

courage one another as we  
struggle along in our calling.

Sometimes our biggest problem is with ourselves. It doesn't take much before we can really be feeling sorry for ourselves. It appears to us that everyone has everything so good and we have this problem and that problem; and we even question God's wisdom by asking, "Why does this have to happen to me?" or, "Why must I have to put up with this situation?" When these thoughts arise in our minds, our first question should be, "What does the Lord want me to learn through this?" Remember, we are not bothering God when we go to Him with all our cares. He *careth* for us! He directs all things, however hard and difficult the way may be, to work out for our good. Sometimes we can't imagine how that is possible, but He *is* faithful. And when we look back on a situation, we must confess that if it were left to our own doing, we would utterly fail. But understanding that God is in control, we can see how the whole

pattern of our life fits together  
so beautifully.

To the Christian woman it is important that the Word of God be not blasphemed, especially not on account of her. If we walk wickedly, we bring reproach upon the Word of God. When we walk uprightly, we bring praise upon the Word of God. When the world sees a wife who professes Christ Jesus and does not live in peace with her husband, not only do they mock her and her marriage but they also speak evil of the Word of God which she confesses. She gives occasion to the world to mock. The fact that God's Word is blasphemed by the bad behavior of a wife implies that God's Word is praised by her good behavior. This is a powerful motive for the believing woman. She detests all blasphemy of God and His Word and she loves to have God's Word praised. With these incentives, the God-fearing woman will be submissive and sound-minded.

A B C D E F G H I J K L M N O P Q R S T U V W X Y Z

## VIEWPOINTS

Competition among students cannot be eliminated from the classroom. That's a given. Nor, for that matter, has anyone ever advocated that an attempt should be made to do so. For, properly handled, competition can help to make of learning a more stimulating experience for many children. Especially is that true when a student is taught to compete against his own

record. That kind of striving for excellence is not only a healthy thing academically, it is also required of us by God Himself. Whatever we do, after all, must be done "heartily, as to the Lord" (Col. 3:23). The apostle Paul adds, however, in that same verse, this: "and not unto men." In individual competition there is always the danger that the "unto men" becomes a powerful motivator. And it is for that reason that, among Christian educators, there is always a concern for how to handle in the classroom, effectively and properly, a force which can work for good or for ill in the lives of the students.

That any activity which offers promise of competition elicits interest and effort on the part of many students is recognized by everyone who has ever stood for any length of time in front of a classroom full of youngsters. But how to use that spirit without establishing a kind of competitive climate in the classroom — that is the question. Too easily a pupil who "loses" regularly can develop feelings of inferiority, to say nothing of frustration and social maladjustment; and those who "win" can, just as easily, develop a complex of superiority, which can work an equal amount of havoc in the life of the individual. Further, when excelling becomes too important a goal in a student's life, learning tends to lose the importance it has for its own sake and becomes little more than a means by which one wins or loses.

Considerations such as these, I say, have moved experienced Christian educators to take a cautious approach to the use of individual competition in the classroom. And, needless to say, there is not always complete agreement among them as to which competitive activities should be considered legitimate and which should not. Included in the agenda of our Teachers' Convention last October was a symposium on academic competition. Two teachers, Miss Winifred Koole and Miss Agatha Lubbers, were asked to present the benefits of such competition. Accordingly, they urged judicious use of it in the classroom. Two other teachers, Mr. Doug DeBoer and Mr. Deane Wassink, in turn warned of the dangers involved and advised against using much of any individual competition in our work as teachers. Two papers were submitted to us for publication in this space: the first by Miss Lubbers, principal/teacher at Covenant Christian High in Grand Rapids, and the second by Messrs. DeBoer and Wassink, both teachers at Heritage Christian School in Hudsonville. If you find the various points of view interesting, and would like your-

*self to enter the friendly fray, please don't hesitate to address the matter via a letter to the editor.*

# Academic Competition

## -Yes

Agatha Lubbers

For many years teachers have used various forms of competition in the classroom to promote academic excellence. Methods such as these have been called extrinsic motivational devices. Such terminology seems to justify the use of this kind of teaching technique. There are however those who adopt the position that the use of competitive games in the classroom violates the principles of Christian education. I contend that academic competition has a legitimate place in the Christian classroom.

What is competition? My dictionary defines competition as a "struggle or rivalry for supremacy, which usually results in a victor and a loser but does not necessarily involve the destruction of the latter." I like this definition because it describes the academic struggle in the classroom. Although the classroom should not be seen as a battlefield, it should be viewed as a place where students who have an interest in academic excellence are attempting to be superior to their classmates. It should be obvious

that a highly motivated student will not be satisfied with being less successful than fellow students. He will be satisfied only when he endeavors to attain the highest degree of excellence.

Academic competition need not be threatening. I agree with Kathy Wiersma who wrote an article entitled "Competition" in the April-May, 1985, *Christian Educators Journal*. She writes as follows: "As a teacher I realize now that my students are first of all God's children. My love for them must be based on that truth and not on their scholastic achievement. When a student is secure in that relationship, competition will not be threatening, but it will be profitable."

Grade school students thrive on competition. They love Bible games, spelling bees, math flash card games, and sentence diagramming contests. Every student plays to win just as he plays to win when he competes in ice hockey or a game of chess.

Gilbert Highet, a professor at Columbia University says: "Competition keeps a class from being

merely a group of faceless nonentities, and gives it something of the diversity of life."

**The classroom provides  
an arena for  
three different kinds  
of competition.**

1. The first kind of competition is the competition between individuals. This kind of competition exists in the classroom just because of the nature of the situation. It also is the kind that can be fostered by means of the typical classroom competitive games.

2. The second kind of competition is competition with one's self. In self competition the student competes against past test scores and previous work. Slower students can also benefit from self-competition because they can work at their own pace without the threat of comparison with other students.

3. A third kind of scholastic challenge is competition between student groups. This kind of competition promotes cooperation as well as competition. When students are working together against another group, they work towards a common goal and yet they can use their individual talents. In this situation the good student must help the poorer

student so that the whole team will benefit.

**Competition has  
several benefits.**

1. Competition brings out different talents in different students and allows those talents to develop.

Competition helps students recognize that they are not all exactly the same. Each one possesses his or her own individual talents. Competitive games will show them where they fit in the classroom. Some will be better in the spelling bees and math flash card games but will not do so well in the sentence diagramming contests or Bible games.

2. Competition between students helps to make learning interesting and stimulating. Competitive games break the monotony of the classroom routine. These games stimulate the students by causing them to concentrate their energies to achieve a higher level of success than their opponents. The spelling bee adds the motivation needed to memorize the correct spelling of the word or learn the correct spelling of the word by assigning the correct letters to the sounds. A new competitive game, *GLOBAL PURSUIT*, produced by the National Geographic Society, will help students learn many geography facts.

3. Competition produces a lift in the winner's morale and encourages him to continue working. Competition can also help the "loser" to work at eliminating the causes for his "losing." That, in turn, will also help to produce a "lift" in the "loser's" morale.

4. When competitive games are used for review of test materials, and everyone enters into the review, they can have a beneficial effect on the quality of work done by the entire class.

Although competition can have the negative result of humiliating others, this tendency must be recognized and controlled in the Christian classroom. The task of the Christian teacher is to give positive leadership to his or her students so that they will not attempt to hurt others. Instead they must be helped to develop and practice the Christian virtues of meekness and kindness. The student must learn more and more to love the neighbor as he loves himself.

One might argue that competition makes it impossible for a student to practice the Christian virtue of consideration for the neighbor and also strive for excellence. For the Christian the purpose in winning the game is not to see the other person suffer. The purpose in playing the game well and winning is to use the talents that the Lord gives to the

participant. If he does this and also plays so well that he wins in the competition, he must learn and practice the Christian virtues spoken of previously. It is the responsibility of the student to learn that winning is not the only thing. He must learn that winning is only part of the game, really a very small and comparatively unimportant part of the game.

The Scriptures recognize that in this life there are winners and losers. In order for one to win he must strive for the prize. The prize for which he must strive is not a carnal prize but is the prize of the high calling which we have in Christ Jesus. In Philippians 3:14 we read, "I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus."

In I Corinthians 9:24-25 the apostle Paul says it this way: "Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize? So run, that ye may obtain. And every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a corruptible crown; but we an incorruptible."

We can compete in the classroom but the competition must not take us away from our main calling in life. It must serve to equip us and make us more qualified to do that which we are called to do — *"Fear God, keep His commandments, and enjoy Him forever."* ■■■

# Academic Competition - No

Doug DeBoer and Deane Wassink

Academic competition recognizes students for achieving certain goals or certain heights of learning. It is supposed to be a motivational factor for a student. It usually “puts everyone in the same boat” with no handicaps for ability as in golf or bowling. Because of that I think that academic competition can be more harmful than good. It can be the cause of students having the wrong concept of what makes studies worthwhile and successful.

With academic competition you must have a winner and a loser, otherwise you wouldn’t call it “competition.” Too often we give the laurels to the winners and not much to the losers. Don’t we then give the impression that winning counts more than losing? Isn’t the winning student viewed as more valuable than the losing student?

The problem with all of this is that God doesn’t reward us on the basis of how we compare to others. He rewards us based on what we’ve done with what He has given. So why should we reward students differently? We tend to base our awards solely on

what students accomplish instead of on what they have been given to work with and then manage to accomplish. One example of this would be the honor roll. Only those with the highest grades are given this honor. What about the student with limited ability who works as hard as he can and receives C’s? Sorry, you are not “honored.” We issue a very loud statement that says you have accomplished more if you have B’s and A’s. It is good that you have tried and thus have C’s, but you’re not publicly recognized. It is obviously not as much of an accomplishment.

When we demand the same high level of achievement, from all students, in order to be recognized, we’re telling them that the achievement is what counts — not the getting there. We are threatening the intrinsic satisfaction of knowing you’ve done your best. Self-competition we definitely need. But academic competition which includes all students — is that proper?

Would it be fair to ask an experienced carpenter and an electrician each to build a china cabinet, and then award the experienced

carpenter for building a superior cabinet? That is what we do with some types of academic competition. We are forcing all students to compete in areas in which some of them are simply not going to succeed. They are not working with the same abilities or tools. Is such competition going to motivate anyone? Instead we must work with each child to set his own goals. Then we will have students that achieve. Students who achieve are students who see their studies as worthwhile. They will actually enjoy school. Then students will recognize that God has given differing abilities, and success comes when we have used that ability to its fullest.

That's the idea that I want in the classroom. I don't want the idea that only high marks and only college bound students are noteworthy. Let's not force all students to compete with one another. We would never force an uncoordinated child to play interscholastic sports. Why do we force students into feeling the pressure of academic competition? Satisfaction, success, and motivation in academics may be found in competition, but let's be careful how we use it.

A number of practical suggestions can be made with respect to teaching that builds up all the students and avoids improper academic competition.

In the first place, we must

create a classroom environment where every child feels valuable for who he is, a precious covenant child with important gifts that must be developed, rather than for his accomplishment in academic scores. A teacher can do this by making positive comments on a regular basis to all of the students. So often we fall into the trap of creating a negative classroom environment. Though control must be maintained we do great harm to those students whom we frequently criticize for their misbehavior or lack of accomplishments. A public comment of appreciation would do much to bolster the student who is struggling.

In the second place, we should do things in class in which a student who is not academically talented can do well and feel good about. Once we get to know the students we should seek out ways to make all of the students feel like valuable, contributing members of the classroom. Even if a child's "claim to fame" is that he has supplied the class with some raw material for an art project, he feels as if he has an important place in the classroom.

Another suggestion is that we must be careful that the review games we use in the classroom build up all the students rather than only a few "winners." One sad event that is frequently repeated is that the children choose

their own teams for a game. There are always one or two children, usually the same ones, who are left to be the last ones whom no one wants on their team. A variation of this is that the same children always are the first ones to have to sit down or stand aside for missing their question during a game. The child soon resigns himself to being a loser after that kind of repeated public humiliation. We must set up games to review the material without setting up some students as the "smartest" and putting down others as the "dumbest."

I am reminded of a "road race" game I once used to motivate children to read. Tags were

placed in a row around the room to represent the number of pages the students read. From a motivation point of view many students really read a lot of books in order to stay in the race. However, there were a few poor readers who had to come into class every day and be humiliated that they had hardly left the starting line. In hindsight, perhaps I could have changed the race to a voluntary event or even somehow represented improvement rather than accomplishment.

All the children entrusted to our care are important in God's sight. We do well to convey that truth in our classroom.



## READERS' FORUM

May 13, 1988

*Perspectives in Covenant  
Education*

Don Doezema, Editor  
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Dear Don,

Having just received the Spring 1988 issue of *Perspectives*, I take this opportunity to express my wife's and my appreciation for

this fine magazine. There is good material for Marilyn as a teacher and for both of us as parents. The articles are instructive, stimulating, and interesting.

May God give you and your staff grace to continue this important work on behalf of the cause of Protestant Reformed covenant education.

Cordially in Christ,  
Prof. Robert D. Decker