drive a considerable distance. Take Dan Diephouse, for example, who for more than twenty years has

served the Board as secretary, has driven probably more than 30,000 miles in all kinds of weather to do so, and has rarely missed a meeting. All without compensation.

And then there's Pete Boogaart; as a retired teacher he assumed the work of business manager some ten years ago. Not only does he take care of all the business affairs, which are considerable for a journal that goes all over North America as well as other countries, but he also personally distributes the issues to many schools in west Michigan. All this at no cost to CEJ. You know, it's a privilege to serve with people like that. And with people like you, and Lillian Grissen before you, and Don Oppewal before her—managing editors, whose gifts and energies have served Christian educators superbly. I hope everybody knows that CEJ has been extremely blessed by all of these leader-servants. I'm grateful to have been associated with them for so long.

**LVG:** How did you get interested in CEJ?

**HJB:** As a high school teacher who read with a good deal of interest what was then still a fledgling journal.

**LVG:** I know you have written a number of articles for CEJ, but I'm not sure our read-

ers know how involved you were. What contribution gave you the most satisfaction?

*HJB:* That sounds like a leading question. I think I know what you expect me to say. So, out with it: creating and developing a cast of characters that inhabited "The Asylum" was a lot of fun. And maybe this is the right time for Zoeklicht to 'fess up. It's been a very well-kept secret, I think, and that's not always been easy; but Don Oppewal, who's borne the pressure of that secret the most, needs the relief to know that he doesn't have to carry the Zoeklicht mystery to his grave.

*LVG:* How did all that get started?

*HJB:* Well, shortly after coming to Calvin College in 1968, I went to see Don Oppewal, who was then CEJ editor. I had taught high school for seven years and had a pretty strong sense of the faculty room as an asylum, a kind of retreat from the trenches as well as a place for the expression of some occasional, inspired madness.

So I said to Don, "Look, I've got an idea for a teacher's column. I'd like to create a cast of characters in a faculty room, where they can get into all sorts of debates and discussions on various issues in education. The only condition is that the column appear under a pseudonym.

*LVG:* Why a pseudonym?

*HJB:* For three reasons. I wanted the readers to focus on the issues, not on the writer. The cover would serve as a kind of disinhibitor. And I thought it would add intrigue. Anyway, Oppewal sounded interested and promised that he'd take the proposal to his board. I guess the board was a bit skittish about the pseudonym, but Don managed to persuade them, and so in the January 1970 issue the first "Asylum" column appeared. And it kept going for the

next twenty-two years. It sort of became the "ER" of CEJ, or maybe sometimes more like "General Hospital."

*LVG:* How did you come up with the name H. K. Zoeklicht?

*HJB:* Well, the idea was to let a searchlight fall on various spots and wrinkles of doing Christian education. So, the Dutch word *zoeklicht* was a good fit. And the HK? Well, soon after hatching the idea for the column, I approached my good friend and colleague Ken Kuiper and asked him to join me in this venture. The initials identify both of us.

plot with some snatches of dialogue, and then Ken would shape it into a more-or-less finished product. Not all of them were co-authored, of course. Each of us did a good many solo pieces as well.

*LVG:* Did you ever disagree?

*HJB:* Oh goodness, yes! Not about basic educational issues, but surely about details.

Each of us had pretty strong notions, so the art of compromise got some exercise. One of the most difficult disagreements concerned Den Denker's untimely demise. I'd created him as a kind of centerpiece—the voice of sanity and wisdom. He



*In the English Department at Calvin College, professors Kenneth Kuiper and Henry Baron chuckle over H.K. Zoeklicht columns in back issues of CEJ. The L.C. Smith typewriter (pictured) in Kuiper's office is the very one where most of the Zoeklicht columns were committed to paper.*

*LVG:* How did you do the writing together?

*HJB:* I wrote the first column or two just to get things started, and after that we collaborated on most of them. We had a lot of wild, wonderful sessions brainstorming some really off-the-wall scenarios. Most of those R-rated versions never got written, of course. But I'd often sketch out a possible

was my hero. And I figured, if you kill the hero, you kill the story. So when Den Denker died, I felt sort of bereaved. I wonder if others did too. But life at Omni Christian went on. I guess there was at least a high degree of verisimilitude in that turn of events.

*LVG:* Why did you wait till now to reveal your identity as the author of the popular column?



HJB: It would've been a good time to do it at the conclusion of the column in 1992. But only one was ready then to blow our cover. Now both of us are.

LVG: I can't imagine that you will actually retire. You've mentored so many of us professionally and encouraged us personally. What projects do you have in mind for retirement days?

HJB: I'll stay pretty close to the college for at least next year, finishing up one major project and maybe teaching a course or two. After that, I look forward to some traveling with my wife, freedom to respond when earth's beauties or human needs call,

savoring more time for reading and writing, and cultivating readiness for "unexpected" opportunities.

LVG: What stands out as a highlight of your professional experience?

HJB: I traveled with Ken Wendling, the President of English Language Institute-China, to China in January 1985, as assistant director of the proposed summer teaching program. We visited the various campuses throughout China that applied to host this first ELIC summer program to explain the program and have the local officials sign the agreements. The following summer, I functioned as the director of the three teams that taught in Chengdu,

Sichuan Province. The experience opened my mind to a greater richness and depth of the human story and my heart to the suffering and joys of Chinese friends with whom I remain in contact. I fully intend to see them again, whether on another teaching stint or a trip.

## "Home Is Where the Heart Is"

*Lucy Bright Den Denker*

*We titled our April 1992 issue "A Tribute to H. K. Zoeklicht," but Zoeklicht himself did not show his face in that issue. We bade him farewell by including representative pieces of more than twenty years of "Asylum" columns published in CEJ. In fact, Zoeklicht was reported to have been stricken by a strange malady while vacationing in Acapulco, Mexico.*

*We're happy to confess that Zoeklicht's malady was never life-threatening, that he continued to relate to CEJ in highly influential ways, even though the column ended.*

*Now Henry Baron, Zoeklicht's creator, says he's breaking tradition—he's retiring from the board. A CEJ board meeting without Henry Baron is hard to imagine—his apt meditations, his fervent prayers, his wry humor, his seasoned approach to publication decisions, his interest in each board and staff member's joys and disappointments. We're grateful. We'll miss him.*

*As a final tribute to CEJ, Zoeklicht/Baron has revived Lucy Bright Den Denker from the "Asylum" column to offer some parting advice.*

Dear CEJ readers,

Some of you don't know me; you've joined the family of CEJ readers too recently. Others may not remember me, but I'd rather not know about that. I like to hang on to my illusion of memorability.

So let me (re-)introduce myself: I'm Lucy Bright Den Denker, and I used to teach English at Omni Christian High. I left there five years ago to teach at Carver, a multi-racial school with an accelerated program for economically disadvantaged but bright students. I switched from Christian to public education, and it was the hardest decision I ever had to make. When my dearest Asylum colleagues at Omni begged me to stay, I couldn't even cry myself to sleep at night.

But I couldn't stay. I was becoming cynical about Christian education, and I loved it too much to let that happen. You see, I wanted to make it better, but everybody else seemed content with what was. And I didn't have the energy to do it alone. I was tired. I was unhappy. And that started to hurt my teaching.

So I left. I joined the faculty of Carver High where I taught mostly AP

classes for motivated students from a rainbow of races. And that's what I want to tell you about. No, not about all the things that made my experience there often so rewarding and heartwarming: the encouragement and support of fellow teachers and administrators, the appreciation of parents, the bigger paycheck, the stimulation of student variety, and the many who sought me out for Christian counsel and adult friendship. All of that was what I needed. It's what every teacher needs. Every day I thank the Lord for those blessings. But what I really want to say is this: I missed Christian education!

I missed it when we began a new year, a new course, a new day and we couldn't thank God for it or pray about our needs. I missed it when a student died and we couldn't talk together about God's tears for us. I missed it when my class volunteered for a month to help out at God's Kitchen downtown, and we couldn't talk about feeding and clothing Christ through the least of his brothers.

But I missed the Christian school classroom the most when I was teaching *Catcher in the Rye*. Holden Caulfield, as

you may remember, never quite recovers from the death of his brother who had been his hero, his model. So he searches. He searches for a substitute, for someone who believes in "whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable." But he can find no one. Not among his peers who major in self-gratification. Not among the adults who major in phoniness. Holden, who wants to save the innocent from corruption, finds none to save him. But most of my students miss that. They see only the outside: an obnoxious, whining, foul-mouthed loser who'll spoil your mood if you let him get too close. They react to Holden pretty much the same way they react to the Holdens among them. That's Salinger's point, and that's what makes this such an important book to teach in the high school. I try to get them to see the phoniness of such superficial acceptance or rejection. But what I really want to show them is that this book is not just about the pressures of conformity or maladjustment or emotional imbalance. This book is about spiritual purity and corruption. This book is about the needs of Holden's soul and ours. It's about loving God and our neighbor. But I discovered in the public school that I can do only so much with what often matters most about the meaning of a book and the meaning of life. Both the foundation and the freedom of propriety are missing. And I have found that immensely frustrating.

That's why I'm going back to Omni Christian High. Yes! They called and want me to come back as an assistant principal

with primary responsibility for curriculum and student development. And I get to teach a couple of English classes too. I hope I get a chance to teach *Catcher in the Rye*. I'm very excited! I think I see now why the Lord led me to Carver. I learned a lot there, including a greater appreciation for the privileges and challenges of the Christian school classroom.

As I said when I left Omni five years ago, "My heart is in Christian education." It always has been and always will be. That's one of the commitments that bound Bob and me together. When he died so suddenly, I promised that I would always honor his vision of what that education ought to sound like and look like and feel like. I'm going back and will try to keep

that promise now. With God's help, I'm going to try to help Christian education at Omni Christian High School be and become all that it's meant to be. I hope we can discover ways to provide more support for the struggling student. I hope we can challenge students to love God with all their mind. I hope we can offer a good place for racial diversity. I hope that as adults we can model a loving heart and a lifestyle for our students that will affect them permanently. Oh, I hope so many things, and I'm so looking forward to it!

My nine-year-old daughter, Monica, asked me recently, "Mommy, will you be my teacher at Omni Christian some day?"

And I said, "Honey, I hope so; I sure hope so!"

## **"Teach Me"**

**Vivian M. Loken**

The days pass swiftly.  
Teach me, Heavenly Father,  
how to be revived by  
fresh spring green,  
without hurtling ahead  
to warm, rosy tints  
of transformation.

Teach me how to enjoy  
every leaf of the dogwood  
without presaging change.

Teach me how, Heavenly Father,  
to see the bare, bony branches  
in their time  
as a phase of life—not death.

"He will swallow up death forever . . ."  
(Isaiah 25:8 NIV)

# The Path to Student Publication

by Karen Orfitelli

*Karen Orfitelli is a freelance writer who teaches literature and writing classes at Cornerstone Christian School in Manchester, Connecticut.*

If you believe your students are ready to produce publishable pieces of writing, but you're unsure how to get their stories or articles into the hands of an editor, don't allow your questions to become an impediment. The path to student publication is well trodden, and many magazines are ready, waiting, and anticipating student submissions!

## Why publish?

"Publish or perish" is an often-heard phrase throughout the halls of collegiate institutions where faculty members are required to seek publication of their work. While this requirement is not often mandated for students, seeking publication and becoming published inherently contain numerous benefits for our students.

The primary benefit for students lies in the fact that publication of a piece they have written affirms them as writers. When an article or story is chosen for publication, that acceptance carries the unspoken message that an objective editor has recognized value in their writing and, hence, in their ability. If an objective expert recognizes merit in a student's creation, that recognition may be the vehicle that allows the student to discover the path for future careers or ministry.

Even if a student's piece is not chosen for publication, there are intrinsic benefits in the process of seeking publication. Students will have had an opportunity to learn how to prepare a well-written manu-

script, to glimpse a behind-the-scenes look at the magazine industry, and to understand that good writing is a lot of work.

## Decide student publication is your goal.

Before entering the classroom, the teacher must decide that student publication is the goal of the unit or curriculum. Pieces worthy of publication do not happen accidentally. They are finely-crafted works written, revised, and honed to be the best a student can produce. Each effort targets a specific magazine or contest.

After the decision has been made to seek student publication, simplify the process by targeting a couple or three periodicals or contests that are age-appropriate for your class. (See the sidebar or Sally Stuart's Christian Writer's Market for a complete listing.) Write to the magazines well before you plan to begin the unit, requesting guidelines and sample copies. This step can take from two to six weeks.

Once you receive the guidelines and sample copies, study each periodical until you are familiar with the departments open to student submissions. The more familiar you are with the magazine's requirements, the better able you are to communicate them to your students. And the deeper their understanding of and response to the requirements, the higher their chances of acceptance.

## Motivate students for rewriting.

When you introduce the unit or course, prepare your students for the work ahead by reminding them that "good writing is rewriting." This advice usually is true not only for new writers, but for sea-

soned professionals as well. Students must not expect that their first, second, or even third draft of a piece will be the last one. Create a bulletin board that advertises and informs students of the frequently-mentioned percentages found in the writer's life—10% inspiration and 90% perspiration.

Even the most motivated student writers will have a romanticized view of writing; so, before they begin to write, dispel the myth of having an inspiration, jotting it down, and creating a best seller or even a winning entry in a student contest. This is a perfect time to share anecdotes from famous writers' lives on the difficulties of getting and staying published. (See American Literary Anecdotes.) Students love these anecdotes, but more important, the stories will give them the perspective they need.

This exercise also will prepare them for the inevitable "returns" (never rejections) that are also a fact of life for a writer. When students know, expect, and are shown that every writer receives work back, the sting of their returned work will be neutralized before it becomes personal.

## Study the magazines.

Students need to be guided through a thorough study of the guidelines and requirements of the magazine or contest. Pass out copies of the magazines and guidelines and allow students to discover the following ingredients:

- a. Departments that accept student submissions
- b. Length of articles, stories, or essays



- c. The tone—humorous or serious?
- d. Topics and focus—Is it a Christian publication?
- e. If it is a Christian publication, how are spiritual truths integrated?
- f. Are controversial issues covered or avoided?
- g. Audience—Advertisements in the magazine may give clues.
- h. Is it a denominational publication? What are the implications?

When students have finished this study, they will be better able to define the genre and the length of pieces they may choose to write. Most student submissions fall into one of four categories: personal essay, short story, poetry, or personal experience. Spend as much time as possible teaching students the elements of each genre. Provide models of exemplary writing for them to read and study. If time does not permit the students to choose their own genre, have everyone in class write the same type of piece for a contest you have previously chosen.

### Require topnotch writing.

Mechanics such as grammar, punctuation, and spelling must be as close to perfect as possible. Remind students often and cheerfully that rewriting and revising are part of being a published writer. At this juncture, students will discover that either they love the art of perfecting their work or they hope never to do it again. The atmosphere of the class must be upbeat and encouraging through this tedious process.

When the students' pieces are finished, double check to make certain they have followed the guidelines or contest rules perfectly. Count every word in the body of the text for an exact word count, required for submission format. (Most word processors are able to generate an accurate word count to save the writer time.)

### Manuscript format

Before your students' work leaves your supervision, teach students the industry standards for submitting manuscripts. Many pieces have been rejected because writers have neglected to follow a few simple rules.

1. Use white, 20-25 bond paper. Never use erasable bond.
2. Margins should be 1"-1 1/2" on all pages.
3. In the upper left corner of the first page, type, single-spaced, the author's name, address, telephone number, and social security number.
4. In the upper right corner, flush right, type word count (exact number) and rights offered (usually "first rights").
5. Skip down vertically a half page and center the title, all in caps.
6. Double-space and center the byline: By (student's name).
7. The first page should be unnumbered and contain approximately ten doublespaced lines of typed manuscript text (12 characters per inch).
8. The second and subsequent pages of the manuscript should begin with a header including the title, student's name, and the page number. A common style uses forward slashes to separate the items.
9. A manuscript of five or fewer pages could be tri-folded and mailed in a #10 envelope. Manuscripts of more than five pages should be mailed flat in a 9" x 12" envelope.
10. ALWAYS enclose an SASE (see terms) with enough return postage for your manuscript.

### Cover letter

A cover letter should accompany student submissions to magazines, not necessarily contests. The letter should be written in traditional business format, addressing the editor by name. The first paragraph may inform the editor what section of the magazine or contest to which the student is submitting. The second paragraph should tell the editor what credentials the student has or why the student is qualified to write the piece. Conclude the letter by thanking the editor for taking the time and consideration to read your submission.

When you and the student have proofread and checked every requirement one last time, type the proper information regarding editor's name, department, publication title, and address on the envelope (with return address in upper left corner). Insert the manuscript and cover letter. Seal the envelope, apply postage, and drop it into the post box. It's on its way!

Wait for the reply . . .

Rejoice! Or revise and resubmit the writing.

Don't hesitate to introduce your students to the publication process. You will be glad you did.

### Writers' Terms

Article. A nonfiction piece of writing.

Byline. Name of the author appearing with the published piece.

Clean copy. A manuscript free of errors, cross-outs, wrinkles, or smudges.

Clips. Samples of your published work, usually from newspapers or magazines.

Contributor's copies. Copies of the issues of magazines sent to the author in which the author's work appears.

Cover letter. A brief letter, accompanying a complete manuscript, especially useful if responding to an editor's request for a manuscript.

Deadline. The date the writing is due to an editor or contest.

Draft/revision. Each copy of writing as it is improved before submission.

Editing. Correcting, improving, revising.

Editor. The person in charge of a publication.

Guidelines. Information from a publication that states writing requirements and author payment.

Header. The top line of a page that shows the author's name, part of the title, and page number.

Masthead. Place in publication that lists owners, editors, staff, and addresses.

Revision. Manuscript changes.

Rights. Authors own all rights to their work. An author can rent or sell some rights to a publisher.

SASE. Self-addressed, stamped envelope.

Solicited/unsolicited. Work requested or not requested.

# Self-examination in the Spiritual Autobiography

by M. N. Surratt

*A former newspaper reporter and editor, M. N. Surratt writes on religion and teaches journalism at the University of North Texas in Denton, Texas.*

**A**fter the waitress brought his fettuccine, my friend stabbed a fork into it and looked up at me. He wanted to know how to write a book about his life. He told me he had a message to tell. "If Jesus could turn my life around, he can turn anyone's around," he said. He confided how he had dealt cocaine, fenced stolen goods, even robbed others. His crime and deceit had ruined his marriage and cost him time in prison. Now he had a second marriage, a young baby, a second chance at life. He wanted to write about his journey to that point. A week later, he showed up at my door with a dozen pages of single-spaced material. "Chapter 1," he said. It was the first of many dispatches left at my door.

There might have been a message in his life story, but it was obscured by the staccato delivery. His writing style was matter of fact, mostly exposition with few details. So over a winter and summer I coached him in the ways of the spiritual autobiography. In coaching him, I borrowed from what I knew about the genre, material I had culled and digested for conference papers. But I also advised him about writing in general. Perhaps something in those lessons might also be of some use in your classroom.

First, the good story combines motion and emotion.

Early on, I gave him homework. What were the times he remembered with his father? How did his father move about the house? What did the house look like? What did the house smell like? Through remembering these details, I wanted him to

describe motion and emotion. "Put yourself in motion," I said. In one place, he had written that the bugs were bad and the weather was hot. I suggested the following:

I squirmed around as best I could to escape the insects that plagued me. I tried to pull away from the Long Island water bugs that crawled about my feet. My skin tightened as the late-summer mosquitoes circled around my sweaty neck.

Second, move the plot along unobtrusively. Work the action into other material, keeping "I" as a subject to a minimum.

Too many of beginning writers' transitions are "Next I . . ." or "Then I . . ." Just one alternative is to use the changes in time or seasons to move the plot along. At one point my "student" wrote how one year something bad had unexpectedly happened to him and his sister. I quickly sketched the following to show how he might set up these events (filling in the blanks with his own details):

That fall had begun innocently enough. In autumn, the mucky, humid summer air blows out and is replaced by crisp, cool breezes that call children out of their houses to the streets to play. We looked forward to . . . Then one day we learned that . . .

Third, use details to create verisimilitude, that is, to give readers a sense of a real place, time, and people.

At another point, he wanted to describe how, when he was fifteen years old, he had helped a friend steal a car. He had written that a street was lined with willow trees and that he had listened for dogs.

I showed him how he could add more details to move the plot along while painting a picture of what his senses had experienced:

It was nearly dark as Johnny moved his car through the Friday evening traffic coming home. As we drove along the two-lane blacktop, we settled into a silence and I gazed out the window. It was a starless night. The sky was a washed-out gray, occasionally pierced by a yellow light from a house in the distance, the countryside a blurring of patches of green and brown. When we reached town, we turned off the main road down a dark street lined with tall willow trees between the street and the houses. Johnny showed me where the car was, parked in an alley. . . . I was nervous as I approached the car. A light breeze was rustling the leaves of the trees. I listened for dogs but didn't hear any.

Fourth, the spiritual autobiography is marked by a certain sensibility, as the protagonist becomes aware of his or her culpability in choosing wrong.

The early models for this genre were, of course, St. Paul and St. Augustine. In their examples, conversion is marked by a dramatic moment in which the individual has a transcendental experience and is transformed. Some scholars have suggested a subsequent conversion narrative pattern, too. As Peter Dorsey puts it in *Sacred Estrangement: The Rhetoric of Conversion in Modern American Autobiography*, this pattern records "not a single moment of regeneration but a series of awakenings interspersed with periods of despair and



melancholy" (34). Anxiety over the state of one's soul and evidence of wrestling with temptation is a sign that the individual is being called apart by God.

This second pattern is most closely associated with the spiritual autobiographies of Puritans, but a good contemporary example is Charles Colson's *Born Again*. A theme throughout Colson's book is his pride in his own abilities and his desire to be self-reliant—even after his conversion and, later, imprisonment. The thread that ties together his autobiography is not gossip about the political machinations of that era, but Colson's self-reflection and his growing awareness of what his pride had cost him. (Another good recent example is Dan Wakefield's *Returning*.)

My "student" hadn't yet achieved that perspective. His autobiography was like too many Cecil DeMille movies. Sure, at the last moment Samson does the right thing, but up to that point most of the focus is on his relationship with the sultry Delilah. In my tutoree's autobiography, there was still too much attention on the crimes, money, and women—and not enough on his spiritual struggles.

Fifth, show the inner struggle.

God had paraded a series of people through his life to witness to him. At the time, my "student" hadn't paid much mind to their prayers or testimony. He needed now to go back and try to see that spiritual activity. To start him along this path, I asked a few questions about one of those witnesses in his life and then scribbled the following example for him:

She belonged to an Assembly of God church just down the road from her house. From the outside it didn't look like much. It was a one-story wood frame structure with an exterior of light beige stucco. But inside there was something going on. You could walk in and feel God's presence. Sunday mornings three hundred people would fill the church to raise their voices. Each Sunday night the church held a prayer meeting. Years later, I would learn that each week, top on her

prayer request list was my salvation.

This quick sketch helped him see how he might peel away the surface layers to reveal the inner struggle.

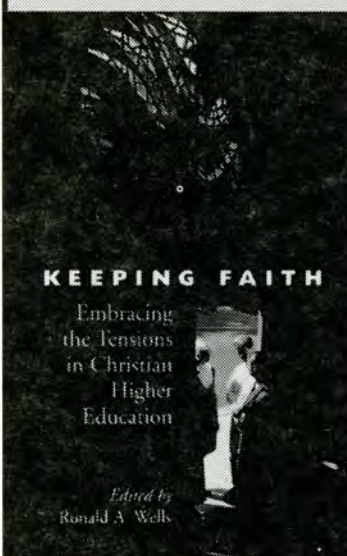
Unfortunately, we never got the

opportunity to finish his story. By fall he had moved away. But he was beginning to see what is true inside or outside the classroom—that the challenge in telling a spiritual autobiography is to reveal the inner struggle, using all the tools available to the writer.

## KEEPING FAITH

### Embracing the Tensions in Christian Higher Education

*Edited by*  
Ronald A. Wells



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- Paperback
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This excellent collection of essays and pieces — occasioned by the inauguration of Gaylen J. Byker as the eighth president of Calvin College in October 1995 — addresses questions of significance not only for those affiliated with Calvin College but also for Christian higher education on the national level. Written by a diverse group of distinguished scholars, these lively papers chart the course of development now being pursued at Calvin College and suggest new directions for America's academic culture. *Keeping Faith* offers readers everywhere a bold challenge to eschew a shallow consensus on the deep questions and to develop a world-and-life view that answers to the realities of a dynamically changing world on the threshold of the twenty-first century.

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# Help Your Students Be Doers of the Word

by Dick Cupp

*Dick Cupp is a retired pastor and a freelance writer from Farmland, Indiana.*

A group of junior and senior high school students in a small California community treated their Bible classes with the usual “ho-hum” attitude until their teacher got them involved physically and spiritually in doing what they were learning.

Here is how it worked. One day the teens studied from the book of James about being doers of the Word, and not hearers only. Included in the lesson was James’ admonition to feed and clothe the poor. The next session they brought food to a needy family.

Soon after they studied Matthew 25, where Jesus urges his followers to visit people in prison, the students, by special arrangement, visited prisoners in the county jail. That initial contact extended into a monthly project with the young people visiting the prisoners and conducting a devotional time open to prisoners who cared to attend. The program had a long-lasting effect; some of the prisoners attended regular church worship services after they were released.

The teaching/service experience went on for three months. Each time the students learned a Bible lesson about specific

Christian service, they would follow up by doing what they had studied. They loved it! They even used their own money—cheerfully—to provide the things needed for the various projects.

In fact, one teaching session dealt with the Bible’s admonition to give generously from our income to support the church and help people in need. Some of the teens had jobs; others had only small allowances. But they were like the Macedonians Paul was so proud of; they gave “beyond their ability,” and the money was used for more Christian service.

One night they visited elderly shut-ins. The students sang hymns, read Bible passages, and shared their love with those lonely people. It is hard to say who received the greater blessing, the shut-ins or the teens. Everyone seemed to feel a warm glow after the visits.

They were not aware of it at the time, but the students were learning two very important things: Christian service to others and personal spiritual growth. People were impressed with the unadulterated enthusiasm of the young people. They influenced both Christians and non-Christians with their eagerness to be servants, to help others in the name of Jesus.

They learned that Christianity is not all stuffed-shirt preachiness and ceremony, but that it involves real, down-to-earth peo-

ple doing real, down-to-earth things for others. Of course, they also learned that God is to be worshipped and revered. Students’ prayers became very meaningful, mentioning specific needs of the people they had met and served. God became very real and holy to them as they went out to do his will. But there was also the joy—the fun-of serving, and serving together. Heartfelt laughter became a part of the “curriculum.”

Younger pupils can also profit by this kind of “do it” class. They can make crafts, or fruit or candy baskets, and take them to the residents of a nursing home. They can get together some food to take to a needy family. They can sing with the elderly and the shut-ins. They need to see what is being done by others in the name of Christ, and they need to be a part of doing it. That means so much more than just another Bible lesson.

Christian schools are spawning pools for the spiritual growth of our children. Give these young people a chance to be doers of the Word as well as hearers. They will be impressed and blessed and will think more favorably of Christian service in the years to come.



# How Big Is a Dinosaur?

by Ron and Doris Schuchard

*Ron Schuchard is a professor of ophthalmology at the University of Missouri-Kansas City and a member of the Creation Research Society. Doris Schuchard is a Christian dayschool teacher and a freelance writer. They live in Independence, Missouri.*

**A**bout 350 million years ago the first four-legged animals walked out of watery environments to begin living life on land. This group includes dinosaurs and humans.

No human being has ever seen a dinosaur alive.

Turtles and tortoises will probably still be plodding on when the Age of Man comes to an end.

Such statements are common in almost any science textbook's segment on dinosaurs. But are they accurate? The theory of evolution, with its tenets of life by chance, development from simple to complex, and natural selection, will cite evidence pointing to these beliefs as fact.

What about the Christian teacher or parent who believes the Bible as the inspired, inerrant Word of God? How do we respond to a student who says, as one of our children recently said, "I'm only an animal. My life is no more important than a bird's." Can a Christian believe in God and science? God has given us both the mind and faith to look at the scientific evidence and believe that in the beginning God created life in all its wonderful and complex forms. Peter encourages us with gentleness and respect to "give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have" (1 Peter 3:15). As we look at the world around us, all creation—including the dinosaurs—witnesses to a loving, wise, all-powerful

God whom we can worship and adore.

What was the world of dinosaurs like? The young and young at heart have always been fascinated by these majestic creatures. Admittedly, for both the evolutionist and creationist there are still unsolved mysteries concerning the dinosaur. While we agree on many points, other facts are interpreted differently among both groups. Christians who accept the biblical view of creation might form a picture of the world of the dinosaur by considering the following questions and answers.

## **What is a dinosaur?**

Also known as "terrible lizards," a dinosaur was primarily a land-dwelling reptile with legs that came straight down to the ground from the hips or shoulders and two openings in the skull behind each eye. Although there were many prehistoric animals, flying reptiles such as the Pteranodon, marine reptiles such as the Ichthyosaur, and mammals such as the woolly mammoth were not, strictly speaking, dinosaurs.

## **How do we know dinosaurs existed?**

From cave paintings to dragon legends, dinosaurs have been represented in the art and literature of cultures worldwide since the beginning of recorded history. While the word dinosaur is not found in the Bible, descriptions of powerful giant creatures known as tannin, leviathan, and behemoth that may very well have been dinosaurs or its relatives are mentioned (see Genesis 1:21, Job 7:12; 40: 41; Psalm 74:13, 14; Psalm 104:26; Isaiah 27:1; Isaiah 51:9).

Scientific study of the dinosaur began with the first identified dinosaur fossils excavated in England in the early 1800s. Fossils of bones and footprints supply most

of our knowledge of dinosaurs, including what they looked like, what they ate, how and where they lived, and how old they were.

## **Did dinosaurs evolve?**

Evolutionary theory holds that thecodonts, a group of water reptiles similar to the crocodile, evolved a long tail and long hind legs for swimming. It was only a small step then to walk onto land and evolve into dinosaurs, although finding these missing fossil links between the two species still challenges evolutionists today.

For Christians, the Genesis account portrays a picture of all animals created by God simultaneously and abundantly, not in the simple-to-complex order dictated by evolution. Dinosaurs did not evolve but, along with all animals, were made "each according to its kind."

## **Did dinosaurs and humans live at the same time?**

The bones of a human and dinosaur together have yet to be found, and possible footprints of a man and dinosaur alongside each other have not been conclusively verified. Creationists do cite evidence of human footprints located in rock strata of the same time period as the dinosaur.

Christians who believe the time frame of the creation "day" is equivalent to twenty-four hours know flying and swimming reptiles such as the Pterodactyl and the Plesiosaurs would have been created on the fifth day, while land-dwelling dinosaurs were created on the sixth day. The world was then ready for God's most special creation, humans, also appearing on the same sixth day of creation.

## **Where did dinosaurs live?**

Dinosaur footprints and bones have been discovered in over half of the states in

the U.S. and provinces of Canada. In addition to the first dinosaurs excavated in Europe, a baby dinosaur in South America, a horned dinosaur near a nest of eggs in Asia, carnivorous dinosaurs in Africa, and even finds in Antarctica attest to their worldwide habitat. Interestingly, similar species of dinosaurs are found scattered in various places on earth, lending support to theories of a uniform climate and one large supercontinent at some point in history.

#### ***How did dinosaurs live?***

Dinosaurs spent most of their time on land. Some were herbivores (plant eaters), some omnivores (plant and animal eaters), and others were carnivores (meat eaters), although it is difficult to determine whether carnivores were predators or scavengers. Several dinosaur nests found together suggest that some dinosaurs may also have cared for their young.

It is possible some dinosaurs lived and traveled in herds, as huge collections of the same kind of dinosaur fossils have been found together with their trackways headed in the same direction. While tracks of some of the giant sauropods suggest a leisurely pace of about two to five miles per hour, it is estimated smaller dinosaurs, such as the coelurosaurs, may have run between ten and fifty miles per hour. (A rhinoceros can run twenty-eight miles per hour.)

#### ***Were dinosaurs fierce?***

In the Garden of Eden dinosaurs did not prey on humans or each other. Genesis records a harmonious coexistence, as all the animals came peaceably to Adam for their names and ate of the vegetation God provided for food (Genesis 1:30). It was only after humankind disobeyed the Creator that the sharp teeth and claws of meat-eating dinosaurs, poisonous and thorny plants, sickness and disease afflicted the world. Fossils of an Apatosaurus with its backbones bitten off or a Compsognathus with a lizard in its stomach attest to the violent death now brought on by the curse of the Fall (1 Corinthians 15:21-22.).

#### ***How big were dinosaurs?***

The biggest dinosaur identified with

a complete skeleton is the Brachiosaurus, 75 feet long, 40 feet high, and weighing about 75 tons. However, bones and footprints of even larger dinosaurs have been found, indicating they may have been 150 feet long, 60 feet high, and up to 150 tons in weight.

Although many dinosaurs were movers and shakers, others such as the Compsognathus were only the size of a chicken. The smallest dinosaur discovered is the 8-inch-long Mussaurus, or "mouse-lizard," a young dinosaur found in its nest.

#### ***Were dinosaurs on the ark?***

Since creatures that may have been dinosaurs were familiar to biblical writers after the flood, it is plausible dinosaurs were on the ark, surviving to be seen or remembered and written about later. Noah's ark, estimated to be more than 400 feet long, 70 feet wide, and 40 feet high, was a gigantic box with the volume of over 500 railroad livestock cars. The ark was certainly large enough to carry land-dwelling dinosaurs, while the enormous sea creatures were able to swim out the flood. It is thought many animals on the ark were represented by young ones, who would then be mature and able to reproduce by the time the ark landed.

#### ***How did dinosaurs die?***

The extinction of the dinosaur is a mystery for evolutionists and creationists alike. Evolutionists propose such ideas as a giant meteor striking the earth, radiation from an exploding star, or pollution from volcanic dust as possible causes for the disappearance of the dinosaur.

Christians who believe in Noah's flood understand such a worldwide destruction would have quickly killed and buried every human, plant, and animal not on the ark or able to swim. Massive fossil graveyards and animals preserved before digestion or decay took place attest to such a catastrophe. For those remaining dinosaurs that survived the flood, the world was a changing and different place. The tropical environment before the flood became the one we know today, with seasons and climates, deserts and arctic, mountains and valleys, and an increase in solar radiation. New diseases, vegetation,

and weather, along with human and animal predators, may explain the eventual disappearance of the dinosaur.

#### ***Do any dinosaurs still exist?***

To discover a modern relative of the dinosaur, you need look no further than the crocodile or alligator. For the more adventurous, there are still reports of dinosaur-like animals roaming the earth. Winged creatures similar to the Pterodactyl have been spotted flying overhead in the American Southwest. Scientists have interviewed natives in the jungles of Africa who describe elephant-sized animals similar to dinosaurs. Giant unidentified sea creatures are often caught in fishermen's nets and spotted on sonar. Perhaps the best documented case was in 1977, when the decaying body of a sea reptile was captured by Japanese fishermen. Photographs and measurements by marine scientists showed this possible plesiosaur to be approximately 32 feet long and 4000 pounds.

#### ***Why were dinosaurs created?***

All creation points to the Creator. God created the earth and all its inhabitants, including the dinosaurs, for his glory, as a declaration of his strength, wisdom, and love (Colossians 1:16). Each of God's creatures was given to benefit and help humankind, as we have been given the responsibility to care for this creation. The God who created the largest and strongest creatures that lived is even more mighty, loving us so much that he sent his Son to save us from sin. In awe of such greatness we can respond, "How many are your works O Lord! In wisdom you made them all; the earth is full of your creatures" (Psalm 104:24).



# Academic Eligibility for Christian School Athletics

by Bob Topp

*Bob Topp, a teacher and coach at Annapolis Area Christian School in Maryland, has twelve years of athletic administration experience in Christian schools.*

The high school jock left this note for his parents:

Dear Mom and Dad,

Since I know you have to leave early tomorrow, I thought I'd write a note to explain that I had a bad day. First, in science, I leaned against a lab table and knocked over a case of glass beakers. It costs \$108.60 to replace the case. Mr. Muller didn't seem too mad at me; he was too busy trying to stop the bleeding of his hand. The day got worse. I got kicked out of history for telling the teacher she looked weird today, then I got in the middle of a food fight at lunch. The principal almost suspended me, but Coach talked him out of it. Then tonight, I was kicked out of the game for pushing the ref and punching a guy from the other team. Coach came to the jail to bail me out. He said that you could owe him the \$10,000. Where they got TEN counts of aggravated assault, I'll never know.

—Your loving son

P.S. Everything above is false. I did get a failing midterm grade in history, and I wanted you to see it in its proper perspective.

This fictitious note suggests the pressure that our students are under to meet the standards that we set. This pressure is meant to be a measure of positive motivation. Academic standards for athletes are designed to keep aspects of school life in proper perspective.

In Christian education, we must recognize that athletics is an extra-curricular element of our schools, not just a recre-

ational sidelight. Christian school athletics must be a distinctively Christian learning experience that urges participants to seek excellence for God's glory, as do music or drama groups, and that fits into a priority system: God, loved ones, school work, then athletics. The Bible shows us who is worthy of our love and in what order. The Bible also tells us clearly to prepare our children to be salt and light in a bland, dark world. Athletics is one small part of that world in which we are to be distinctive.

Setting academic standards for athletic eligibility is one way we can reflect the goal of excellence for God's glory. A school's failing to hold to an established eligibility standard based on the priority system above—such as allowing an ineligible student to play in a game because his or her scoring will put the team in championship position—gives a clear message that sports holds a place higher than spiritual and/or academic integrity.

Academic eligibility standards can be useful tools, but how does a school establish them? Many schools and leagues have taken their cue from the NCAA (National Collegiate Athletic Association), which uses 2.0 as a minimum grade point average (GPA) on a 4.0 scale. This is a good starting point, but we ought not apply a standard without considering the intent behind it. We must consider the issues of insufficient effort, limited abilities, and failing grades. Do we need to step in more quickly when Joe has three D's and three C's or when Mary has one F and five B's? If Mary has chosen to put out little effort in one course when she has good academic ability, should she be confronted with athletic ineligibility? If Joe's best academic effort produces C's and D's, should he face a penalty?

We must analyze whom we are penalizing and why. Will penalties line up with the educational goals of the school, or

will we be putting up a facade of "high Christian standards" that in reality is strong discouragement and very poor motivation to our teenagers?

In 1993, the Association of Christian Schools International (ASCI, based in Colorado Springs, Colorado) surveyed their secondary schools across the United States about academic eligibility policies for athletes. From the 197 responding schools, 31 different eligibility standards were given. The most popular standards from the respondents are listed below.

Standard	Responses	Percent
2.0 GPA	52	26.4%
2.0 GPA with no F's	45	22.8%
Pass all classes (no F's)	23	11.7%
No more than one D and no F's	13	6.6%
1.7 GPA with no F's	11	5.6%
1.7 GPA	6	3%
No more than one F	5	2.5%
1.5 with no F's	3	1.5%

Some schools stick to percentage grades (which are applied to letter-grade scales of varying stringency) and call for minimum percentage grade averages of 70, 72, 75, 78, 80, or better.

The extremes in this survey take us from 2.5 GPA with no F's to two respondents who had no eligibility policy. One respondent said, "We do not link academic failure with athletic competition. . . . We do not want to take [athletic competition] away for reasons that don't show linkage." On the other hand, some schools chose to set a standard higher than their league or state association, wishing to show the higher standard (and, as assumed, the better performance) in the Christian school setting.

The range of extremes in the survey exposes a controversial question—How should athletics be used to emphasize academic performance? Is there or should there be any "linkage"?

Of course, no easy answer exists, but

the way a school leans on this question can be taken from a portion of that school's philosophy. Subject-centered education, in which the subject ("Truth") is more important than the student, operates under a philosophy that calls for very high academic standards. Child-centered education, in which the child is more important than the content, operates under a philosophy that calls for standards that seek to meet specific needs of individuals without being too lenient. One survey respondent cited a study that showed that students who play on school teams get better grades, and students who drop out of sports do not improve their grades. Considering that schools often declare low-GPA students ineligible for athletics on the assumption that they will give more time and effort toward academic improvement, the respondent commented, "I wonder if we are doing the right thing."

In the interest of doing the right thing, we need to examine and assess the actual intent of our eligibility policies. First, we need to ask whether we wish to uphold strict high standards to motivate students to put their best effort into school work. Our student-athletes certainly are more important than the adults we may try to impress with our high standards. We need to set or revise policies so that struggling students are motivated to perform better.

Lest such a statement imply a lenient approach, we should consider the issue of failures. Eighty-six of the 197 survey respondents (43.7%) imposed a restriction on any student-athlete who was failing a class at any checkpoint (report card or mid-quarter report). These restrictions, as the above table illustrates, came in many forms. The underlying principle is a sound one: Failure is unacceptable. For the student-athlete with good academic ability but little effort, the message is to put out at least enough effort to pass. Combined, perhaps, with a GPA standard, the message is even stronger: Put out in class or sit on the bench. For the student-athlete with limited academic ability, the message is that if C's

and D's are the best you can do, that is appropriate.

But what about the learning disabled student-athlete? He or she is an individual with strengths as well as weaknesses and

**Our student-athletes  
certainly are more  
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with our high standards.**

may not be able to meet academic standards others easily attain. Exceptions to eligibility policy should be given for such a student. Christian teachers should carefully and honestly assess the educational needs of the student and the role athletics may play in helping him or her reach excellence. As long as the learning disabled student is showing good effort in academics, we should grant the opportunity for athletic participation. It is worth weathering the cries of "Unfair" from a few to give this student a chance to know some success. Learning-disabled students often view athletics as the primary reason for coming to school. Taking away their chance for success will likely turn them off to school as well as to good work habits.

Having any student say, "Why should I try to do better? What's the use?" is not only discouraging but also condemning to the school that is to educate and motivate that person. Therefore, our standards need to be less stringent without being lenient. No F's is a reasonable beginning. In addition, using a 2.0 GPA standard should be the toughest standard considered. Moving the GPA standard to 1.7 or saying "no more than one D and no F's" is better. Overly

strict standards do not accomplish what we want.

We also need to consider the length of eligibility. In the survey, the full range of responses went from one week to one semester. The frequency of the most popular ineligibility periods is listed below from among 197 respondents:

Assuming sufficient improvement, athletes could return to active participation after . . .

one quarter (9 weeks)	40
one-half quarter (4, 4 1/2, or 5 weeks)	34
one week	30
two weeks	20
three weeks	20
meeting academic standard ASAP	18
one semester	9
six weeks	9

Here again, we must examine our intent. We seek to provide hope of return to the team in a reasonable length of time. Otherwise, the student will give up. The hope of return in three weeks provides the motivation to put better effort into studies. Being ineligible for an entire semester, an entire quarter, or even, sometimes, half a quarter can wipe out the remaining games in that season. Three weeks gives a student a chance to show sustained effort. One or two weeks may not give opportunity for strong, sustained effort. More than four weeks is too overwhelming.

Using these principles, administrators should tailor policies to the specific needs of their schools and their students. Eligibility standards must exist for the growth of the kingdom, that our students might know how their athletic abilities reflect their desire to give God the glory.





## Until Human Voices Wake Us Microcosmos: A Journey into a Smaller World

by Tim Bruinius

*Tim Bruinius teaches biology at Bellevue Christian High School in Bellevue, Washington.*

**W**ith a flutter of wings, we descend below the level of the grasses at our feet, embarking on an incredible journey into another world; a world so foreign, yet so familiar. The bugs we see every day are suddenly larger than life. In *Microcosmos*, we see them eyebrow to antennae, as we enter their world.

Claude Nurisdany and Marie Perrenou, the directors of *Microcosmos*, allow the insects to speak for themselves. Unlike National Geographic documentaries, there is no narrator guiding you. Rather, you explore this Kafka-esque world alone. Suddenly, you are drawn into the life of an insect. You witness an epic struggle between stag beetles. You ride along on the back of a dragonfly. You find yourself in a forest, the music quickens, and through the underbrush you glimpse a lumbering rhinoceros beetle, big as a house.

Nurisdany and Perrenou spent fifteen years researching their subjects, two years designing the camera equipment, and three years filming. It is a labor of love, and it shows. The camera work is precise and agile, the colors are crisp, and the music, superb. The most striking feature of the film is the amazing complexity of the subjects. From our normal distant vantage point insects seem simple and common. Nurisdany and Perrenou reveal the

amorous embrace of two Burgandy snails (set to operatic music). Their cameras capture the reproductive parts of a flower set on hinges that allow them to swing down and deposit pollen on the backside of a bee. You feel the terror of the ants as an intruding pheasant devours them with exoskeleton-crunching blows to the ground.

*Microcosmos* reminds the viewer of the creation's astonishing diversity and complexity and its incredible testament of the power and faithfulness of God. Unfortunately, this goes unrecognized by



many in the scientific community. Often, the diversity of the creation is attributed to internal factors as if the universe were self-regulated. This does not mean that the naturalistic approach to science cannot bring us a valid understanding of the universe; it just means that science attributes the order to the wrong source.

What this means is that a "Christian science" does not exist. The purpose of sci-

ence is to try to understand the creation. Creation answers important questions about God. For this reason, it is important that Christians are involved in the sciences. If science is explored from a Christian perspective, it becomes a method for better understanding God.

However, a so-called Christian worldview is not always the path to accurate knowledge. Take the familiar story of Galileo for example. Galileo's relatively straight-forward observations conflicted with the church's current understanding of human kind as the focus of creation, the center of the universe with everything revolving around us. Eventually, the church came around to Galileo's framework, but the wrong focus did damage the church's position on theological matters. It seems very logical that humans should be in the center of everything. To be relegated to an obscure corner of a vast universe pre-

sents a sort of identity crisis. It seems easier to believe in God and the creation of humankind if we hold a place of more importance (in our limited understanding). But that is where Nurisdany and Perrenou offer a profitable example.

They allow the creation to speak for itself. They trust us to learn by observing, without herding us into a philosophical cattle pen. The truth will begin to make itself evi-



dent. Part of that truth is the sheer wonder of this tiny part of creation.

Would it have been better to close our ears and minds to Galileo's observations? To do so is to lessen our understanding of the creation and, therefore, of the Creator. A more current example of how we can work to further understand the creation is the issue of the age of the earth. Every branch of science, from astronomy to microbiology, points to a very old earth. The traditional Christian view is that the earth is extremely young, perhaps six to ten thousand years old. From a naturalistic perspective, many of the evolutionary processes take a lot of time, so an old earth is sensible. From a traditional Christian perspective, a literal interpretation of the beginning of Genesis leads one to believe in a young earth. As Christians, we must be honest, we must

search for the truth, and we must be willing to accept truth even if it does not fit with our current framework. If the general revelation reveals that the earth is old, then we must accept that as part of our framework.

Often all sides are blinded by their worldviews. A scientist working from a naturalist perspective can be quick to attribute a finding to evolution. However, Christians are often quick to dismiss findings that show that organisms are capable of change, often dramatic change, over time. Many Christians think that the process of change that evolution describes threatens their core beliefs. Rather than be threatened, we need to work for honesty within the scientific community. We must also be willing to accept the truth, whatever it may be and whether or not it corresponds with our

current worldview.

All of this from a movie about bugs! When one is presented with the miracle of the creation and allowed to attribute it to its rightful owner, many questions come to mind. The strength of this fine film comes from its lack of human voices. The insects speak for themselves and for their Creator. The film is an honest portrayal of the realities of the creation: birth, death, metamorphosis, and love. It is an honesty that we, like children, just rediscover in our search to better understand the creation and, in that endeavor, to better understand our Creator.

# True or False?

**EXAM FOR EDUCATORS AND ADMINISTRATORS**

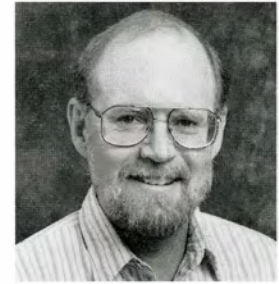
1. \_\_\_\_ I want a masters program that offers me more than a diploma and a raise.
2. \_\_\_\_ I want to make changes in my classroom and in my school.
3. \_\_\_\_ I would like a program that requires me to be on-campus only four weeks out of the whole year (a beautiful mountaintop campus would be nice too).
4. \_\_\_\_ I want to know how my Christian faith is important in my work as an educator.

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# HYPERQUICKSAND



by Ron Sjoerdsma

**A**s the sunlight faded on a late spring Saturday afternoon, Jim Sooterma realized he had lost track of time again. He turned from his computer screen and stared out his classroom windows. On the Hillendale Christian Middle School playground some neighborhood kids swarmed like bees around a nest invader. A soccer ball exploded out toward his windows, and suddenly the swarm became recognizable faces rushing toward him.

Jim quickly slid behind his computer hoping he would not be seen. He'd never get finished with this project if Sammy or Neal invited themselves in. Besides, he'd probably need to chide them for chewing up his precious softball field, and he didn't have the energy for that confrontation.

None of the kids seemed aware of his presence as they retrieved the ball from the bushes rimming the HCMS building. Jim immediately felt shame at his reflexive action. Last fall he probably would have run out to join them (surreptitiously to keep them off his infield) or invited them in to show them some of his impressive CD-ROM atlases. Sammy seemed especially attracted to anything remotely connected to computers. His enthusiasm for the World Wide Web had exploded into an insatiable desire for new information and digital media. Even the technology curmudgeon, Bill Hamilton, had to admit that Sammy was a changed student—not necessarily for the better, Jim imagined Bill would say.

Jim also wondered what Bill would say about Jim's own metamorphosis. Last fall he had hesitantly endorsed Kate Wells' idea of going online with their eighth graders. He had taken baby steps on his way to incorporating internet images into

his social studies lessons. Now he was becoming a champion of new teaching tools, embracing Kate's ideas. It was interesting how often at team meetings he found himself enthusiastically supporting her ideas for new technology applications. Jim observed that Bill and Sara Voskamp, separated by thirty-some years of teaching experience, were often allies in their complaints about unbridled progress. He had attributed this hesitancy to Bill's general orneriness and Sara's inexperience or time pressures.

But now he was not so sure. His wife, Mae, had mentioned this morning that she had hoped they could get some of the early vegetables in today—the ones that said "plant when danger of frost is past" on the package. But he wasn't going to get to them today. He had spent the entire afternoon absorbed in enhancing his HyperStudio presentation for Monday's class on early American explorers. He had not been happy with the textbook's description of the native cultures, but had found a gold mine of Mayan and Inca websites. In the pre-HyperStudio days he might have put the sites up on the LCD projector and walked his students through some of his search results. HyperStudio gave him so many more options, including creating a tutorial for students who would inevitably be absent on Monday morning.

Jim thought that it may have been

HyperStudio that had begun to change the way he prepared many of his lessons. When Kate had convinced him back in February that their students needed to have this tool for their presentations—"It will give them so much more power to create than ClarisWorks," she had said—he had gone with her to convince Helene Peters to approve the funds to buy a twenty-copy lab pack. In the end, the students hadn't done much with the new software because Sara and Bill had resisted learning yet another



new software package. So they had decided to wait until next year to formally introduce it to the students.

In March, Jim had gone to the statewide Computers in Education conference and had watched as the head of the company that created HyperStudio amazed the crowd with the ease and power of his multimedia tool. Jim had picked up the demo CD-ROM at the HyperStudio booth, and he was hooked.

His first project had involved building an interactive model community. He could click on the mayor's icon and jump to a list of mayoral duties, or he could

switch to an animated graph showing what local taxes were used for. Never mind that it took him his entire spring break to complete all the stacks needed to make the project intuitive for individual users. He had told Mae, who had hoped they would get the kitchen painted, that he was actually saving time. Now, in a few minutes he could update his lessons when in the past he would have had to create all new handouts. Plus, he wouldn't need to create special materials and explanations for students who missed school.

Jim felt the ache in his stomach that occurred with the pressures of sorting out his time commitments. Mae had started to refer to his classroom as Saturday quicksand, but she really couldn't complain too much because she usually spent a good part of her Saturday showing houses.

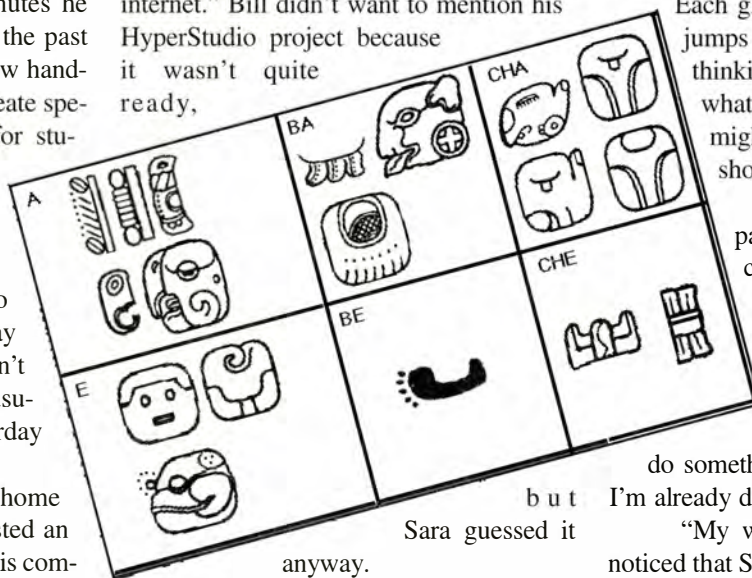
He really should have been home this afternoon. Had he really wasted an entire afternoon sitting in front of his computer screen reading about Mayan glyphs? It was fascinating content that probably would be far beyond the scope of what he had formerly done or wanted to do with the exploration unit. And wouldn't it be better for a few students to gather this information on their own and create their own multimedia presentation? Maybe next year.

Jim decided to call it quits for the day. Perhaps he could simplify the presentation before school on Monday. He really needed a computer at home—he doubted Mae would go for that, except that he heard that the World Wide Web was the next avenue for the real estate business. He simply had to find a way to be more disciplined about his preparation time—he was putting more time in now than he did as a first-year teacher.

As if on cue, Sara Voskamp poked her head into his classroom. "What are you doing here? I thought you were gardening today." Sara almost always worked in her classroom on Saturdays, so Jim couldn't return the question. Bill Hamilton had told her that Saturdays were just a nat-

ural part of the first-year experience, but Sara was nearing the end of her second—she just explained that science teachers obviously had to work harder than others.

"Just trying to get my presentation ready for Monday morning. There's some pretty great stuff about Mayans on the internet." Bill didn't want to mention his HyperStudio project because it wasn't quite ready,



anyway.

"Did you do another project with that new software? I want to see it. Your project on Greek myths was so cool. When are you going to teach the rest of us? The school should really pay you for giving us an inservice some time this summer."

"Fat chance of that." Jim tried to deflect the show-and-tell. "I've sort of wasted my whole afternoon here, and Mae and I are supposed to go out for dinner in a little while."

"Well, just let me play around with it a little. You can just go, and I'll shut down and close up your room. If that's okay with you, I mean." Jim thought Sara was overly enthusiastic for someone who had seemed so hesitant to learn the new software. And he really wasn't ready for someone else to try out the new stack.

"Let me just show you the first few slides so you get the idea. I don't have all the buttons connected yet anyway." Jim thought maybe he could do his demonstration in a few minutes and then be on his way.

"You mean that you are still going to

work on this more before Monday?"

Sara seemed incredulous.

"I'll just come early Monday. It may surprise you, but I often used to come early." Jim pulled up the home page of his explorers presentation. "Let me show you this really nice page on Mayan glyphs.

Each glyph is actually a button that jumps to the translation page. I was thinking I'd have my kids guess what they thought the pictures might mean, and then I could show them."

"Sort of like having part of an overhead transparency covered," Sara interrupted.

"I suppose. But it's certainly more elegant, don't you think?"

"Sure. But when would I ever have time to do something like this? It seems like I'm already drifting into a time warp."

"My wife calls it quicksand." Jim noticed that Sara wasn't oohing and aahing like she should have been.

"Quicksand. Great metaphor. I'd better let you go; sorry I bothered you about seeing your project. . . . It really is cool." Sara waved as she headed out the door. "See you Monday. Don't forget about the team meeting at 7:45," she added.

Jim sighed. He tried out a few more buttons, fixed a link that was messed up, and wondered how early he would need to come in on Monday. "Would a transparency work just as well?" he wondered. "Too late for that now."

As Jim turned off his Mac, the shutting down noise seemed a little like a science fiction time machine returning to the present. Maybe Sara's "time warp" was even a better metaphor.



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# Owl Theme

by Judy Smith

*Judy Smith is a grade four teacher at Abbotsford Christian School at the Heritage Campus in Abbotsford, British Columbia.*

The students in my grade four class learn much about organizing their expository writing while researching owls. Each student writes a report on a specific owl. In the process they learn research skills, sequencing of ideas, and paragraphing. They also use their written report as the basis of a well-organized oral presentation.

#### Materials:

- a large stack of 3" x 5" notecards
- a 6" x 10" manilla envelope for each student
- trade books about owls
- office paper in a variety of colors

#### Method:

1. Find books, magazines, and articles that contain information about the owls the class will be studying. (In British Columbia we have fifteen kinds of owls to study.)
2. Let the students become familiar with the owl books. Students can be divided into groups of four or five, with a selection of books to examine and discuss. After a few minutes, rotate the books to another group until all students have viewed the books and read a few things about different owls.
3. Make a list of owls to be studied. For example, we brainstormed for lists of British Columbia owls and owls that are not found in our province.
4. Students choose the owl they will study. I do this by drawing the students' names. When a student's name is drawn, he or she chooses an owl. Not more than two people may study the same kind of owl.
5. Give each student a checklist containing the following categories:
  - Appearance
  - Food
  - Shelter
  - Enemies
  - Life Cycle

# for Organized Research

Include some key topics in each category. For example:

## Food

- What they eat
- Where they find food
- How they find food
- Owl pellets
- Nocturnal / Diurnal

1. Students begin researching by taking notes on the 3" x 5" cards. On one side of a card they write a question, such as, "What do great horned owls eat?" On the back of the card they write the answer. They use the checklist as a guide and may also record additional information. The teachers' role during this process is to check the cards frequently and to encourage students to expand their ideas. As they research, students record their resources on a bibliography sheet.

1. Stop the research periodically and have the students quiz each other, using their question-and-answer cards, so they can retain the information.

2. Model writing a rough draft using the information recorded on the cards. Show how to sort the cards into categories, using the topics on the checklist. Demonstrate sequencing the information from one category and writing this into a paragraph, adding an introductory and concluding sentence.

3. Students write a rough draft, one category at a time.

4. Edit the rough drafts.

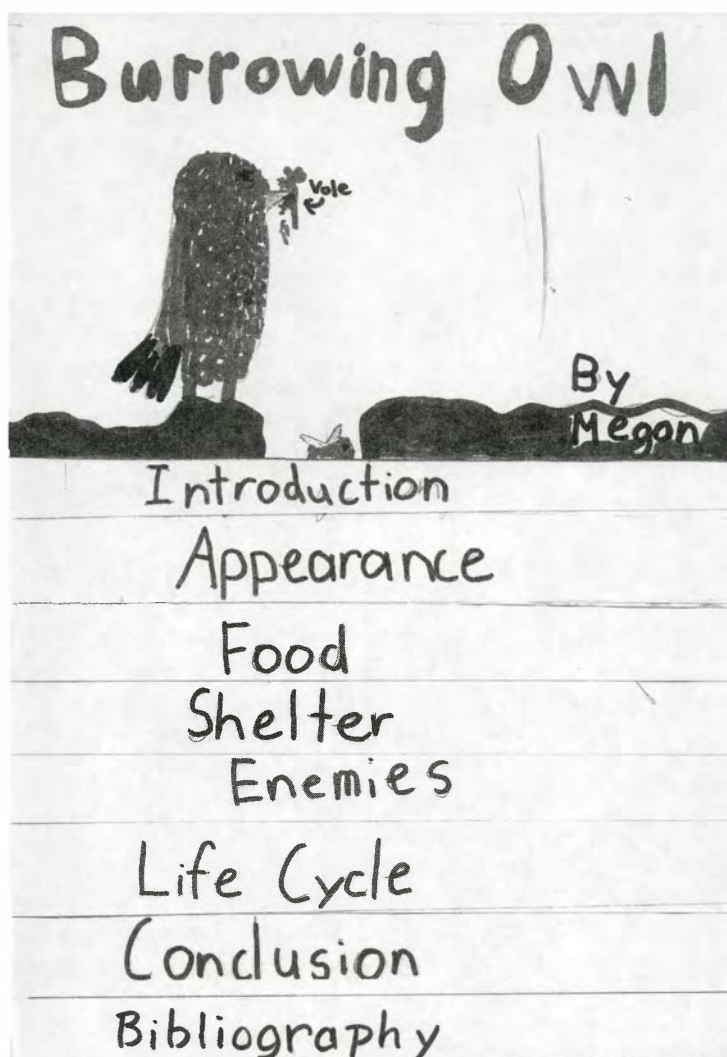
5. Students write their final copy on paper that is color coded for each category and cut progressively shorter by a half-inch. This results in an attractive booklet, and provides a visual representation of the organization of ideas. The shortest page is

a cover, designed by the student.

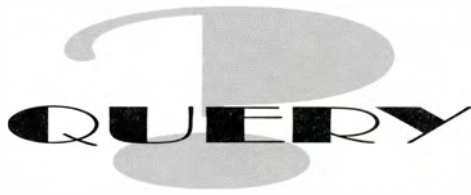
6. Students rehearse their oral presentation with a partner then present their learning to the class in an oral report.

The study of owls, a science topic that relates to the study of the province of British Columbia in grade four, provides a vehicle for doing research, writing para-

graphs, and organizing information. It is a highlight of the school year, generating a lot of talk and enthusiasm, focused on the topic.







by Marlene Dorhout

*Marlene Dorhout, a teacher at Denver Christian Middle School, is on leave this year to work with community leadership. Address questions to:*

*Marlene Dorhout  
Query Editor  
325 E. Iliff Avenue  
Denver, CO 80210*

**Q** *I am a teacher of eighth grade in one of our CSI schools. I teach Bible and am very concerned about the apathy of my students toward church attendance. Many that go regularly dislike church services or say church is boring. More alarming is the fact that some students seldom attend. Most of my students do not have a regular devotional life or a spiritual relationship with God. They have all the right answers for class and can memorize Bible texts, but there seems to be little carry-over into their everyday actions. I'm wondering if this response is a reflection on the parents or even on our school. Is this situation common to other Christian schools, too? What can we do?*

**A** Much of your concern is caused by the age of the students and the age in which they live. Eighth graders are dealing with tremendous changes in their physical appearance and emotional feelings. In addition, they are faced with temptations and problems they have never encountered before. Such facts, however, do not excuse or totally explain the attitudes mentioned in your query.

Because I taught eighth grade students for almost thirty years, I certainly have a love and concern for them, too. In order to determine if your area of the coun-

try would skew the practices and feelings of this pre-adolescent age, with the aid of the Bible teachers in our local Christian school, I surveyed the middle school students, asking questions regarding your concerns.

A couple of classes did not participate in the survey. Out of the one-hundred-fifty students who did answer regarding Sunday church attendance, twenty-seven students said they attend church twice on Sunday; seventy-one go once a Sunday. The remaining answers were scattered from twice a month to very seldom.

Certainly, church attendance has changed for adults, too. Adults are the ones who usually provide the transportation for adolescents. A few students indicated they'd like to attend more often, but they couldn't get there or sporting events interfered. Regardless of their answers, the vast majority of students were satisfied with their current church attendance.

However, for most of the students, they were not satisfied with the sermons, and sometimes the music. These adolescents clearly indicated that the worship service is geared for adults. The sermons are beyond their comprehension, don't apply to their lives, and are too long and boring. I lingered over the surveys of those who said they loved the service. Obviously, these students felt themselves to be part of the church and shared a strong personal relationship to God.

Church attendance and personal devotions did not necessarily correspond. As might be expected, some students attend church simply because they are required to do so. Forty-nine of these middle schoolers admitted they have no per-

sonal devotions. Twenty-one students have daily personal devotions. The most frequent responses regarding frequency of personal devotions were once a week, once a month, or "sometimes when I'm not busy." When I asked what they used for devotions, a few answered "the Bible." Some said they use devotional books, but most didn't answer. Certainly, a lack of materials cannot be the reason, but lack of guidance might be.

I asked other questions regarding youth groups, materials, leaders, service, Christian education, and relationships. Some answers indicated that these adolescents want to be a part of the Christian activities if they are accepted, allowed to participate, and understand the content.

I doubt that much is accomplished by placing the blame on parents, the school, the adolescent phase, or even society as a whole. In spite of the results of the survey and the habits you have noted from your classroom, I do believe the honesty and openness of this age facilitate changes, if necessary. Many times young people will call something "boring" if they don't understand or aren't part of the action. They question the status quo as they seek to find meaning and identity. The challenge for us as educators is to respect their opinions and to involve them in the solution. My answer to a query in the previous issue of CEJ may help you understand the faith development of adolescents.

I talked to several enthusiastic, encouraging youth leaders. Most of them were trying a variety of materials and activities to keep young adults interested and active. Their jobs are difficult because youth group attendance is not mandatory,

and meetings are too infrequent to establish continuity.

Ideally, the home, church, and school could work together, helping each other and the adolescents as they struggle with their spiritual lives. I encourage you to consider a community forum for teachers, parents, pastors, youth workers, and other interested Christians to discuss the concerns and to coordinate programs and activities. All of those who work with early adolescents could be empowered and inspired. These young people are worth it!

**Q** As teachers we try to teach the students how to work together; yet, I don't feel we set an example ourselves. Sometimes I think the kids in my classroom demonstrate more "give and take" than the teachers in the faculty room. Why wouldn't adults who expect children to work cooperatively practice what they preach? What can I as a teacher do to work toward this goal without sounding condescending?

**A** I detect a hesitancy to confront this issue because the teachers already know how to work cooperatively. As Christians we usually do know what is right; but, like the apostle Paul, we too often do the opposite. If all or most of the teachers function this way, a negative or resistant attitude must be permeating the group.

Human frailties that prevent collaboration are usually of the following nature: competitiveness, pride, debilitating pessimism, controlling leadership, unclear expectations, unresolved conflicts, myopia, pervasive individualism, untapped gifts, and unwillingness to listen.

To analyze all the possibilities and prescribe for each a remedy would be too time consuming, even though self-assessment as individuals and institutions is important. Perhaps you instantly recognize some of the common characteristics in faculty members or maybe even yourself. The purpose is not to single out the fault, but to move toward a common goal in order to energize the community spirit.

Much emphasis lately has been placed on the vision or mission. Christian schools have always had a mission—the teachers usually just read and agreed to it as part of their contract. Many schools are now articulating their vision with much

more emphasis on participation, the active realization of their mission. With that common goal, the faculty can focus on the bigger picture; their commitment to such must take priority over personal agendas.

Collectively, Christian educators bring a rich legacy of faith experience and academic excellence to this new era. The twenty-first century is on the horizon. Perhaps that is the stimulus that prods schools to re-examine their purpose. So, instead of chastising your colleagues, challenge them to look to the future, together, for the sake of our Christian heritage.

Eventually, inviting the parents to work with the staff would encourage the cohesiveness of faculty necessary for such collaboration. Certainly the parents and teachers are the role models for the students and share the responsibility of creating a faith community in which everyone has the opportunity to grow and learn. The old adage is still true: "We can do more together than we can do separately."

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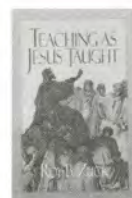
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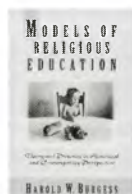
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# Trust & Obey



Jeff Fennema

*Jeff Fennema teaches eighth grade language arts at Timothy Christian Middle School in Elmhurst, Illinois.*

**S**elf-esteem. The word evokes many ideas, definitions, and connotations. Young adults view themselves asking, "Who am I?" and "What do I think of myself?" and "What do others think of me?"

Recently educational theory and practice have moved from being adult-centered to student-centered. While this change in focus has resulted in a much-needed dialogue about students' abilities and needs, many critics claim the pendulum has swung too far in the opposite extreme.

## What Others Have Said

-The child with high self-esteem has the best chance of being a happy and successful adult. Self-esteem is the armor that protects kids from the dragons of life: drugs, alcohol, unhealthy relationships, and delinquency (McKay and Fanning).

-Self-esteem is the single greatest need facing the human race today (Schuller).

-Self-esteem determines the degree of a person's sense of self-ownership—the continued feeling that we really do own our inner assets. This provides for appropriate independence and serves us well in all areas of life (Rubin).

-Lack of self-esteem can actually extinguish the desire to go on living (Dobson).

-Self-esteem—or the lack of it—is critical in people's lives. Positive self-esteem has been found to be related to high motivation or drive for achievement—in sports, in work, in school (Gordon).

A plethora of literature specially addresses the issue of self-esteem. Most, if not all, experts agree that positive self-

esteem is good, and negative self-esteem is bad—a fairly basic concept accepted by a large majority of educators. However, disagreements arise in defining self-esteem, locating its origin, and determining its place within the lives of young adults.

## Is There a Problem?

Yes! Definitely there is a problem. So say critics of the self-esteem movement so prevalent in our homes and schools today. Bookstore shelves offer evidence of a backlash against an over-emphasis on creating and building self-esteem: *Spoiled Rotten: Today's Children and How to Change Them* (Fred Gosman); *Raising a Responsible Child: How Parents Can Avoid Indulging Too Much and Rescuing Too Often* (Elizabeth Ellis); *Greater Expectations: Overcoming the Culture of Indulgence in America's Homes and Schools* (William Damon)—to name just a few. Even Dan VanderArk, the executive director of Christian Schools International, recently examined a common link between self-esteem and self-indulgence in *Christian Home and School*. Yes, there seems to be a problem.

Part of the problem may lie in how self-esteem is viewed in relation to desired behavior and achievement. We teachers witness daily a correlation between positive self-esteem and desired behavior and achievement. Our students provide the evidence of this connection. However, as the most basic statistics lessons teach, a correlation does not necessarily mean cause. If self-esteem is viewed in the context of cause and effect, is it a prior condition, or is it a result or an outcome?

If self-esteem is seen as a cause or prior condition, then it is something that can be addressed as an entity in and of

itself. This appears to be the direction most self-esteem instruction has taken over the past years. The belief generally states that young adults must possess positive self-esteem before they can engage in meaningful learning and achievement. This position then would call for self-esteem activities and exercises for young adults as a prelude to developing skills or engaging in academic activities.

If self-esteem is actually a result or an effect of meaningful learning and achievement, then pushing a student to potential ability may be a key element in the process of promoting positive self-esteem. Consequently, the focus will lie in challenging students to set personal goals and helping them attain these goals. The payoff will come as a result of this activity, not prior to it. Still, the focus on self-esteem remains on the individual, an egocentric concentration.

## What to Seek First

To discover that the focus must not be on the individual, we could first question the prior condition stance in relation to two of Jesus' parables. In the parable of the talents (Matt. 25:14-30), was low self-esteem the cause for the negligence of the servant who was given one talent? Might he have made a wiser decision if he felt better about himself? If positive self-esteem is a necessary prior condition, what was the Samaritan doing by helping the injured traveler in Luke 10:30-37? Why would a member of a community that was treated like dogs do what was right without positive self-esteem? Surely the priest or the Levite would have been the hero of the story.

To question the individualism in the result or outcome view, we could look at

the dynamics between God and Moses. When God revealed his plan for Moses to lead the Israelites out of Egypt, Moses rattled off a list of reasons why God might be making a mistake (Ex. 4:1-14). God then revealed a list of signs that Moses could perform for his future audience. (Some might consider this to be an activity to build self-esteem.) Yet, when Moses persisted in questioning God's decision, "the Lord's anger burned against Moses" (vs. 14).

It appears that God was displeased with Moses for refusal to trust and obey—a scene quite familiar to parents and teachers in dealing with their children and students. This simple idea of trusting and obeying may offer further insight into the issue of self-esteem. If we are to seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness (Matt. 6:33), all other endeavors must become secondary.

While this command is presented in the context of physical needs (food, clothing, shelter, it certainly sheds light for those of us who are familiar with, and even subscribe to, Maslow's hierarchy of needs. The influential U.S. psychologist and philosopher Abraham Maslow asserted that human needs are realized in this order: physiological needs, safety and security, love and belonging, self-esteem, and self-actualization (Motivation and Personality 1954). If we are to seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, then all of these things will be taken care of—that is a promise from God. Our pursuit of the human needs suggested by Maslow may be interfering with our need to seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and this includes self-esteem.

Christians and non-Christians alike struggle with issues of homelessness, mental and emotional disorders, as well as physical and sexual abuse. How can these atrocities take place when we are seeking first the kingdom of God and his righteousness? Doesn't God promise that our needs will be taken care of as result?

There appears to be a discrepancy in God's promise and the events of today's world. How can a thirteen-year-old student believe that God will take care of her sexual abuse at home if she seeks first the kingdom? How can a seventh grade student believe that his classmates and family will

quit telling him he is stupid if he seeks first the kingdom? I do not believe there are any quick or pat answers to those questions, and I am skeptical of anyone who does. These are questions we may never fully understand in our sinful human condition. However, our inability to understand God's promise in the context of today's society does not necessarily indicate there is something wrong with the promise.

Scripture does tell us to trust and obey. This command may sound like a pat answer, but its simplicity cloaks the very real difficulty we have in adhering to this command. Even if we do not understand why, we must trust and obey. "The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may follow all the words of this law" (Deut. 29:29).

Jesus summed up the law with these two commands: love God, and love your neighbor. The beauty of these mandates lies in the outward focus we must maintain. We are not called to spend time adjusting our self-esteem before we can effectively love God and love our neighbor. Rather, we are called to look beyond ourselves in a life of genuine service and gratitude. Lives of genuine service and gratitude come only from changed hearts, and this is where we miss the mark on the issue of self-esteem.

### Children of God

Our students are made in God's image (Gen. 1:26-27), and that alone makes them special. Yet God does not stop there. He offered his only Son as a sacrifice (John 3:16) because he loves us and our students with such incomprehensible depth. This is where our students' value should derive—not just from self-esteem activities and exercises, but from each moment they spend in the Christian school classroom. A perceived need for self-esteem activities may suggest a need to improve how we convey the message of individual worth to our students in the classroom every day.

The lesson on self-esteem is not complete without discussing the need for a response to God. If the message remains focused solely on the individual, self-indulgence cannot be far behind. Encouraging students to live lives of genuine service and gratitude to God provides

a picture of wholeness to our students' self-image. Often we think of service projects or similar efforts as opportunities to help others—ways to show gratitude—and these are definitely worthwhile functions. Yet if we fail to promote obedience among our students, these service projects and outreach gestures become as vacuous as Saul's sacrifice at Gilgal (1 Sam. 15:22, Mark 12:33).

Every encounter we have with our students should leave them with the knowledge that they are indeed special—not because Barney or the latest self-esteem guru says so—but because God made them special. We need to guide them in trusting this biblical truth. In completing the process, we should also find various ways to say to our students, "Now that you know this, what are you going to do about it?" We need to guide them in lives of obedience.

Trusting and obeying are natural results of changed hearts. We know that only God can create clean, regenerate hearts in our students. Yet we can operate as effective agents in promoting this change, and we can pray that our efforts will be used by God in furthering his will. Each day, whether they realize it or not, middle school students ask the question, "Who am I?" The message "trust and obey" makes a wonderful self-esteem exercise as we try to help our students answer this question. But why stop there? Let us promote that message in everything we do and say in our classroom, in the hallways, at lunch, at break. If we do, very likely the need to focus on self-esteem will become obsolete.

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# Second Glance

## Do You Love Me?

by Bärbel Kobabe

*Bärbel Kobabe teaches business and English at Abbotsford Christian Secondary School in Abbotsford, British Columbia.*

**C**an you pray for my mom? She's really sick." Jill's large eyes peered out from behind her long red hair.

"Sure," I stammered. Where did this request come from? We were thirty minutes into a solid discussion of a merchandising business and what kinds of accounts it would require. I looked at Jill again. This was my star pupil who rarely made any mistakes. Her work was neater than the answer key that came with the teacher's resource package. Jill's eyes looked distant, anguished, . . . like they were searching for something. This was going to be more than the 'regular' prayer request.

"Jill, what's wrong with your mom?"

The last time I saw her mother, she seemed very well. Jill, her mother, and her maternal grandmother had read a three-part litany ten days earlier at a dedication service of the new addition to our high school.

"They don't know what's wrong with her. She's been really sick for five days and isn't getting better. The doctor says it might be something in her kidneys. She went for tests today."

"Yes, I'll certainly pray for her. Thanks, Jill." I tried to affirm Jill but was feeling awkward in my response. There was a nudging at my shoulders as a small voice asked, "Why don't you pray right now? That's her real question." I forced the voice back and ignored the spiritual hypodermic pricking my conscience.

Just as I was about to resume where we had left our overhead notes on sales

allowances and discounts, Mieke spoke up. "Would you pray for my mom too?"

"Sure, of course. What's wrong with your mom?"

"She needs an operation."

I shuddered inside and my mother's voice came through reminding me never to ask what operation a mother or woman needed just in case it was the "H" word. The question, having a life of its own, ventured forth. "What operation, Mieke?"

"She has to have an operation in her nose. She's been sick for almost a year because her sinuses are all plugged up, and so they want to poke holes in her sinuses. She doesn't want the operation because it's only 55% effective anyway. And she is scared."

"Wow," I said dumbfounded.

I love words yet find myself wordless in the face of pain and suffering, wanting to thrash at God for allowing it. I thrash at God for not giving me the words to comfort and ultimately to fix the ache and grief of my students. I thrash at him for having to trust him to give me the right words—I, who love words, find myself wordless when I kneel before The Word to pray.

I breathed deeply after having discovered that I was holding my breath. Another arm shot up. It was my daughter.

"Can we pray for a woman in my evening pottery class?"

We looked at Alesha quite blankly, nodding our consent.

"She has only three months to live. She has cancer."

This was too much. Dear God, what are you doing here, this is accounting, not chapel. So much sickness, so much pain. The questions burst forth from the teacher part of me; this teacher was starting to

weaken in this basin of pain. "Three months? And she's in your pottery class?"

"Yup. She's doing all those things in the next three months that she always wanted to do but didn't, and pottery is one of them."

Alesha grinned at us, sharing this woman's delight in being alive now, creating and fulfilling dreams and goals regardless of how short life may be.

I felt my heart being stretched tight sideways and held my emotions back. Would I be in this classroom with these beautiful young people, learning from them and with them, sharing what I knew?

"Wow." My vocabulary was reduced to ridiculous utterings at times of profundity.

I stared at the young people in front of me. I was already listing in my mind all the items I would bring to the Lord, later, tonight, maybe tomorrow . . . would I remember? Sure. This was already a sort of prayer by discussion, wasn't it?

There was a disturbing question in the eyes of the students. For a change it was dreadfully silent in the room.

Oh no. Surely not now, not here. No, no, I was not going to stop now and pray now, here, out loud. Oh, sweet Jesus, don't ask me to do this. I don't have any words. You heard me; all I have is "Wow." Clearly these children are looking for more direction than what I could possibly give right now. Sweet, sweet Jesus, don't ask this of me.

"Can we pray for my uncle, too?" Jennifer piped up from across the room.

"Your uncle?" I asked, hoping the explanation would be long, maybe we would run out of time for "public, corporate" prayer.

"Yes. My aunt died two weeks ago and he's having real hard time."

I knew what loss and grief felt like, especially loss of a loved one. I decided to offer something other than the now infamous "Wow." "Oh my," I offered hesitantly, groping for something that would show the compassion I felt for her uncle. "He will grieve for a long time." As soon as the words left my mouth I felt even more stupid. Should have stuck with the "Wow," kiddo!

Jennifer wasn't finished yet. "My aunt had cancer and bulimia and, and something else . . ."

I had no words. I couldn't move. I couldn't speak. I had not dared to venture to the center of the room; I stayed at the front, close to my overhead projector; I seemed safe there.

What do I do now with the open flowing barrels of pain that these kids had tossed my way?

Oh, Lord.

I heard the still small voice that I knew would eventually move me. "Do you love me?"

I replied, "You know I love you."

"Do you love me?"

The second time, I could see this was to be trial by fire again; my heart wept at the question that Jesus was asking me again.

"Do you love me?" He asked a bit slower and louder. Then, very distinctly he added, "Feed my sheep."

My heavy heart dropped over the precipice; I was a goner for sure now. I heard it again, fainter this time. "Feed my sheep."

I entered the center of the room, and pulled up a chair. Before I sat down or said anything, I heard his voice again, "I was hungry and you fed me, I was thirsty and you gave me to drink, I was naked and you clothed me. I was sick and in prison, and how did you visit me?"

The barrier dropped, I sat on the chair, and said, "Let's pray."

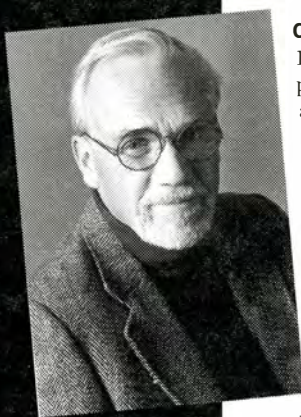
As I scanned the room, out of habit I suppose, I noticed both doors to the room were open ("flying wide the door"—the advent hymn came to mind) and I decided this too was adiaphora.

I prayed. The words were given, I had none prepared. I don't know how long we were in prayer. It was a 96-minute class; at the "Amen" we had exactly 37

minutes left. At the "Amen," we all looked at each other, momentarily not speaking. Our faces were changed. We were changed. We had stepped into God's kingdom and had left this world behind entirely. Each pair of eyes reflected Christ and his peace.

As usual, it was the blundering teacher breaking the profound silence. I said, "Our Accounting 12 seems trivial in the face of all this. And yet, it too belongs to God. Let's do it."

God be with us all. Gratitude took on new depth for me that day, that moment out of kronos, that space of time in kairos. I was grateful that I am called upon to pray like this because I am in a Christian school. What would I have done had it been otherwise? Where does God's precipice end? How far will he have to push me over the edge of impossibilities before I start to feed his sheep without being asked about love? How many more times, Lord? You know my math skills are not so hot!



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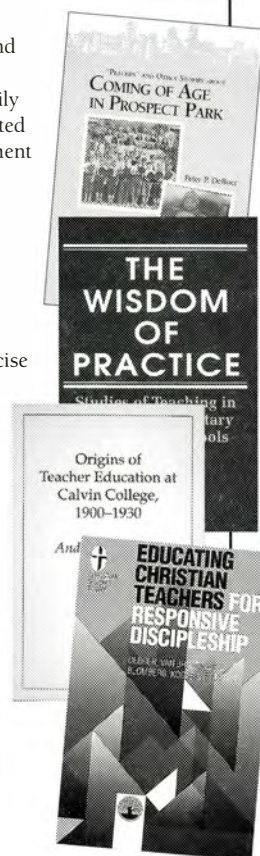
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# BOOK Review



Steve J. Van Der Weele

Devotions for Today series on the books of Exodus and Numbers: *100% Chance of Frogs*, first half of Exodus (1992); *The 40-year Campout*, second half of Exodus (1993); *Don't Pray with Mud on Your Shoes*, first half of Numbers (1995); *Killer Snakes and Talking Mules*, second half of Numbers (1995). Illustrations by Paul Stoub. Grand Rapids, MI: CRC Publications.

by James C. Schaap

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

Now that the Public Broadcasting System's television series of panel talks on the book of Genesis has run its course, Bill Moyers should take on the books of Exodus and, yes, Numbers. And he should consult James Schaap, whom he would find a kindred spirit in his appreciation for the narrative power of these books. Only Schaap does it better. More on that later.

Exodus and Numbers are the basis for a total of 204 meditations on the Israelites' odyssey from their sojourn in Egypt to the eve of their occupation of Canaan. They can be profitably read by any good reader from adolescence to old age; one does not outgrow reflections such as these. A good reader, yes; for though, as Schaap says, we need the faith of a child, we must also think as well, and interpret, and explain. And all this the author does in a lively, vigorous way.

The very titles—savor them—sug-

gest something of the tone of these delightful essays. The style is informal, colloquial, racy, fast-paced—even slangy at times. And he can change pace and tone with great effectiveness—from the sublime to the abrupt. Wit abounds as he seizes on news stories, anecdotes, popular culture, and history to enrich and enliven. The imagination is at work. The author establishes meaningful connections between biblical materials and present cultural settings and links the cast of biblical characters with contemporary folk.

Nothing is lost on this author—his own odyssey, his relationships with colleagues, lore from his profession, the lives of his relatives and townsfolk, episodes and characters from literature. He is adept at impersonating biblical characters, compelling you to see the situation from their point of view. He sets up odd angles sometimes—as when he contemplates what a great service Jethro performed when he, as an outsider, proposed a plan to lighten Moses' work load. I like his anachronisms—placing a pair of binoculars in Moses' hand as he surveys the land to which he has brought his people but which he would never enter himself. Balaam gets no fewer than twelve essays. There is depth and scope to these devotional essays.

These devotions teem with life. Schaap is particularly effective in his reflections on the ten commandments. He sets up scenarios—a caddy (Schaap's own son, as it turns out) offered a lucrative job which, alas, calls for Sunday work; a

young man rationalizing shoplifting; the temptation to worship cars and other possessions. He makes vivid and concrete the pain adults inflict on the young—as in divorce, or in being an abusive parent at home while putting on a front of respectability for the outside world.

Schaap strives for relevance, connecting the Old Testament stories and situations with contemporary life. He uses the vocabulary of computers, e-mail, songs (even some attention to Hair), street lingo, sports, such social problems as burnout. Why all the emphasis on sanitation? In an earlier age, when epidemics were rampant, it was a matter of survival. Why the long sections on the where and how of worship? To indicate that God is somewhat fussy about how he is worshiped—as he is still nowadays when some present forms of worship are more pleasing to the worshipers than to God.

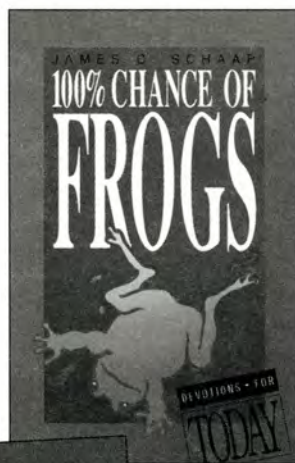
The author dwells at length on the Israelites' hair-trigger whining. We are no better. Amazingly, God kept coming back to the Hebrews, as he does still, in his patience and grace. True piety is one thing, mindless zeal is another. Counterparts of Zimri and Cozbi (Numbers 25:6-18) are all around us. And the problem of gender arises (Numbers 27:1-11) when some women ask for laws to prevent the ending of their family line. As a matter of justice, not gender, really, their request is honored. This situation anticipates Paul's passage in Galatians emphasizing the equality of all people. Schaap does not shun this problem

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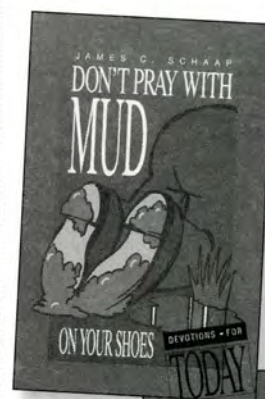
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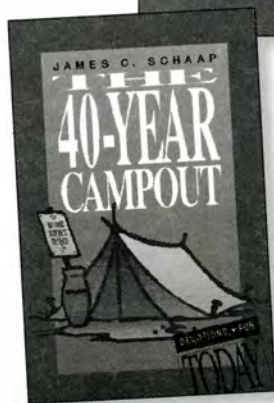
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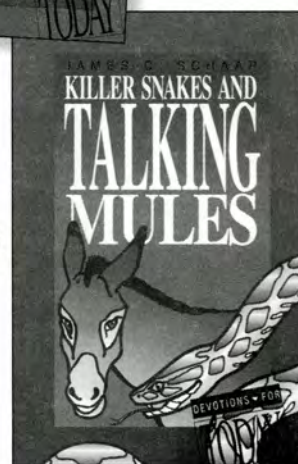
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or others. Some things, he notes, such as this one, God gave us to resolve ourselves. We have work to do.

I have been told that at one stage in the church's history seminarians were taught to read the Bible "with the intent of locating the doctrinal content in every passage." Schaap adopts a more literary approach—not only because of his profession as a teacher of literature at Dordt College but because of that progress in the art of hermeneutics which accepts the biblical stories on their own terms. It is precisely by doing justice to these stories as narratives that Schaap demonstrates the formula that, of course, these books are redolent with no less than Immanuel himself, God with us.

When I said earlier that Schaap does his work better than the people on the PBS Genesis panel, I meant this: Schaap always holds before him the big picture—the role these books play in God's redemptive program. This stance keeps him from some of the more esoteric—if sometimes fresh and arresting—interpretations of several of the television panelists who forget, as Lew Smedes points out, that the main character in these stories is God. The focus is not on mere individuals acting in some neutral context.

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## Media Eye



# The Trigger Effect

Trigger  
Trigger  
Trigger

by Stefan Ulstein

*Stefan Ulstein teaches media and English courses at Bellevue Christian Junior High and High School in Bellevue, Washington.*

**W**hen the power goes out in a big American city like Los Angeles, everyone expects a riot. The faceless masses of unwashed humanity surge forth in an anonymous frenzy of looting and violence. Homeowners guard their front porches with shotguns. Korean grocers don body armor and return fire from rooftop command posts.

What we forget is that each rioter, each fearful bystander, and each cringing onlooker is a human being with free will. That's the setup of a thoughtful and troubling film called *The Trigger Effect*.

Out for a quiet night at the movies, Matt (Kyle MacLachlin) and Annie (Elisabeth Schue) endure a series of petty annoyances, from two rude guys who can't shut up in the theater to a careening lout who knocks into people in the mall. It's one of those nights that makes you want to leave the city for good and settle in some hick town where everybody waves when they drive by.

When they return home they find that their daughter has a painful earache, yet the doctor tells them to wait until morning. They are furious at his apparent indifference. It's as if nobody is connected to anyone else on the planet. Everyone just has his or her own little bubble.

Suddenly, the power goes out all over the city, with no apparent reason for this technological catastrophe. Nor do we need one. The point is that the very thing that gives us air conditioning, lights, security

alarms, and all the other conveniences that isolate us in our cocoons is suddenly gone. The druggist can't access computer files, nor can the checkers use Visa and Mastercard. How will people eat? Filling stations can't pump gas.

Post-apocalyptic adventure films like *Mad Max*, *Waterworld*, and *Escape from New York* have strip-mined this premise before, but *The Trigger Effect* goes deeper. What is it that makes us civilized? How well do we know our neighbors? What do people do with all of those guns they keep for protection?

*The Trigger Effect* is that rarity in modern cinema, a film based on characters. As the characters interact with one another, they grow. They make decisions, some wise

and some foolish. They judge others' motives without any solid evidence. Eventually, they learn something about themselves and others that is both provocative and realistic.

*The Trigger Effect* is rated R for language and violence. It is an intense drama about the human heart, reminiscent in some ways of *Lord of the Flies*. While there is nothing gratuitous in the film, it would be too mature in its themes for younger teenagers. Given the films that young teenagers watch on their own, however, *The Trigger Effect* might provide an introduction to thoughtful, non-Hollywood-mill cinema.

