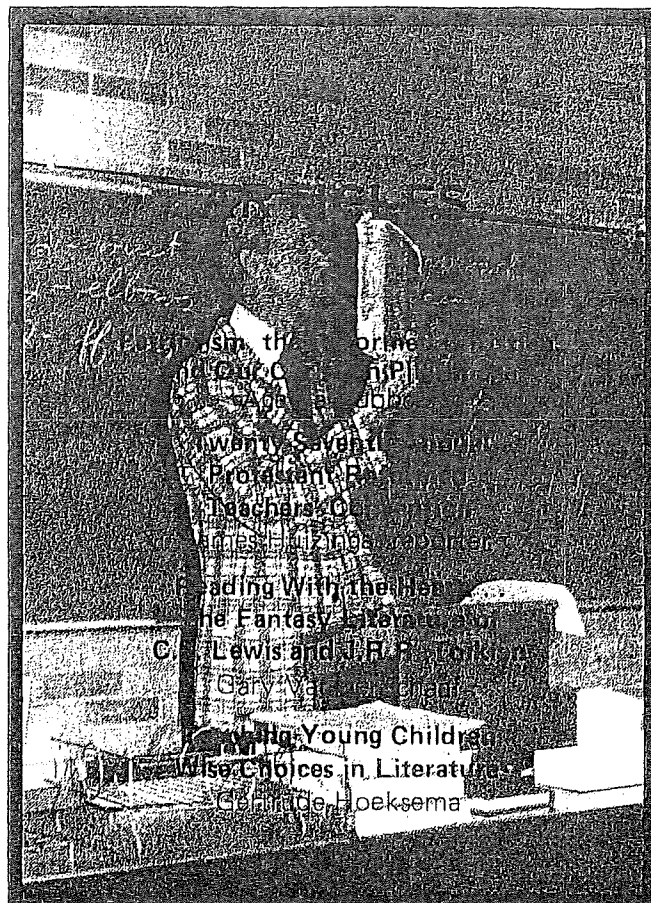


# PERSPECTIVES IN COVENANT EDUCATION



WINTER

1982

# PERSPECTIVES IN COVENANT EDUCATION

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## STATEMENT OF PURPOSE:

**Perspectives in Covenant Education** is a journal regulated and published tri-annually, in September, January, and May by the Protestant Reformed Teachers' Institute. The purpose of this magazine, in most general terms, is to advance the cause of distinctively Christian education as it is conceived in the Protestant Reformed community. More specifically, the magazine is intended to serve as an encouragement and an inducement toward individual scholarship, and a medium for the development of distinctive principles and methods of teaching. The journal is meant to be a vehicle of communication: a vehicle of communication, not only within the profession, but within the Protestant Reformed community and within the Christian community in general.

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## FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK. . .



by Agatha Lubbers

This winter issue of *Perspectives* is devoted to a review of the activities of the Protestant Reformed Teachers' Institute Convention that was held in November at Covenant Christian High School. Mr. James Huizinga served as the reporter at the convention and your editor functioned as photographer of the events at the convention.

Two of the articles appearing in this issue of the *Perspectives* were presented originally as papers for two of the sectionals of the Convention.

Gary VanDerSchaaf, junior high teacher at the Adams Street Protestant Reformed Christian School examines the place of the fantasy literature of C.S. Lewis and J.R.R. Tolkien as part of the repertoire of literary offerings in the Christian Schools. In his article, "Reading with the Heart. . .The Fantasy Literature of C.S. Lewis and J.R.R. Tolkien" he sees this form of fantasy as having a legitimate place in the curricular offerings of our Christian Schools. He concludes his article on this note:

Whatever methods we finally use, let us all decide to make a greater effort to involve our students with fantasy literature.

Gertrude Hoeksema, first grade teacher at Adams Street Protestant Reformed Christian School spoke at one of the sectionals on the topic "Teaching Young Children Wise Choices in Literature." Among several other important points, she states the following:

We are guiding our children in critical, independent choice, for soon they must achieve independence through sanctified guidance.

"Patriotism, the Reformed Christian, and Our Christian Pilgrimage" is an article that is fitting for this time of the year. The month of February is often a month when we especially think of those men who were important in the early history of our nation. A proper approach toward the teaching and practice of our respect for government is the burden of this article. □

# PATRIOTISM, THE REFORMED CHRISTIAN, AND OUR CHRISTIAN PILGRIMAGE

On October 7, 1981, I spoke to the students of Covenant Christian High School on this topic. In a somewhat revised form I have prepared this paper from the notes I used for that chapel speech.

## PATRIOTISM: WHAT IS IT?

During the course of the year certain days are designated for special festivities to remember important people and to recall significant events in the history of the United States of America. Days called Columbus Day, Independence Day, and Lincoln's Birthday are only a few of our national holidays. These national holidays elicit a feeling of national pride and gratitude which we call patriotism.

The Scottish poet, Sir Walter Scott, has said it well.

Breathes there the man with soul so dead  
Who never to himself hath said,  
"This is my own, my native land!"  
Whose heart hath ne'er within him burned  
As home his footsteps he hath turned  
From wandering on a foreign strand?

Patriotism — what is it? *The Oxford Universal Dictionary* says,

A patriot is one who exerts himself to promote the well-being of his country; one who maintains and defends his country's freedom or rights.

Patriotism or patriot is derived from a Greek word which means "of one's fathers" or "one's fatherland."

The implication of all this is that one who is patriotic is faithful to his homeland because it is the land of his heritage. One of the anthems extolling America says it well,

My country! 'tis of thee,  
Sweet land of liberty,  
Of thee I sing;  
Land where my fathers died!  
Land of the Pilgrims' pride  
From every mountain side  
Let freedom ring!

Patriotism today seems to be outmoded. But who of us despite the pervasive cynicism of the times is not grateful for the freedom that we still experience in our homeland. We need not fear reprisal and repression because of our religious beliefs, although we see times coming when this will not be true.

Those who have travelled abroad have experienced the sensation of happiness for a fatherland — a country such as ours. Although all is not right in the country, the attitude that we Christian teachers and parents must adopt is one which supports the country in which we live and teach. Christian young people must be taught a proper attitude of respect for our country, for its symbols, and its institutions.

The apostle Peter writing to the strangers and pilgrims of his day says also to us, "Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake" (I Peter 2:13). He was in reality saying, "Be obedient, don't be a treasonist, be patriotic!"

Specifically that means that we give praise to God for our homeland and nation. God has caused us to spend our three-score years and ten or our four-score years in these U.S. of America. Christian Schools exercising privileges granted by the Constitution of the U.S. of America must teach properly the patriotism that Reformed Christians ought to exercise.

#### WHAT MUST OUR ATTITUDE BE TOWARD OUR NATION?

This question is a basic and an important question. Reformed Christians always have asked this question. During the tumultuous days of the Reformation disagreements arose between the Anabaptists and other leaders of the Reformation. Article 36 of the Netherlands Confession states that "we detest the Anabaptists and other seditious people, and in general all those who reject the higher powers and magistrates, and would subvert justice, introduce community of goods, and confound that decency and good order, which God hath established among men."

Our attitude in the first place must be one which gives evidence that we are filled with gratitude to our heavenly Father who cares for us through the agency of government. John Calvin says in the *Institutes*, that the "first duty of subjects towards their magistrates is to entertain the most honourable sentiments of their function, which they know to be a jurisdiction delegated to them from God, and on that account to esteem and reverence them as God's ministers and vice-regents." (Chapter 20, Book IV.)

God uses government and national institutions to care for us. Our

attitude ought to be like the attitude that Jeremiah recommended to the captives in pagan Babylon in the sixth century B.C.

And seek the peace of the city whither I have caused you to be carried away captives, and pray unto the Lord for it: for in the peace thereof shall ye have peace (Jeremiah 29:7).

The captives from Judah were in Babylon. This was not their earthly fatherland. They were far from home and perhaps far from loved ones. They sang the songs of Zion in a strange land. "By the rivers of Babylon. . . we wept when we remembered Zion" (Psalm 137:1).

The letter of Jeremiah to the captives was an instructive letter. News had reached Jeremiah in Jerusalem that false prophets among the exiles were prophesying a speedy return to Palestine. Jeremiah was called to tell these exiles that the captivity would not be brief but that it would continue another 60 years. This meant that many of the optimistic captives who thought of an early return to Canaan were listening to prophecies that would never occur. Many would never return to Palestine, they would die in Babylon, and they would never again see Jerusalem.

The Babylonian captives were told to *live* in the land. They were to build houses, plant gardens, and live a normal life as believers in a strange land. They were to make that land their own land. Calvin in the *Institutes of the Christian Religion* says,

Here we see the Israelites, after having been stripped of all their property, torn from their habitations, driven into exile, and forced into a miserable servitude, were commanded to pray for the prosperity of their conqueror; not in the same manner in which we are all commanded to pray for our persecutors; but that his kingdom might be preserved in safety and tranquillity, and that they might live in prosperity under him. (Chapter 20, Book IV.)

We conclude, therefore, that we too are comprehended in the admonition and instruction of Jeremiah. Although we live in somewhat different circumstances the message of Jeremiah to the captives of Judah comes to us too, because the principles of proper behavior toward government are changeless. Just as the captives from Palestine were called to pray for the peace of the city so we are called to pray for the peace of the city. We are not called to be world shakers and world reformers but we are called to gratefully serve God as we serve the country in which God calls us to live. "For in the peace thereof shall ye have peace."

In the second place we should pray properly for the peace of our country. Our prayer for our country, which evidences a proper patriotic

attitude, should not be a carnal prayer. It may not be a prayer, which is like the prayers of the world, but it must be a proper prayer which is rooted in the attitude that we desire the church to have a quiet and peaceful life so that the gospel preaching by the messengers of mercy may have free course in the world and in our nation. Such praying will evidence that we submit quietly to the will of God in all things.

In I Timothy 2:1-3 we read,

I exhort therefore, that first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men; for kings, and for all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty. For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour.

This instructive exhortation sent by the apostle Paul to youthful Timothy about seven centuries after the admonition of Jeremiah to the captives in Babylon teaches the New Testament church how to pray properly. During those days in which Timothy was bishop of Ephesus the church was in danger of persecution in the pagan Roman Empire. Did the church and its membership resist, or was she properly patriotic? Once again the church was reminded that she must pray for the peace of the city and the peace of the government for in the peace of the government the church shall have peace and the gospel shall have free course. This is well pleasing – “good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour.”

In the third place our attitude toward the government and toward our country will be observed by our behaviour as citizens. We should be the best possible citizens. The communities in which you and I are called to live should be able to see in you and me that we are the best citizens that the community has.

In Titus 3:1-2 Paul writes as follows:

Put them in mind to be subject to principalities and powers, to obey magistrates, to be ready to every good work, to speak evil of no man, to be no brawlers, and gentle, shewing all meekness to all men.

The classic passage describing the attitude that Christians must have toward government is found in Romans 13:1-3,

Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers (government). For there is no power but of God; the powers that be are ordained of God. Whosoever resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God: and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation. For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil. Wilt thou then not be afraid of the power? do that which is good, and thou shalt have praise of the same.

From the foregoing it ought to be obvious that the Christian has the only correct motivation for true patriotism. He is patriotic for God's



sake. He is patriotic not merely because he has a kind of earthly love for country and for fatherland but he practices true patriotism, devotion for country, because he knows that all earthly powers exist for the sake of the coming of the eternal kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ.

The believer who loves much because he has been forgiven much shows by his behavior and confession that he understands what Solomon says in Proverbs 8:15.

By me kings reign, and princes decree justice. By me princes rule, and nobles, even all the judges of the earth.

Our patriotism is not rooted in a belief in the principles of democracy. We respect government not because government is so beneficent, or is so responsive to the will of the people. Our attitude is far from that expressed in the phrase, "government of the people, for the people, and by the people." Our patriotism and respect for government and country is not rooted in some kind of social contract with the governed. No, rather *government is* ordained by God. Daniel says,

God changeth the times and the seasons: he removeth kings and setteth up kings. Daniel 2:21.

... the Most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will. Daniel 4:17.

We show respect and are properly patriotic because "it is the bounden duty of every one, of what state, quality, or condition soever he may be, to subject himself to the magistrates; to pay tribute, to show due honor and respect to them, and to obey them in all things which are not repugnant to the Word of God." Netherlands Confession, Article 36.

Our patriotism is rooted in the firm belief that it is the bounden duty of everyone to honor, love and show fidelity to all in authority over me since it pleases God to govern us by their hand (cf. Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 39).

## WHAT ABOUT PATRIOTISM AND OUR CHRISTIAN PILGRIMAGE?

The final question that we must ask and answer is the one stated above, "What about Patriotism and our Christian Pilgrimage?" One might justifiably ask the question, it would seem, whether our concern with national fidelity will not detract from the fidelity that we ought to have for the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ. Would it not be better for us to be more concerned with our heavenly country?

These are legitimate questions and they deserve an answer. The answer we give will determine our spiritual attitude in all these things.

In I Corinthians 7:30-31, Paul the apostle talks to the Corinthian church, a church that he loved dearly although he exhorted it severely.

And they that weep, as though they wept not; and they that rejoice, as though they rejoiced not; and they that buy, as though they possessed not; and they that use this world, as not abusing it: for the fashion of this world passeth away.

In this particular section of the book of I Corinthians Paul stressed the spiritual attitude that we should have as citizens of this world. Among other spiritual lessons Paul says, "and they that buy, as though they possessed not." Paul is really saying that the members of Christ's church own without possessing. They own but they do not make that which they own their treasure. They that use this world do not abuse. This means simply that the members of the church do not use wrongly because abuse is improper use.

This passage from the Scripture describes for us the life style of the church here and now. If we are to follow the directives and principles of Holy Scripture, our patriotism and our love of country is always set in the perspective of the spiritual love that we have for the far greater country which we one day will have. That gives a unique dimension and direction to our submission to the God-ordained government of the state.

The apostle Peter shows that obedience to God determines our attitude toward the commands of men. In Acts 5:29 Peter and the other apostles said, "We ought to obey God rather than men." This does not mean, however, that Peter advocated anarchy and that he advocated an unpatriotic attitude. The same apostle writes to the elect strangers scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia, as follows:

Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake; whether it be to the king as supreme; or unto governors, as unto them that are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and for the praise of them that do well (I Peter 2:13, 14).

We will be patriotic but we will not be patriotic if our patriotism means that we must sin against the commands of God. We, too, will obey God rather than man.

Our spiritual attitude will be like that of the great hero of faith — Moses, who could have been sinfully patriotic to Egypt. He had it all. It looked as if he were going to be the king of Egypt. Instead he was willing to suffer affliction with the people of God rather than enjoy

the pleasures of sin for a season. He esteemed the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt. He had respect unto the recompense of the reward. He esteemed the reproach of Christ greater riches than an imposing pyramid in Egypt. He esteemed the riches of Christ more respectable than to have his body carried around the world as one of the great specimens of history. He did not fear the wrath of the king (cf. Hebrews 11:24-27).

We sing and we should sing our national songs with enthusiasm and with respect. This shows our attitude of respect toward the government which God in His providence has given us. However, as we sing these national anthems we sing them in the full awareness that we have other important kingdom anthems like these:

I'm a pilgrim and I'm a stranger  
I can tarry, I can tarry but a night  
Do not detain me for I am going to  
where the fountains are ever flowing.

I'm a pilgrim and I'm a stranger  
I can tarry, I can tarry but a night.

The words of a paraphrase of Psalm 39:12 appear as follows:

I am a stranger here,  
dependent on Thy grace,  
A pilgrim as my fathers were,  
with no abiding place.

The writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews makes it possible for us to view our calling as citizens in this world while we are looking for the world to come.

Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear (Hebrews 11:28).

Agatha Lubbers

★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

“A good teacher is not made in a few short years. But improvement is bound to result if serious, conscientious effort in the direction of betterment is perseveringly made.”

— C.B. Eavey

★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

TWENTY SEVENTH ANNUAL  
PROTESTANT REFORMED  
TEACHERS' CONVENTION



Covenant Christian High School, Grand Rapids, Michigan, was the site of the 27th annual Protestant Reformed Teachers' Convention. Over 40 Protestant Reformed teachers gathered for two busy days filled with speeches and presentations. We are grateful that God in His Grace makes possible these days of fellowship and professional growth.

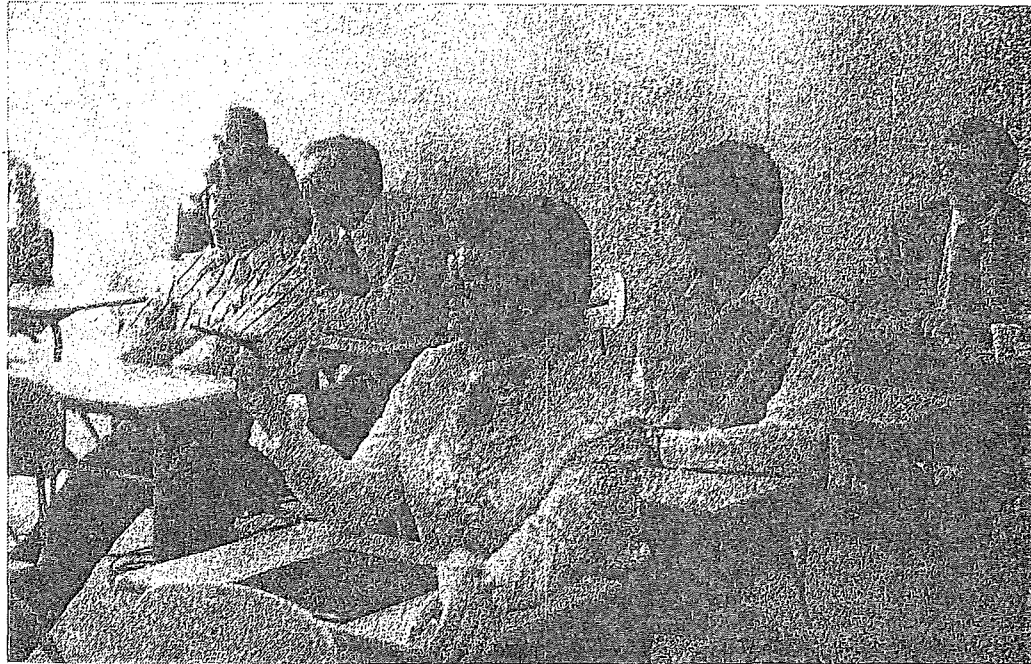
## CONVENTION, 1981

### CONVENTION PICTURE

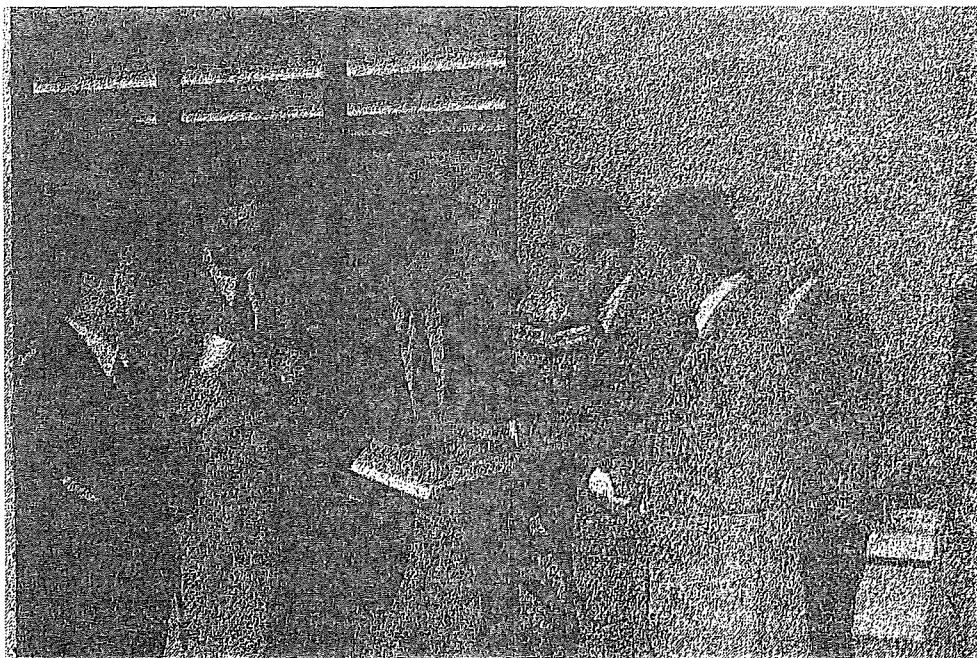


The beautiful fall weather was just right for an outdoor picture. Pictured here, left to right, are:

Don Doezema, Jim Huizinga, Rick Noorman, John Zandstra, Fred Hanko,  
 Jerry Kuiper, Darrel Huisken, Cornie Doezema, John Buiters,  
 Cal Kalsbeck, Tim Orme, Peter VanDer Schaaf, Antoinette Quenga,  
 Candace Hoeksema, Grace Faber, Winifred Koole,  
 Dave Harbach, Ron Koole, Melanie VerHey, Sandi Kooiman, Gertrude Hoeksema,  
 Gladys Koole, Hulda Kuiper, Lois Kregel, Marilyn Decker, Jane Petersen,  
 Skip Hunter, Vern Huber, MaryBeth Lubbers, Judi Doezema, Marilyn Schipper,  
 Ignacio Quenga, Roderick Kreuzer, Judy Booth, Mariel Petersen,  
 Jeanette Van Egdome, Anita DeJong, Agatha Lubbers,  
 Joel Sugg, Ken Feenstra, Gary VanDerSchaaf, Lamm Lubbers,  
 Ed Karsemeyer, Harry Langerak, Barb Hunter.



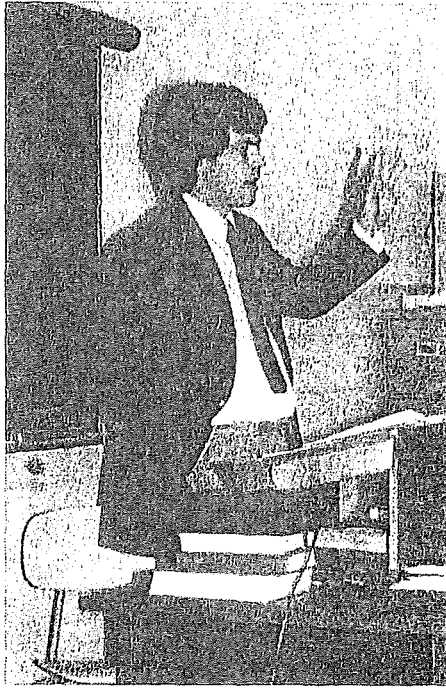
More than 12 separate presentations were made throughout the two-day convention. Generous amounts of time were given for active participation and discussion.



One of the most enjoyable features of a convention is the informal discussion that takes place after the speech.



## CONVENTION SPEAKERS



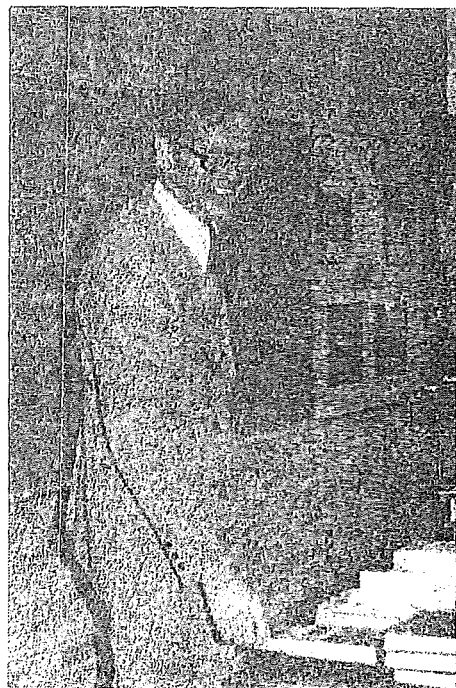
Gary VanDerSchaaf gave a presentation on "Fantasy Literature."



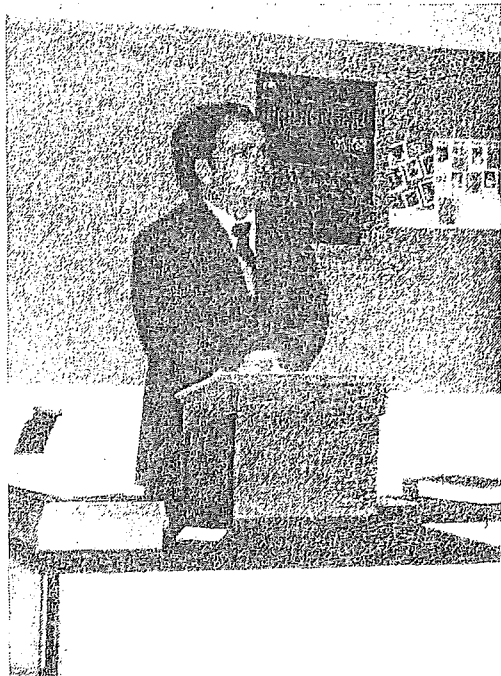
Rick Noorman spoke on "P.E. and Play Theory."



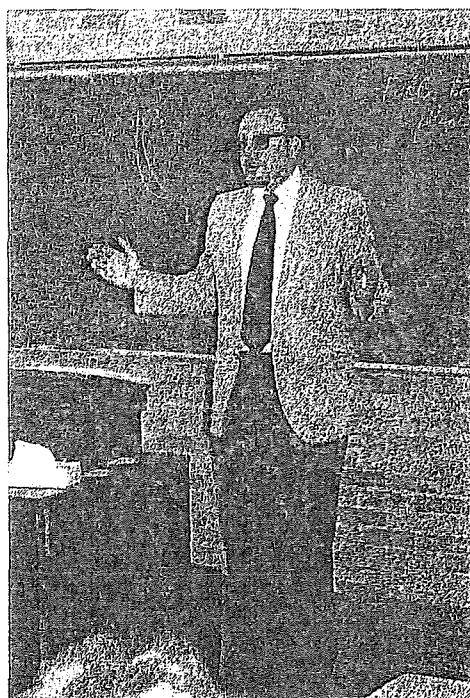
Gertrude Hoeksema gave a primary sectional on "Wise Choices for Literature."



Fred Hanco talked about a problem in history: "When Do You Throw the Book Out: Textbook Selection."



Rev. Haak, pastor of Southeast Protestant Reformed Church, delivered the keynote address. His speech, "Telling the Greatness of God's Strength," was based on Psalm 78:4-7.



Gerald Kuiper, who directs choir at Covenant Christian High School, presented "Directing Techniques For Elementary Teachers."



A history "Show and Tell" offered several new ideas for teachers of history. Joel Sugg, from Katy, Texas, is seen demonstrating a device for teaching chronology.



## RETIRING INSTITUTE OFFICERS



The Institute Board is responsible for planning and conducting the annual convention. Retiring officers from left to right are:

Harry Langerak, Vice-president; Gary VanDerSchaaf, Treasurer;  
Peter VanDerSchaaf, President; John Buiter, Vice-all; Gladys Koole,  
Secretary.

## OFFICERS FOR 1982



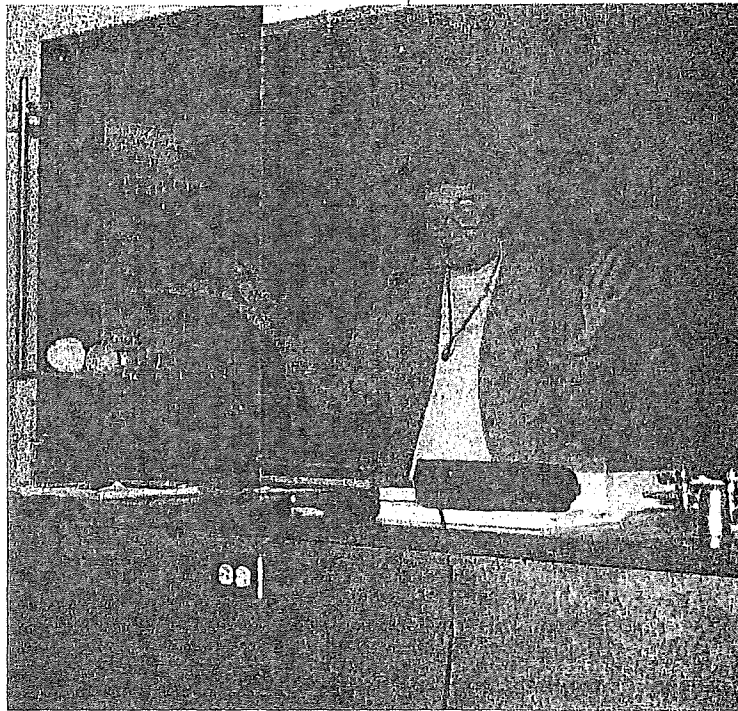
Plans for the next convention begin immediately. New officers from left to right are: Jim Huizinga, treasurer; Hulda Kuiper, secretary; Dave Harbach, president; Jerry Kuiper, vice-president; Darrel Huisken, vice-all.



Convention time is time for Christian fellowship. Group singing is an integral part of devotional activities.



Some business has to be conducted in private.



Winifred Koole is a teacher at Hope Protestant Reformed Christian School. She is seen here participating in a sectional entitled, "Hands on Science."

The 1981 Teachers' Convention was a successful one. The teachers who were able to attend enjoyed the opportunity to see old friends and to discuss common matters of the profession. The various speeches and presentations that were given throughout the convention provided much stimulation and afforded many insights that the teachers could take back to their own classrooms. Teachers' conventions such as this one are inspirational. The group singing, the Christian fellowship, the keynote address given by Rev. Haak, the high quality presentations given by fellow teachers — all these things remind us of how good the Lord has been. We go back to our classrooms with greater thankfulness for the cause of covenant instruction and with increased dedication and zeal for the important task that God has given each of us to do.

# READING WITH THE HEART . . .

## THE FANTASY LITERATURE OF C.S. LEWIS AND J.R.R. TOLKIEN

The last battle is over. The great door is shut. Old Narnia is no more. Beneath a cloudless sky of eternal blue, through a countryside whose grass and trees and mountaintops are forever green, walk the kings and queens, the noble lords and ladies of Narnia. Above them flies the great eagle Farsight, and beside them trots Jewel the Unicorn.

The company is happy, but bewildered. All have just seen their country, their world, destroyed. And yet, aren't those mountains familiar? Didn't that forest, didn't those hills mark Narnia's southern border? Yes! cries the company, yes! Those are the mountains, that is the forest, those are the hills! But somehow it is not the same; somehow, it is all different. "It seems," says one lord, "more like the *real thing* than old Narnia":

It is hard to explain how this sunlit land was different from the old Narnia. . . perhaps you will get some idea of it, if you think like this. You may have been in a room in which there was a window that looked out on a lovely bay of the sea or a green valley that wound away among mountains. And in the wall of that room opposite to the window there may have been a looking glass. And as you turned away from the window you suddenly caught sight of that sea or that valley, all over again, in the looking glass. And the sea in the mirror, or the valley in the mirror, were in one sense just the same as the real ones: yet at the same time they were somehow different — deeper, more wonderful, more like places in a story: in a story you have never heard but very much want to know.

The difference between the old Narnia and the new Narnia was like that. The new one was a deeper country: every rock and flower and blade of grass looked as if it meant more. I can't describe it better than that: if you get there, you will know what I mean.

It was the Unicorn who summed up what everyone was feeling. He stamped his right fore-hoof on the ground and neighed and then cried:

"I have come home at last! This is my real country! I belong here. This is the land I have been looking for all my life, though I never knew it till now. The reason why we loved the old Narnia is that it sometimes looked a little like this. Come further up, come further in!"<sup>1</sup>

For a little while now, let us journey together "further up and further in" into the fantastical worlds of C.S. Lewis and J.R.R. Tolkien. We will examine the ideas which gave form and content to their worlds; we will see what place these worlds have in our classrooms; and we will see how we might lead those in our care to share with us a glimpse,

not of this world, but of a truer country, a deeper land, our real and final home.

Before we begin, I must make one distinction. I distinguish between "high" and "low" fantasy, and the differentiating question to be asked is this: is God present? Some critics want this question to be "Are the gods present?" but this I find unsatisfactory: it makes every possible difference to me whether the story points me to Heaven or to Olympus. Examples of high fantasy are few: some of the works of George MacDonald, *The Wind in the Willows*, *The Lord of the Rings*, *The Chronicles of Narnia*, possibly a few of the works of M. L'Engle, and, a recent addition to the list, *The Book of the Dun Cow* by Walter Wangerin, Jr. To be sure, a fantasy may be "low" and still be an excellent story. Nonetheless, I think the distinction between high and low fantasy is a useful one in helping us choose fantasy literature for our classroom.

I have said that both *The Chronicles* and *The Lord of the Rings* are high fantasy. God is present. The questions then are these: why, for Lewis and Tolkien, is God there, and once there, what is He doing? To answer these questions, we must understand Tolkien's and Lewis' ideas of myth, story, and fantasy.

It is September, 1931. The place is Magdalen College, Oxford. Three men walk in the English twilight. Suddenly, one man speaks:

"But all myths are lies, and therefore worthless."

"No," replies one of the other men. "They are not lies."

Lewis stares at Tolkien. Tolkien continues, "Man is not ultimately a liar. He may pervert his thought into lies, but he comes from God, and it is from God that he draws his ultimate ideals. Therefore . . . not merely the abstract thought of man but also his *imaginative inventions* must originate with God, and must in consequence reflect something of eternal truth . . . . In making a myth, in practising 'mythopoeia' and peopling the world with elves and dragons and goblins, a story teller, or 'sub-creator'. . . is actually fulfilling God's purpose, and reflecting a splintered fragment of the true light."<sup>2</sup>

The three men — Lewis, Tolkien, and Hugo Dyson, a Christian friend — talk late into the night. Tolkien exhorts Lewis (who deeply loves the great myths) to think of the gospels as myth, but as *true myth*, as myth become fact. Do you have to analyse, to probe with rational argument the old myths in order to enjoy them, to know what they "mean?" No, of course not, says Tolkien. You enjoy them and understand them almost intuitively. Cannot you do the same for the story of Christ as you do for the great mythic stories? God is mythopoeic, says Tolkien, and therefore you must become mythopathic.

Tolkien goes home at 3 A.M. Dyson leaves an hour later. Twelve

days later Lewis writes to a friend, "I have just passed from believing in God to believing in Christ."

Now there it is, the answer to both our questions. Why is God in fantasy stories? Because in writing good fantasy, man is retelling a myth, and God is the source and subject of all great myth. What is God doing in a fantasy story? He is revealing Himself to man, He is leading man to Himself.

An understanding of these ideas is fundamental to any personal or classroom evaluation we make of Lewis' or Tolkien's work. For instance, why did Tolkien spend over ten years writing the over 500,000 words of his trilogy? Why all the maps of Middle Earth? Why the genealogies, the chronologies? Why the one hundred page appendix of the history of Middle Earth? There is even a complete Elvish grammar and alphabet! Why? Because Tolkien was working out his role of "sub-creator." Tolkien believed that he had to make his world so real and convincing that a reader would enter into the imaginary world and give it "primary belief," and in that condition of belief, share the author's creative process and created subject.

And are not the works of both men highly derivative? Did not both men draw heavily from Welsh, Norse, and Greek myth? Of course they did, but this is as it should be, for all myths are just retellings of the Great Story. Lewis goes so far as to say:

... all stories are waiting, somewhere, and are slowly being recovered in fragments by different human minds according to their abilities – and of course being partially spoiled in each writer by the admixture of his own mere individual invention.<sup>3</sup>

According to Lewis and Tolkien, the more original a story is, the worse it is.

Now, the Narnia series is criticized for being just too unrealistic. All those giants and fauns and dryads and marshwiggles and talking animals: it really is too much. But, *no* says Lewis, such creatures are essential: "Giants, dragons, paradises, gods, and the like are themselves the expressions of certain basic elements in man's spiritual experience. . . the words of a language that speaks the else unspeakable."<sup>4</sup>

And it does not matter that the story may not be like real life, for as Lewis says, "It may not be 'like real life' in the superficial sense: but it sets before us an image of what reality may well be like at some more central region."<sup>5</sup>

*The Chronicles* have also been attacked on the basis of style and structure. For instance, much of the children's dialog is most unchild-like, and throughout the novels there is little character development

and less character analysis. Furthermore, sustained detailed descriptive writing — the kind that consumes page after page in Tolkien's work — is on the whole missing.

But, Lewis would answer, all these criticisms are quite beside the point. First of all, story is not primarily concerned with characters, neither their psychological growth nor their psychological motivations. Story is primarily concerned with *what happens*, with what the characters *do* and with what is *done* to them. Secondly, whatever power story or myth has lies not in the cleverness or stylistic expertise of the author. Lewis contended that a third or fourth rate novelist could be a first-rate fantasist because fantasy, story, and myth work independently of the written form they take. Myth and fantasy work by triggering in man the recollection and appreciation of truth inherent in all men as they are creatures of God.

Therefore, the carefully contrived inner consistency, the attention to detail that marks Tolkien's work is missing from Lewis'. Lewis insisted (to Tolkien's dismay: Tolkien disliked the Narnia stories) that it was the story itself which captivated and inspired, not the manner in which the story was presented:

Form and content (in poetry) can be separated only by a false abstraction. But in a myth — in a story where the mere pattern of events is all that matters — this is not so. Any means of communication whatever which succeeds in lodging those events in our imagination has, as we say, done the trick.<sup>6</sup>

And this is true of myth because "Myth does not essentially exist in *words* at all. In poetry the words are the body and the 'theme' or 'content' is the soul. But in myth the imagined events are the body and something inexpressible is the soul. . ."<sup>7</sup>

We have seen now the philosophy behind the creation of Narnia, Perelandra, and Middle Earth. It is a very interesting philosophy, and its appeal is evidenced by its widespread acceptance. It is, however, a very wrong philosophy.

Its fundamental error involves a misconception of what the image of God in man includes. Man's imagination and his imaginative inventions are not based in the post-fall remnants of the image of God in man. In perfection, before the fall, that image consisted of man's ability to live in righteousness and holiness before his God. That ability was totally abrogated by the fall. Man's creative abilities and his ability to communicate through words is due to his creation as a rational being, not as an image bearer. Man's rational abilities, though they are greatly impaired since the fall, he still retains; but they are, apart from regenerating grace, completely under the domination of sin.



Man's ability to "subcreate" then does not *per se*, as Tolkien argued, mean that the creative impetus and created object come from God or in any way participate in His Godhead. Far from it; the imaginations of man are evil continually, and Tolkien notwithstanding, the Psalmist still declares that all men are liars.

All men, apart from God, *are* liars. We must have none of this "noble pagan" nonsense, none of this "splintered fragment of the true light." Scripture does not allow it.

The words of Paul are especially helpful here. Paul, who had firsthand, everyday experience with the great myths, never tried to work with them. If Tolkien is right, if pagan myths are never just lies and always contain something of the truth, we should expect that Paul might have used them as a starting point, as common ground, from which to present the unfragmented light of Christ. But this Paul never does. On Mars Hill, surrounded by statues of the great mythic figures, Paul does not say, "See, you already have a belief in some gods. Can't you just transfer that belief to one God?" No, Paul tells his audience that these gods represent no truth, but only the sin-darkened ignorance of their vain imaginations.

Scripture plainly tells us the origin of pagan myth. Far from being "good dreams" sent by God to reveal Himself to men, Romans 1:18-25 tells us

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness; because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath shewed it unto them. For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse: because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools, and changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and fourfooted beasts, and creeping things. Wherefore God also gave them up to uncleanness through the lusts of their own hearts, to dishonor their own bodies between themselves: Who changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature, more than the Creator, who is blessed for ever. Amen.

Clearly then, pagan myth is a corruption, an idolatry, a lie, whose source is not God but Satan, the father of all lies.

Nevertheless, although the works of Lewis and Tolkien owe much to pagan myth, their work *is not* pagan myth. What is it? We are all aware that there are among God's people those who believe that the fantasy works of these men are blasphemy, and as such have no place in our



homes or schools. It does no good in the kingdom to simply ascribe to such people the intelligence and sensitivity of a potted fern — as we are sometimes tempted to do — and teach the stories anyway. For the sake of all concerned and primarily for the sake of God's own truth we must determine the true nature of these stories, their true value, their true power, what they are and what they are not, what they cannot do, and what they can.

We must first determine whether or not high fantasy is a legitimate field of Christian endeavor. If it is irreverent to picture Christ as a lion, if it is blasphemous to use a hobbit, a demi-man, and a wizard as Christ-figures, then we can stop right here. I do not believe such portrayal to be blasphemous, and therefore I will continue.

God reveals Himself in His word and in His creation. In both, He reveals Himself, His power, His characteristics, His Godhead, through images, concrete images in nature, word images in Scripture. Each winter God covers parts of the world with a white blanket so that He can say to us "I will cover your sins and make them white as snow." At the same time, He causes other parts of the globe to enjoy perpetual summer so that He might say, "I am the eternal changeless One." God builds mountains so that His Son might be the Solid Rock. He gives marriage so that Christ and His church might be bride and groom. He even gives chickens so that the Saviour might gather us under His wings. The images in nature and in Scripture are countless; I am sure each of you has your favorite. The point is this: God communicates to His people in images, through metaphor and simile. And I contend that any image, or series of images, that reveals God to me, or enables me to better appreciate my Lord and His Word is not blasphemous.

Those opposed to high fantasy argue at this point that while it is God's prerogative to thus reveal Himself, it is a violation of the second commandment for man to write stories portraying God in this manner. According to this argument, Lewis and Tolkien, as well as those who enjoy these stories, are involved in the creation and (perhaps) worship of graven images.

This is a curious argument, for then we have a God Who first prohibits His people from talking about Him in images, then through inspiration moves His saints to violate that prohibition. Furthermore, I do not believe that any child of God, however young, has ever been tempted to pray to or in any other means worship a lion because he has read the Narnia series. Indeed, I should think just the opposite.

This is a crucial point, for here we can answer the challenge of image-worship and at the same time reveal the true power and value of

fantasy. Unlike other forms of literature, fantasy never has itself as ultimate object of attention. High fantasy, though it may be enjoyed on the level of a good tale, always points beyond its own fantastic images to "some more central region." For instance, a sanctified, appreciative, reader is never left in Narnia. No one called to Narnia was ever taken there to stay.

At the end of *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*, Aslan tells Edmund that he and his sister will not return to Narnia. Of course the children are saddened, and they despair of ever meeting Aslan again:

"It isn't Narnia, you know," sobbed Lucy. "It's *you*. We shan't meet *you* there. And how can we live, never meeting you?"

"But you shall meet me, dear one," said Aslan.

"Are — are you there too, Sir?" said Edmund.

"I am," said Aslan. "But there I have another name. This was the very reason why you were brought to Narnia, that by knowing me here for a little, you may know me better there."<sup>8</sup>

And that, I suggest, is the very reason why we bring our children to Narnia and Middle Earth: for is that not the point of covenant education, to know and serve God better? This is the value of high fantasy, that by turning our attention to God, it can lead us to a greater love and appreciation for Him and His Word, and for the events recorded in that Word.

Now at this juncture someone might say that as God's people we need nothing beyond His word, that Scripture is sufficient for us. In answer to this, we should notice two things. First, no one is suggesting that fantasy literature be used as a second scripture. High fantasy literature is, if you will, an aid, a help, a sign pointing to and reminding us of the real power and portent of the events recorded in Scripture. To our shame, we must admit that humanly speaking, we are often-times not impressed or excited by the great events of the Bible. We all admit that the stupendous events of Christ's life — His birth, death, resurrection — do indeed make up the most profoundly significant and deeply moving "story" the world will ever know. Yet because of repetition and the hardness of our hearts, "The Greatest Story Ever Told" does not always affect us and mean to us what it should. I believe that fantasy literature, in retelling the events of Scripture, can enable us to see anew the awesome power and earth-moving importance of those events, can send us back to Scripture with a greater understanding and appreciation of its significance. Again, I am not saying that fantasy literature is necessary for an understanding and appreciation of Scripture. I *am* saying that fantasy literature *can* help us to

appreciate the significance of Biblical events. And this leads us to the second point: that as fallen people in a fallen world, we need all the help we can get. Fantasy literature, I believe, can help.

Therefore, we should not be offended that God is in fantasy literature. I think that we should rejoice in it. All natural creation, through images, points to God; all creation, had we but eyes to see and ears to hear, tells HIS story. For centuries, these images have been incorporated into song and psalm, poem and prayer, so that these things too can tell that story. All the myriad ways we are given to praise God, to tell one another about Him, to praise Him, to enjoy Him, are blessings. His goodness to us is overwhelming! If I may use an image, not only do we get our cake, but we may eat it, too. And we may eat it all the time. So then, when we find God in fantasy literature, our reaction should not be an indignant, "What is He doing here?" but a joyful, "Of course. He is here, too!"

That God is in some fantasy stories is the source of those stories' power. It is the only reason, as I see it, that we read these stories again and again. In our secret hearts, we never tire of hearing the Story of which those stories remind us.

And now I must speak very personally. Really, there is no telling you exactly how these stories work within me or what they mean to me. Throughout his *Chronicles*, Lewis writes again and again, "It was like that. I can't explain it any better. If you don't know now, there is nothing I can do." I once thought this to be just the author's way of writing his way out of a dead end. I know better now. What Lewis in his stories is trying to express is at the core of every believer's attachment to his Lord. Lewis himself admits this is an impossible task, but for me, his images come very close to expressing "the else inexpressible."

Permit me just two examples, both from the *Chronicles*. In *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*, when the children first hear that "Aslan is on the move," a strange feeling comes over them — "like the first signs of spring, like good news." I share that feeling. I cannot read those words without thinking of Andrew running to Peter with his good news, *the* good news that God's children had waited millenia to hear: "We have found the Messias!"

And surely one of the most moving scenes in the entire *Chronicles* is found in the closing paragraphs of *The Last Battle*. Aslan has gathered the children about him and he says to them, "All of you are — as you used to call it in the shadow lands — dead." And then Aslan says to them the words that each of us must yearn to hear:

"The term is over! The holidays have begun. The dream is ended: this is the morning."

And as He spoke He no longer looked to them like a lion; but the things that began to happen after that were so great and beautiful that I cannot write them. And for us this is the end of all the stories, and we can most truly say that they all lived happily ever after. But for them it was only the beginning of the real story. All their life in this world and all their adventures in Narnia had only been the cover and the title page: now at last they were beginning Chapter One of the Great Story which no one on earth has read; which goes forever; in which every chapter is better than the one before.<sup>9</sup>

Does not every child of God long for that day, for the beginning of that Great Story? Do we all not yearn for the words of Revelation 21 to come to pass?

Thus far, I have been long on philosophy and short on practical advice. How can we best include high fantasy literature in our classrooms?

The first problem is one of exposure. Teachers in the primary and intermediate grades, include a few fantasy tales in your list of stories to read to the class. Primary teachers might have the advantage here, in that perhaps their students are not too old to be put off by the fairy-tale format. Intermediate teachers, do a little pre-reading work to uncover (or create) enthusiasm for the kind of characters and action the story holds.

Talk about the books. Try to "sell" them to the class. A teacher should always be giving book-talks, formal or informal. Include some fantasy literature in your talks.

An indirect or passive means of exposure is simply having the books around. If you have a reading corner, make sure for every Laura Ingalls Wilder you have a M. L'Engle; for every Hardy Boys, a Hobbit; for every *We Were There at the Battle of the Bulge*, an abridged *Song of Roland* or *Le Morte d'Arthur*.

I know that junior and senior high teachers get little opportunity to cover entire novels in class. If you cannot make time for an entire novel, use a few short stories, or even self-contained portions of novels. There *are* some good fantasy anthologies on the market; if you cannot afford these, put together your own collection. It is worth the effort.

And finally, read the books yourself, and let the class know you are reading them. Be seen reading them; if one of your students should ask what is so interesting, there you have a perfect opportunity to introduce someone to fantasy literature.

The second problem is "how much to make" of the literature, or

in other words, how far do we go in explaining the symbolism? Of course, the stories will be understood differently at different grade levels, and even within the same class there will be different levels of comprehension and appreciation. At all age levels, I think, it is wisest not to overdo it. Do not over-allegorize. In fantasy literature, there is never the one-for-one, tit-for-tat, correlation between “story” and “reality” that characterizes allegory. Over-allegorizing will almost certainly turn students off. Especially with younger children, remember that if the student sees nothing in the story but a good tale, that is fine. High fantasy stories are good tales and they can be enjoyed at that level. Perhaps, in a few years, when the student might read the story again, he will see the Story that works behind the words.

If you are going to discuss the stories more formally, the guidelines for all good classroom discussion apply. Take your cues from the class: base your observations and questions on their response to the story. And always tailor your questions to student level. For instance, asking fourth graders about the difference between “Magic from the beginning of time” and “Magic from *before* the beginning of time” is pointless. A better question would be, “Does Aslan’s sacrifice remind you of another sacrifice?” Answers to this question will reveal how well the students have grasped the central image of *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*. Following questions should be based on and add to that understanding.

Whatever methods we finally use, let us all decide to make a greater effort to involve our students with fantasy literature. I hope I have shown that fantasy literature is an honorable and profitable endeavor, and that it can, to a much greater degree than other types of literature, increase the student’s appreciation of his Creator’s Word and world. And that is what our work is all about. Let us use good stories so that our students will know and love the Great Story all the more.

And if you still do not know what I mean by a good story, let me try one more time to tell you. In *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*, on the isle of Coriakan the fallen star, Lucy discovers a magician’s book. As Lucy pages through the book, she finds a most unique and powerful spell:

She came to a spell “for the refreshment of the spirit.” The pictures were fewer here but more beautiful. And what Lucy found herself reading was more like a story than a spell. It went on for three pages and before she had read to the bottom of the page she had forgotten that she was reading at all. She was living in the story as if it were real, and all the pictures were real, too. When she had got to the third page and come to an end, she said, “That is the loveliest story I’ve ever read or ever shall read in my

whole life. Oh, I wish I could have gone on reading it for ten years. At least I'll read it again."

But here part of the magic of the Book came into play. You couldn't turn back. The right-handed pages, the ones ahead, could be turned; the left-handed page could not.

"Oh, what a shame!" said Lucy. "I did so want to read it again. Well, at least, I must remember it. Let's see. . .it was about. . .about. . .oh dear, its all fading away again. And even this last page is going blank. This is a very queer book. How can I have forgotten? It was about a cup and a sword and a tree and a green hill, I know that much. But I can't remember and what *shall* I do?"<sup>10</sup>

In Narnia, Lucy knows what she must do; she knows who can help her, just as in our world we too know whom to seek:

(To Aslan) "But please," said Lucy.

"Speak on, dear heart."

"Shall I ever be able to read that story again, the one I couldn't remember? Will you tell it to me, Aslan? Oh, do, do, do."

"Indeed, yes, I will tell it to you for years and years."<sup>11</sup>

For years and years and years, world without end. I cannot describe a good story better than that. If your heart hears a good story, you will know what I mean.

Gary VanDer Schaaf\*

#### FOOTNOTES

1. C.S. Lewis, *The Last Battle* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc., 1970), pp. 170-171.
2. Humphrey Carpenter, *The Inklings* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1979), p. 43.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 138.
4. C.S. Lewis, *Preface to Paradise Lost* (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1942), p. 17.
5. C.S. Lewis, *Of Other Worlds: Essays and Stories* (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1966), p. 15.
6. C.S. Lewis, *George MacDonald: An Anthology* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc., 1947), p. xxvii.
7. *Ibid.*, p. xxvi.
8. C.S. Lewis, *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc., 1970), pp. 215-216.
9. C.S. Lewis, *The Last Battle*, pp. 183-184.
10. C.S. Lewis, *Dawn Treader*, p. 133.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 136.

\* "By election, by proscription, and by conquest,"  
an honorary citizen of Narnia.

# TEACHING YOUNG CHILDREN WISE CHOICES IN LITERATURE

In introduction, I will begin with a truism: that reading for enjoyment is difficult to censor and control. The reason is that tastes differ so widely and also the standards set up by the varying characters among God's children. However, it is still the task of covenant parents and teachers to guide covenant children to choose proper books to read and to mold their tastes so that they read *quality* literature. It is also a *challenge* to teach them critical analysis so that they are able and willing to judge and evaluate, using high standards, and then choose literature that will enrich them. That is the challenge with which this article struggles.

First, we must get children to read. Teachers are very eager to have their pupils read, but too many parents are not interested in getting their children interested in quality literature or even in reading at all. Hence, many children are not interested. If a child does not read, there is no need for critical choice.

It follows, then, that we must have reasons for reading. Why read? For at least nine reasons, which I will briefly state:

1. Information: for facts — names, places, distances
2. Knowledge: using the facts and applying them in solving problems
3. Guidance: the "what to do if" books, such as medical guides, sociology guides, and moral guides
4. Pleasure: for interest and enjoyment, whether it be in plot, character studies, or the details of a story
5. Fun: this is a shade different from pleasure and would include stories of the imagination, stories of humor, wit, or fantasy
6. Empathy: animal stories, particularly horse stories with touching incidents, such as *The Lonesome Colt*, by C.W. Anderson; or a story about the under-dog, such as Wanda in *The Hundred Dresses*, by Eleanor Estes; or family-kinds of stories, complete with warm, gentle characters
7. Stimulation: by action, suspense, use of logic (as in mystery stories); or stimulation by heroes whom the children become acquainted with and want to imitate, heroes with strong, steadfast characters, as in *Call it Courage*, by Sperry.
8. Aesthetics: the order and beauty of words, rhyme, rhythm, repetition, poetry, as in *Listen Rabbit*, by Aileen Fisher

9. Insights: the causes and results of actions or situations, the “whys” and “what thens” of moral issues, the coming to grasps with the complexities of life.

Who gets our children to read? Teachers do. Because the classroom is a structured situation with learning as its goal it is the best situation. Teachers try to inspire their pupils to read, and it is a big task. Gladys Hunt in *Honey For a Child's Heart*, shows why we teachers want to inspire them:

Take all the words available in the human vocabulary and read them from the dictionary, and you have only a list of words. But with the creativity and imagination God has given human beings, let these words flow together in the right order and they give wings to the spirit. Every child ought to know the pleasure of words so well chosen that they awaken sensibility, great emotions, and understanding of truth. . .

We cannot underestimate the use of words in creative thought! Proverbs says, “A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in pictures of silver.” The right word in the right place is a magnificent gift. Somehow a limited, poverty-stricken vocabulary works toward equally limited use of ideas and imagination. On the other hand, the provocative use of the right words, of a growing vocabulary gives us adequate material with which to clothe our thoughts and leads to a richer world of expression.

The elementary teacher knows how true the following words of Nancy Larrick, taken from *A Teacher's Guide to Children's Books* is:

The six years of elementary school are crucial. This is the time when a child learns to read independently. It is also the time when he is likely to establish reading habits that will prevail through high school and adult life. As evidence, high school librarians report that their best patrons are students who became eager borrowers in elementary school.

Parents also try to get children to read, but it is not so easy to encourage them to make their families “reading families.” And it is not of great importance to all parents. What can we do about it? Take the message of the importance of *good* reading to the homes through notes, speeches, and propaganda. We can tell them such things as the following, from Gladys Hunt's book:

As Christian parents we are concerned about building whole people — people who are alive emotionally, spiritually, intellectually. The instruction to *train up a child in the way he should go* encompasses so much more than teaching him the facts of the gospel. It is to train the child's character, to give him largeness of thought, creative thinking, imaginative wondering—an adequate view of God and His world. He can never really appreciate the finest without personal redemption. But many a redeemed person lives in a small and insecure world because he has never walked with God into the larger place of His domain. We have books and the Book at our disposal to use wisely for God's glory.

A young child, a fresh uncluttered mind, a world before him — to what treasures will you lead him? With what will you furnish his spirit?



Hunt also speaks of the child's basic need for milk and honey from his parents. *Milk* is the symbol of the care a child receives for his physical needs. *Honey* symbolizes the sweetness of life, that special quality that gives the sparkle within a person. She says, "Most mothers are capable of giving milk, but only a minority of giving honey, too." To give honey, one must love honey and have it to give. Good books are rich in honey.

Teachers can help parents to feed their children honey by motivating parents to read to their children or to read the same books as their children do and afterwards discuss with them, which is enriching for both. Teachers can try to sell good reading to parents. If we succeed, or partly succeed, we are ready to begin the process of *setting up standards*; and the following are four yardsticks for discerning good books:

1. Good books are what Hunt calls "real books." She says, "Real books have life. . . . The author captures reality, the permanent stuff of life, and something is aroused in the heart of the reader that endures. . . . A good writer has something worthy to say and says it in the best possible way. Then he respects the child's ability to understand. Principles are not preached but are implicit in the writing."

2. May Hill Arbuthnot, in *Children's Reading in the Home*, says, "Children's books should measure up to two sets of criteria: (1) Do they meet the child's needs and interests at a particular age level? (2) Do they fulfil standards essential for good writing for any age group?"

Good writing includes expert use of the following four criteria:

- a. It must have real characters — clever, resourceful, deceitful, humble, kind, consistent, but always *uncomplicated* and *convincing*.

- b. It must have a simple theme, a unity of the main idea, as, for example, in *Tim All Alone*, by Edward Ardizzone which through a misunderstanding (he believes his parents are dead and he goes to sea) uses the convincing theme of utter loneliness consistently, bringing tears to the eyes of young children.

- c. It must have a plot with action, conflict, suspense, or obstacles, all woven expertly into the whole of the theme. The plot of *Tim All Alone* uses all these facets and Tim is lonely to the end of the book. It has a happy ending, the kind of ending young children like. Real life does not always have a happy ending, but young children feel a need for a happy ending; and if the ending cannot be happy, it should at least have a satisfactory resolution.

- d. It must have a suitable style. Style is a weaving with words,

the music of the book. A staccato style is suitable for a fast-paced mystery and a tender style is right for a kitten story.

3. The format and illustrations should fit with the style of the book: bright colors or gentle lines; bold strokes or delicate pen sketches; old fashioned or modern art. However, the art should be legitimate art, a representation of the beauty of God's world, not a distortion of it.

4. The book should be morally good. That does not mean *moralistic*: a little moral lesson added or applied now and then. It also does not mean that sin and evil may never be portrayed, for that is what surrounds us in this life; but to be moral, evil must be shown to be evil and the right path must be shown to be the right path. The book should be able to stand in the face of God's law.

In *setting up standards*, we must also reject poor books, those which do not measure up to the standards we set. When we measure these books, we will do well to remember that in a discipline such as literature it is difficult and often impossible to set up absolute standards, to say that a book is very good or very poor. There are degrees of goodness and badness here, and we may want to limit, but not ban, a certain caliber of books. The following, then, are yardsticks for rejecting (or using caution with) poorer books:

1. Books that are absurd and silly rather than clever and humorous. Some of the Dr. Seuss books fit here. *The Cat in the Hat* contains absurd, preposterous situations, in language which is sounds, not words. Arbuthnot calls the book a "completely satisfying nightmare." I disagree. It is not satisfying. *The 500 Hats of Bartholomew Cubbins* is flippant in style and fantasy gone wild. *Julius*, by Syd Hoff, and *Drummer Hoff*, by Emberly are silly, pointless stories. For years I have watched the reactions of young children to books such as these and without fail I have noted that it brings out the worst in them. Their over-reactions take the forms of exaggerated silliness, to the point of rolling in the aisles. The *Curious George* stories, though not silly to the degree of the books just mentioned, are borderline and non-edifying nonsense at best. They are books that do not enrich a covenant child. For the older child, Cleary's *Henry Huggins* comes close to absurdity. It is best to limit, if not ban that caliber of story as trite and superficial.

2. Books with distorted art. The Dr. Seuss and Syd Hoff books fall into this category, as well as a host of modern books. There is a moral issue here, I believe. The authors use God's creatures and distort them for purposes of getting laughs. We may not laugh at distortions of

God's creation. It is what the wicked always do. When our covenant children get their hands on these books, they do it, too.

3. Books with themes of rebellion. This type of book seems to be proliferating these days. *Tweety and Sylvester*, by Seymour Reit with a distorted, cartoonish style of illustration, is a story based on a broken promise (which is wilful disobedience) and takes that premise as being very funny. A book such as this is not proper fare for covenant children.

*It's Like This, Cat*, by Emily Neville, won the 1964 Newberry Award. Arbuthnot has quoted the following section to show how it breathes rebellion and disrespect:

My father is always talking about how a dog can be very educational for a boy. This is one reason I got a cat.

My father talks a lot anyway. Maybe being a lawyer he gets in the habit. Also, he's a small guy with very little gray curly hair, so maybe he thinks he's got to roar a lot to make up for not being a big hairy tough guy. Mom is thin and quiet, and when anything upsets her, she gets asthma. In the apartment — we live right in the middle of New York City — we don't have any heavy drapes or rugs, and Mom never fries any food because the doctors figure dust and smoke make her asthma worse. I don't think its dust; I think it's Pop's roaring.

The big hassle that led to me getting Cat came when I earned some extra money baby-sitting for a little boy around the corner on Gramercy Park. I spent the money on a Belafonte record. This record had one piece about a father telling his son about the birds and the bees. I think it's funny. Pop blows his stack.

*Where the Wild Things Are*, by Maurice Sendak, which won the 1963 Caldecott Award, is described by Arbuthnot as follows:

Here is a touch of wildness that might be classified with the fanciful stories, but since it begins and ends in the real boy's bedroom and the fantasy is only a dream, it has been classified with the realistic tales. This extremely funny story is about a small boy who puts on wolflike pajamas complete with tail, and then becomes outrageously naughty. After he is put to bed, he falls asleep and dreams of horrible monsters, but *he* becomes king of them all. The drawings are hilarious, and children thoroughly enjoy both them and the text.

Our children should not and most likely would not enjoy the book, for both pictures and text breathe an atmosphere of total rebellion; and this rebellion is rewarded with kingship!

Books for the middle elementary grades often exploit erratic behavior, lying, rebellion, disobedience, and violence. Arbuthnot gives the gist of one of these:

*Harriet the Spy*, by Louise Fitzhugh, il. by author, Harper, 1964. (9-12).

Another completely contemporary story, *Harriet the Spy* is a popular

book with children and a controversial one with adults. Harriet is a non-conformist and a rebel with unusual potentials. She is never without her notebook in which she records not only her secret life as a spy, sleuthing around her neighborhood, but also, alas, her personal and caustic comments on her classmates. So when the children find and read the notebook, they are properly indignant and gang up on Harriet. She is definitely out. With ostracism, her behavior goes from bad to outrageous. Harriet's rebellion comes to a hopeful conclusion that is not wholly conclusive. Children find this book convincing, because Harriet is urban, modern, and a very real little girl.

Of course, using such a theme of rebellion in a story is not per se wrong. Scripture does it, too. But it is wrong to base a story on such a theme, making the wrong seem right and the disobedient, lying child the hero because of her sin. It is not palatable fare for a covenant child. He, too, must learn at an early age to distinguish between sinful fiction and sin in fiction, which is recognized and condemned as such.

4. Books with sex aberrations or books that make sex a joke. About *The Long Secret*, also by Fitzhugh, Arbuthnot tells that: "One chapter in which Janie, Harriet, and Beth Ellen discuss menstruation strikes some adults as very funny but shocks others. Certainly, the chapter is an improvement on some of the lugubrious attitudes of the past, but it is probably for home rather than school reading."

*The Egypt Game*, by Zilpha Snyder, deals with child molestation in an improper manner, as do many other books for children in this age group. It is hard enough to teach young children the sanctity of sex according to Scripture. It is a tender age — that of pre-adolescence — and much influenced by the racy delights of the aberrations of sex. Even if these stories are written to make children aware of the social evils around them, I judge that they are too young and too impressionable to be exposed to such evil knowledge.

5. Books whose only virtue is superficiality and materialism (often along with a wrong view of life). Series books are often guilty of this kind of thing: the Nancy Drew books, where life is a series of successes and always turns out happily; or the Bobbsey Twins type, stories with a bland sameness, in which life is always happy; or the Eddie and Betsy books, which boast superficiality and triteness; or the Zane Grey type, the rags-to-riches books, which promote the materialistic philosophy that all that matters is to get ahead in this world. Parents and teachers should limit a child's reading of this caliber of books.

6. Books that perpetrate the vain-glory of man. Biographies and Cinderella kinds of stories fit here. In *Marian Anderson*, by Shirlee Newman, we read of a person with no noticeable flaws in her character,

and some struggles in her life which she gladly endures for the sake of her goal — fame and riches. Our children need much guidance with a story such as this. *Florence Nightingale* by Charles Walcut portrays the heroine as a “do-gooder” who seemingly has no faults and who almost superhumanly overcomes all obstacles for fellow man — a true common grace story.

Many hero stories, those about Daniel Boone, Abraham Lincoln, Patrick Henry, etc. glory in the great achievements of man, and we who guide young children should take great care in limiting books such as these, especially in these days of the vain-glory of man.

7. Books that present a pseudo-religion or idolatry as acceptable or books that are blasphemous. Many books portray characters of seemingly flawless morals, but never mention any worship of the Lord, nor a God-fearing walk, nor any moral issues. A good example of a book of this kind is *The Boxcar Children*, by Gertrude Warner. Young children ask many questions, such as “Were they Christians? May they do that on Sunday?” They need guidance for this kind of book, too.

Many books include stories of idolatry. If it is portrayed as idolatry, our children will be able to face the false religion for what it is, but in stories such as *The Egypt Game*, where the characters act out an orgy, with temple, gods, chants, and ceremonies of idolatry, our covenant children face a real danger. In *Little Scarface*, by Gilbert Wilson there is the elusive rainbow-spirit (a play on the Holy Spirit?) and too much explanation is needed for our children.

Other books which parade under the name Christian teach either a pseudo- or a poor Christianity. I have in mind some of the sentimental books published by Zondervan Publishing Company or some Beka books, whose themes are either “goody-goody” parents and children or a God Whose only attribute seems to be a shallow love and the view that if *you* walk in kindness toward others, all will be rosy ever after. That is not a Biblical view of life and is very dangerous instruction for our children.

Once again, remember, there are degrees of badness in every area of this critique. However, when in doubt, throw it out.

How then, as godly parents and teachers, should we go about finding books for the varied interests of covenant children of primary age? We may want to turn first to books written by authors who are Christian or possibly Christian, and there are not many: The Narnia Series by C.S. Lewis, probably some by Paul White, George Mac Donald, Lloyd Alexander, some of the Paideia Press books by Vande Hulst, Anne De Vries, Lambregtse, Norel, and others.

But I do not believe the issue in choosing proper literature for our children lies in searching scrupulously for Christian authors. I believe that we must teach our children to read *as godly children*. They are called to learn as much as they can of the world about them, to be enriched by reading of God's creation and of His workings with men. Therefore it is important to guide them into a broad knowledge and experience, to expose them to tastes of adventure, historical fiction, animal stories, logic (mysteries), humor, family stories, fantasy (stories of the imagination) and poetry.

I suggest that teachers of primary children choose a quality, recommended booklist, such as Larrick, Arbuthnot, or Hunt have published, and then use these lists selectively, ending with a quality, *edited* booklist for our children.

Then our children can select books from that list. We are guiding our children in critical, independent choice, for soon they must achieve independence through sanctified guidance. The key word in the previous sentence is *guidance*. We may never forget that it is the nature of all children (covenant children especially) to be *fed*. That is a Biblical principle. We may not leave them too soon on their own, but always monitor their books as long as they are under our jurisdiction.

Yet we *guide* them to be independent. When they say, "I don't know what to read," we may want to hand them part of Larrick's questionnaire to help them determine their own taste.

1. When do you have the most fun at home?
2. Why do you have a pet? Or why not?
3. What person do you like to play with best of all?
4. At school whom do you like to work with?
5. What do you like to play indoors?
6. What do you like to play outdoors?
7. What is your favorite sport?
8. What is your favorite hobby?
9. What is one thing you want to learn more about?
10. What is one thing you want to learn to make?
11. If you could do anything you please next Saturday, what would you choose?
12. If our class could take a one-day trip, where would you like to go?
17. What do you like to read about?
 

animals	science	make-believe	nature
covered-wagon days	sports	boys' adventures	
knights of old	trains and planes		
18. What person (in real life or in history) do you want to be like?

Another possibility is to introduce the game of the Three Wishes:  
 I wish I were \_\_\_\_\_; I wish I had \_\_\_\_\_; I wish I could \_\_\_\_\_.  
 Or to ask each child to write a few sentences to complete the state-

ment: "One thing I wonder about is \_\_\_\_\_." Many youngsters ponder long over what they wonder about, and their comments will often give clues to their anxieties as well as their interests.

Teachers, insist that their choices be varied by asking for selections from several different categories. This kind of guidance is for parents, too. The premise for insisting on varied choices is that our children do not yet know what they really enjoy. They must taste all kinds before they say, "I like" or "I don't like." The purpose, of course, is to mold their literary tastes in their formative years. Then they will be ready to make their own choices without teacher or parent.

The execution of all these ideals does not come easily. We teachers must campaign for good literature. Many parents do not know, but would like to know what kind of good reading to select for their young children. Grandparents want to know, too. They often ask me. A solution would be to institute a *Talk to Parents Night*, complete with incentives and enthusiasm.

If these principles are followed, when our children reach late primary age they should know high literary standards. Urge them to use them. Talk, converse with them about these standards. In class, discuss with them a much-read or a little-read book to sharpen their interests. And then remind them to read with godly thought as critical covenant children, children who ask and answer their own penetrating questions. Most of them can. Many don't. The proper ones are: "Can I read this to God's glory?" "Am I using my time well?" "Would I be ashamed if Jesus read this with me?" "Am I reading the best?"

In instructing children and making them independent in their choices, we never expect to achieve fully in this life; but we keep on striving. We, too, need prods, reminders, booklists, talks with parents, and the grace of God to help us and our covenant children.

Gertrude Hoeksema

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"He who would become a better teacher must become such not by wishing but by dint of hard work. Improvement will come only as the teacher constantly gives thought to making his teaching better, as he studies to improve, and as he works diligently to produce better results. No amount of wishing will avail as a substitute for work."

— *Principles of Teaching for Christian Teachers*,  
by C.B. Eavey

## BOOK REVIEWS

*Letters to Barbara*; Glenn Meeter; Eerdmans, 1981; 256pp., \$13.95, cloth. (Reviewed by Gary VanDer Schaaf.)

Glenn Meeter, professor of English at Northern Illinois University, has published short stories in several magazines, including *Redbook* and *Atlantic Monthly*. *Letters to Barbara* is his first novel.

Seen through the eyes of Adrian Vander Vaarten, the principle character, the struggles of a small, Dutch, Reformed community against the inroads of secularism — via radio, television, urbanization, and integration — form the background of the novel's central action.

Taking a summer job as a park supervisor in a large, "unReformed" city, Adrian meets swearing, drinking, dancing co-workers and the street-tough, world-wise children of the city's ghetto. Most importantly, he meets Barbara, his attractive, black, fellow supervisor who is to be his partner for the summer.

By summer's end, the relationship that develops between Adrian and Barbara comes to a climax in visits to each other's churches, and there the great cultural and spiritual differences separating the two young people are finally seen as an insurmountable ob-

stacle to continued involvement. The relationship's end sets the stage for Adrian's final confrontation with the beliefs and traditions of his youth.

Meeter has done a remarkable job of portraying the type of close, tightly-knit, Reformed community with which most of our readers are familiar. Problems within the church (*Psalter* vs. *Psalter-Hymnal*), problems from without (a large, chain-supermarket that threatens to open on Sunday), and the people who must face these troubles are all presented in an accurate and sensitive way. Most satisfying to me is the warmth, love, and understanding that Meeter brings to his community and its characters as they face their struggles. Absent for the most part is the satire, the venom, even the hatred that marks the work of other Dutch-American authors (Peter DeVries, David Cornel DeJong, Fredrick Manfred) when they have written about the people and culture to which they were born.

There are too many sub-plots in the book for the author to develop adequately. The author divides his energy (and our interest) among too many conflicts: the town's antithetical struggles, Adrian's dissatisfaction



with his church, Adrian's relationship with Barbara, and the larger problem of prejudice within the church. I felt a dissipation of tension that prevented real involvement in the novel.

Nonetheless, Meeter is to be commended for his work. His use of words, his ear for language and dialog is certainly a cut or two above that which character-

istically is found in "Christian literature." And Meeter has succeeded where so many others have failed: his Dutch Calvinists are human, he has put the name of God into the mouths of fictional characters without making those characters seem to be fools. *Letters to Barbara* should be a welcome addition to high school, church, and home libraries.

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**EERDMANS' CONCISE BIBLE ENCYCLOPEDIA**; edited by Pat Alexander; Eerdmans, 1980, 256 pp., \$8.95, paper. (Reviewed by Gary VanDerSchaaf.)

This slim volume is a pocket-sized abridgment of the 1978 publication, *Eerdmans' Family Encyclopedia of the Bible*. According to the jacket blurb, the text attempts to "cover the historical, geographical, and cultural setting of the Bible as well as its teaching." Entries include "Archeology," "Canaanite Religion," "Family Life," "Religion of Israel," and "Jesus' Teaching."

The book provides in a straightforward, easy-to-understand manner, "the historical, geographical, and cultural setting of the Bible." The sections of the encyclopedia which deal with such matters would be helpful to anyone interested in the

"life-situation" of God's people throughout the old and new testaments. The illustrations that accompany some of the articles add to the book's appeal.

It is when the authors use culture and history as hermeneutical tools to delineate and explain the Bible's teachings that the book fails. Higher criticism is tendentious in nearly every article involving doctrinal issues; in some articles, such criticism is blatant. Regarding creation, for instance, the entry reads: "The Bible has nothing to say about which scientific theory of creation is most likely to be true. This is not surprising, since it was never intended to be a book of science" (p. 57).

If the reader is wary of such statements, the book is recommended for high school and personal libraries.

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EERDMANS' BOOK OF CHRISTIAN POETRY; Pat Alexander, Editor: Eerdmans, 1981; illustrated, 125 pp., \$10.95, cloth. (Reviewed by Gary VanDer Schaaf.)

Over sixty authors are featured in this attractive volume that presents some of the best poetry, sacred or profane, written in the last 1300 years.

In a format designed to wet the appetite, brief poems, from the seventh century's "Caedmon's

Hymn" to John Updike's "Seven Stanzas at Easter" (a personal favorite), are presented in chronological order. Readers are sure to find their own favorites among the poems of John Donne, George Herbert, William Blake, Gerard Manely Hopkins, and T.S. Eliot. Readers will also delight in the work of authors of less reknown.

The brief biography of each author and the many rich and varied illustrations add to the enjoyment of the book. A real treasure for home and school!



"... we let our young men and women go out unarmed in a day when armor was never so necessary. By teaching them all to read, we have left them at the mercy of the printed word. By the invention of the film and the radio, we have made certain that no aversion to reading shall secure them from the incessant battery of words, words, words. They do not know what the words mean; they do not know how to ward them off or blunt their edge or fling them back; they are a prey to words in their emotions instead of being the masters of them in their intellects."

— "The Lost Tools of Learning"  
by Dorothy Sayers in *National Review*

The following is a list of the manuals for teachers that have been produced by teachers at summer workshops and through personal study. These educational helps have been funded in part or totally by the Federation of Protestant Reformed Christian Schools. Copies of these are available.

*Biblical Perspectives in the Social Sciences* (1971)

*A Writing Program for the Covenant Child* (1972)

*Suffer Little Children* (Bible manuals 1, 2, & 3), at cost

Workbooks for *Suffer Little Children*, at cost

*History Units on Medieval World History* (1979)

on the following topics:

Unit I. The Barbarian Migrations

Unit II. The Eastern or Byzantine Empire

Unit III. The Rise and Spread of Islam

Unit IV. England and the Middle Ages

Unit V. France in the Middle Ages

Unit VI. The Crusades

Unit VII. Feudalism and the Manor

*Reformed Education* by Rev. D. Engelsma. (Orders should be sent to Reformed Education, 4190 Burton S.E., Grand Rapids, MI 49506. Send \$1.50 plus \$.60 for postage and handling.)

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