

# PERSPECTIVES IN COVENANT EDUCATION

## ARTICLES

Background Briefs

Witnessing the Gospel of  
Parental Christian Schools

What Place Should Fantasy Literature  
Hold in the Heart and Mind  
of the Child of God?

Response to "Reading with Heart"

Reply to Articles of Response  
Concerning Fantasy Literature

Early Years' Training in the Home

Teaching Our Children to Pray

Art Education in the Christian School

**SPRING**  
**1982**

# PERSPECTIVES IN COVENANT EDUCATION

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winter, and spring by the Protestant  
Reformed Teachers' Institute.

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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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*Winter  
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# BACKGROUND BRIEFS

by Agatha Lubbers

With the appearance this spring, 1982, of *Perspectives*, the Protestant Reformed Teachers' Institute completes the seventh publishing year. Volume VII is the first volume in which there are three issues (fall, winter, and spring). Previously we published only twice a year. We hope the reader is happy with the somewhat smaller size of the magazine.

With the rise in printing costs, mailing costs, and other costs, the editorial staff continues to be busy with attempts to find the most economical ways of publishing and distributing the journal. May we hear any helpful comments? We are also interested in keeping our magazine as attractive as we can.

We also continue to receive enthusiastic comments concerning the contents and the perspective of *Perspectives* from readers who request materials and additional subscriptions. (These are usually not Protestant Reformed readers.) Here is an example received just recently:

*Trusting we shall receive your solidly Reformed literature in the near future, . . .*

\* \* \* \* \*

Finally and in a sense most importantly, we express our gratitude to God for the generous support both in prayers and financially that we receive from societies and individuals who are friends of *Perspectives*. Without your support we could not publish as we do now.

Thanks and don't forget us as you make decisions concerning the distributions of any monies you might have.

\* \* \* \* \*

The appearance of the spring, 1982, journal marks another first. This is the first time one of our writers has received specific written response or rebuttal to an article in an issue of the journal. (There may have been personal correspondence between a writer and a correspondent but this editor does not know of this and this editor has not previously received copy of this kind.)

The winter, 1982, issue contained an article by Mr. Gary VanDer Schaaf, "Reading with the Heart . . . The Fantasy Literature of C.S. Lewis and J.R.R. Tolkien." Two rebuttals to this article of Mr. VanDer Schaaf have come into the editor's hands and these were forwarded to Mr. VanDer Schaaf for his response. These two articles — one from Mrs. Barb Dykstra and the other from Mr. Bernie Kamps — appear in this issue along with a response from Mr. VanDer Schaaf.

We are most happy to see such activity among our readers and only remind others, who might wish to write, that our editorial policy is as follows: "All manuscripts must be signed and all authors are solely responsible for the contents of their articles." (Cf. Editorial Policy, inside front cover of each issue.)

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Our entreaty appearing each issue has resulted undoubtedly in the short and provocative article by Mr. Harold Tilma, one of our subscribers. In the article "Witnessing the Gospel of Parental Christian Schools" Mr. Tilma urgently calls all who participate in Reformed Christian education to be more active in promotional efforts that should result in the funding and founding of more Christian schools such as Reformed Christians have founded.

May I suggest in this connection that these schools have always been schools *controlled* by parents through boards of directors. These schools are not to be *controlled* by the state nor the church.

We establish schools that attempt to submit to the laws of the state. "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. This same Peter tells us that we will obey God rather than men. Such obedience is the "higher law" for it indicates that we have the law written in our hearts.

This also means that the church and ecclesiastical creeds do give direction to the instructional program. The Consistory shall see to it that parents establish proper instruction for their children. (Cf. Article 21 of Church Order of Dordrecht.)

In this connection permit me to quote from an article appearing in a newly established magazine appearing for the first time in 1982, i.e. *Reformed Perspective*: a Magazine for the Christian family. This magazine is published in Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada, by a non-profit organization that intends to "publish periodically a magazine

promoting Reformed principles in all spheres of life, especially the social, political, and economic spheres.” So reads a part of Article 2 of the constitution of this organization. Article 3 of the constitution provides the following basis:

In carrying out its objectives, the Society is bound by the Bible, God’s infallible Word as it is summarized and confessed by the American and Canadian Reformed Churches in the Belgic Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism, and the Canons of Dort.

That tells you something about the magazine (\$26.00 a year to U.S. subscribers). I salute the founders of this magazine in their avowed attempt to bring the Scriptures and the Confessions to bear upon all aspects of life particularly the social, the political, and the economic. This is fraught with its usual hazards — witness the devolution of the Association for Reformed Scientific Studies (1965) into the post-millennial stance found in the writings of the leaders of the Association for the Advancement of Christian Studies, sometimes known as the Toronto movement. (Cf. *Perspectives*, Spring, 1980, by editor.)

Here is the quote from an article by Dr. J. Faber, principal of the Canadian Reformed Theological College in Hamilton. This quote is part of an article appearing in the February, 1982, issue of *Reformed Perspective* (Volume 1, No. 2). Writing about “Schools and Creeds” Dr. Faber concludes an article in which he defends the placement of the ecclesiastical creeds as part of the basis and purpose for Reformed Christian instruction as follows:

One could elaborate on the contents of the ecumenical creeds and the Reformed confessions and show their significance for all education on elementary, secondary, and tertiary level, from grade school to college or university. The doctrine of the trinitarian God and the means by which we know Him is fundamental for Christian education. What the Reformed churches confess concerning creation and the place and function of man is of primary importance. In Hamilton, Ontario, there is a Reformed high school and the pupils enter it through a hallway adorned with a simple plaque with the words: “to the end that man may serve his God,” taken from the Confession of Faith concerning the creation of all things. The Canons of Dordt provide excellent ammunition over against the onslaught of humanism in twentieth century education. The exposition of the Ten Words of God’s Covenant in the Heidelberg Catechism give good guidance in ethical questions that undoubtedly will be raised in the classroom. . . .let us leave the historic Christian Creeds and Reformed Confessions in place, also in the Christian schools. We will need them there, in the eighties, and in the further future, more than ever before.

This, in my judgment, is good advice.

\* \* \* \* \*

A speech by Mrs. Marilyn Decker (kindergarten teacher at Hope Protestant Reformed Christian School) at a monthly meeting of the Mothers' Club of the Adams Street Christian School is aimed particularly at the responsibility of the parents of young children in their pre-school years. In the article "Early Years' Training in the Home" Mrs. Decker suggests ideas that can also be applied to the training parents give their children during other years than the pre-school days.

\* \* \* \* \*

Rev. C. Hanko, a retired but very active minister in the Protestant Reformed Churches, used the contents of the article "Teaching Our Children to Pray" as a speech for the Adams Street Christian School Mothers' Club. Some important emphases concerning the importance and place of prayer in our children's daily lives are included in this article.

\* \* \* \* \*

Miss Connie L. De Vries is the author of the article, "Art Education in the Christian School." For many years I have known the father of this young woman because we were both catechism students in a class taught by my father. Today this young woman is a graduate of Calvin College and wrote this paper to satisfy the requirements for one of the art classes she was attending at Calvin College. (She was an art major.) This paper affords insights into the value and limitations of art that we Reformed Christians often neglect.

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*"... for the sincere Christian, the only legitimate and obedient commitment is to serve Christ. To make that Christ-serving concrete, the Christian serves the students in the name of Christ. Teaching for the Christian is not an ultimate end; it is the way by which he can fulfill his calling and serve the Lord of his life. It is not an attempt to gain reward, but, if it is done in the name of Christ, it will certainly bring rich blessings. Cf. Mark 9:41, Matthew 10:39, and Proverbs 8:35."*

Education in the Truth, p. 146  
by Norman DeJong

## WITNESSING THE GOSPEL OF PARENTAL CHRISTIAN SCHOOLS

Does our Protestant Christian School constituency have a duty and responsibility to Christian parents in other denominations? As a help to them should we acquaint them with our beliefs and practice in the establishment and maintenance of our own Christian day schools?

It is understood that some measure of this proposed activity is carried on now through pamphlets and books and by way of *Perspective* articles. Should not this work be expanded? Since our Covenant God has blessed us to such a great degree in our Christian Covenant Schools, should we not have inclination and desire enough to put forth greater effort to show our gratitude to our God by seeking further development and growth in this endeavor?

There are questions to be asked in view of such proposed venture. What school organization should initiate such a program? Should our school boards' association take on such a project? Should the Protestant Reformed Teachers' Institute? Or should a new committee or group be established to carry on this undertaking?

God has given us the conviction of truth that parents have the responsibility to provide covenant instruction in parental schools. It is not the duty and function of government to take over this authority and then finance and operate public schools.

Would not our knowledge and vision from the Holy Scriptures be an effective witness to parents that need instruction, courage and vision as we have received this gift from our God?

Should not the glorious truth we have of Jehovah God, our Covenant-making and keeping God, be an incentive for greater witnessing in the sphere of education? Does not his doctrine excite, enthuse, and inspire us to present this Gospel to others that do not have it?

Should not our experience and practice in the domain of parental schools be of great benefit to more Christian parents? Even, we ourselves have only begun to merely scratch the surface of the knowledge of God's indescribable and unmerited favor of God upon us. God has made the most excellent, that of greatest worth and value when He made the promise of His covenant to be a God unto all believers and all their children. This means that He will be the God of salvation to



believing parents and their children also in the instruction of their children.

God promises to help parents to provide covenant education to their children in the home and in their parental schools. This is God's word in the promise, I will be a God unto you and to your children. Through the financial and physical needs of school facilities, God will make His promise come true. He will give parents the will, enthusiasm and incomes sufficient to fulfill this obedience which God Himself says is necessary. How can we ever lose, Dear Father God. Thou hast spoken. We humbly and sincerely believe Thee for Thou art the God of Truth.

It is thrilling to hear from parents who have not too large incomes who pay tuition costs of over \$6,000.00 for their children in Covenant schools. They are not only willing to do it but they find great joy in doing it, for they give to God the glory and praise for it all.

There is no greater joy that can ever be experienced in heaven and in earth than to give all glory and majesty, dominion, power to the only wise God our Savior! The Scriptures call it exceeding joy (Jude 24-25). This joy we desire for other Christian parents to have also. Psalm 85: 7, 6 — "Shew us Thy mercy, O LORD, and grant us Thy salvation. Wilt Thou not revive us again: that Thy people may rejoice in Thee?"

So we ask again, do we need more activity in the instruction of other parents concerning their duty and responsibility of parental Christian schools? The matter of publishing Covenant Christian instruction books and distribution of same would have to be faced.

In what way could our witness be diffused? Could articles be sent to religious publications? If this attempt would not be successful, could advertising space be bought in appropriate journals and newspapers? To what extent would offers of help be indicated? Should speakers be provided upon request?

The matter of financing some of these activities would need attention. Have not our people always responded favorably when any need is presented to them. To be used of God to bring about the blessing of covenant schools to more parents surely is incentive and motive enough.

Harold Tilma

★★★★★★★★

*"Under any government the Christian principle is plain: Render unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's, and unto God the things that are God's. Children do not belong to Caesar."*

*A Christian Philosophy of Education, p. 195  
Gordon H. Clark*

## WHAT PLACE SHOULD FANTASY LITERATURE HOLD IN THE HEART AND MIND OF THE CHILD OF GOD

"...the Faun began to talk. He had wonderful tales to tell of life in the forest. He told about the midnight dances and how the Nymphs who lived in the wells and the Dryads who lived in the trees came out to dance with the Fauns; ... and then about summer when the woods were green and old Silenus on his fat donkey would come to visit them. And sometimes Bacchus himself, and then the streams would run with wine instead of water and the whole forest would give itself over to jollification for weeks on end."

(C.S. Lewis, *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, pp. 12, 13)

"That's what I don't understand, Mr. Beaver," said Peter, "I mean isn't the Witch herself human?"

"She'd like us to believe it," said Mr. Beaver, "and it's on that that she bases her claim to the Queen. But she's no daughter of Eve. She comes of your father Adam's —" (here Mr. Beaver bowed) "your father Adam's first wife, her they call Lilith. And she was one of the Jinn. That's what she comes from on one side. And on the other she comes of the giants. No, no there isn't a drop of human blood in the Witch."

(C.S. Lewis, *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, pp. 65, 66.)

Please read over again the above quotes and then tell me if God is present in them. Tell me if God could be the source and subject of them and if, in them He could reveal Himself to man, or through them lead man to Himself.

I will admit, until we received the Winter, 1982, edition of the *Perspectives* I had never read any literature by C.S. Lewis or J.R.R. Tolkien. However, the article "Reading with the Heart...The Fantasy Literature of C.S. Lewis and J.R.R. Tolkien" deeply troubled me and after reading it several times, I felt the need to look into the literature. After reading some of the books of the Chronicles of Narnia, I felt very strongly that I had to write on what I believe to be the truth about fantasy literature.

Before I begin, I would like to ask those of you who have never read fantasy literature to please read this carefully, and those of you who *have* read and enjoyed fantasy literature, to please put all of your previous feelings of the stories out of your mind, and read the facts in this article with the mind and heart of a spiritually sensitive child of God.

God is NOT present in fantasy literature! I think it is basic first of all for us to see what myth is and then look at some quotes of the authors. Myth is a story of unknown origin to serve to explain some practice or belief or natural phenomenon, or story invented as a veiled explanation of a truth, or a person or thing existing only in imagination or whose actuality is not verifiable. Mythopoeic means creating or tending to create myths, and mythopathic means to be affected by myths.

Lewis had never underestimated the power of myth. Far from it. . . . But he still did not believe in the myths that delighted him. Beautiful and moving though such stories might be, they were (he said) ultimately untrue. . . .

No, said Tolkein, They are not lies. . . . To you a tree is simply a vegetable organism, and a star simply a ball of inanimate matter. . . . But the first man to talk of "trees" and "stars" saw things very differently. To them, the world was alive with mythological beings. . . . They saw the sky as a jewelled tent, and the earth as the womb whence all living things have come. . . . man is not ultimately a liar. He may pervert his thoughts into lies but he comes from God, and it is from God that he draws his ultimate ideals. . . . not merely the abstract thoughts of man but also his imaginative inventions must originate with God, and must in consequence reflect something of eternal truth.

What was the point of it all? (Lewis continued) How could the death and resurrection of Christ have "saved the world"?

Tolkein answered him immediately. Had he not shown how pagan myths were, in fact, God expressing himself through the minds of poets, . . . Well, then, Christianity (he said) is exactly the same thing — with the enormous difference that the poet who invented it was God Himself, and the images He used were real men and actual history. He (Lewis) enjoyed these stories, "tasted" them, and got something from them that he could not get from abstract argument. Could he not transfer that attitude, that appreciation of STORY, to the life and death of Christ? . . . Could he not realize that it IS a myth and make himself receptive to it? For, Tolkein said, if God is mythopoeic, man must become mythopathic.

Twelve days later Lewis wrote. . . . I have just passed from believing in God to definitely believing in Christ.

So we can understand this; Lewis read the gospels, believed them as myth, only true myth because God "created" them, and thus he came to believe in Christ. But *did* he?

Actually it was not quite so easy or so sudden as that. . . . He had in fact reached the point where rational argument failed, and it became a matter of belief rather than of logical proof. . . . (and) Lewis could not go on thinking it over for ever. He realized that some sort of "leap of faith" was necessary to get him over the final hurdle. . . . So he became a Christian.

Indeed his doubts about the Christian story never entirely ceased. There were, he remarked, many moments at which he felt "How could I —

I of all people — ever come to believe this cock and bull story?” But this, he felt, was better than the error of taking it all for granted. Nor was he utterly alarmed at the notion that Christianity might after all be untrue. “Even assuming (which I most constantly deny),” he said, “that the doctrines of historic Christianity are merely mythical, it is the myth which is the vital and nourishing element in the whole concern.”

(The above two sections of quotes were taken from  
Humphrey Carpenter's *The Inklings*, pp. 44-47.)

Although I am in no position to question Lewis' Christianity, THIS IS NOT HOW A CHILD OF GOD IS REGENERATED! God never reveals His saving grace to man through any means other than Scripture and the preaching of it. To say anything else is anti-scriptural, as the Confessions tell us.

*CONFESSION OF FAITH, ART. II* . . . “And secondly He makes Himself more clearly known to us by His Holy and divine Word, that is to say, as far as is necessary for us to know in this life, to His glory and our salvation.”

So we have found that both Lewis and Tolkein drew heavily from pagan myth in their belief. They also did so in their writing, and believed this is as it should be, for all myths are just a retelling of the Great Story.

This is not so! We cannot in any way tell the glorious gospel truths using idol gods. (See Acts 17:16.)

We have also found that both men believe that myth and fantasy work by triggering in man the recollection and appreciation of truth inherent in all men as they are creatures of God.

This is not so! There is NO recollection or appreciation of truth inherent in unregenerate man, as the Canons make clear to us;

*CANONS III & IV, ART. 6* “What therefore neither the light of nature nor the law could do, that God performs by the operation of the Holy Spirit through the word or ministry of reconciliation: which is the glad tidings concerning the Messiah, by means whereof it hath pleased God to save such as believe, as well under the Old as under the New Testament.”

Lewis said that the immediate cause of *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* was a series of nightmares that he had been having about lions. On a deeper level the story was, he explained, an answer to the question: “What might Christ be like if there really were a world Narnia and He chose to be incarnate and die and rise again in that world as He actually has done in ours?”

(*The Inklings*, p. 223.)

We cannot say that Lewis' creations were placed in his mind by God, neither may we ask, what would Christ be like if. . . . We know Him

through scripture and that is the only way we *may* know Him, other than acknowledging Him through His creation. So, what *are* these stories? They are PAGAN! Their nature is pagan, they have NO spiritual value, and their true power is to draw the minds of our covenant children away from the beautifully clear Word of God and get them involved in mystical episodes to distort their knowledge. Strong statements, I agree, but nevertheless true! What do you think it does to your child's knowledge and understanding of creation when he hears or reads from *The Magician's Nephew* that Aslan (the lion Lewis uses to represent Christ come from another world) starts with an empty world, begins singing beautiful music, sings into being trees and mountains, and then touches noses with some of the animals he sings into being that they may become the Talking Beasts of Narnia — ONLY AFTER:

The Lion opened his mouth, but no sound came from it; he was breathing out, a long, warm breath; it seemed to sway all the beasts as the wind sways a line of trees. Far overhead from beyond the veil of blue sky which hid them the stars sang again: a pure cold difficult music. Then there came a swift flash like fire (but it burnt nobody) either from the sky or from the Lion itself, and every drop of blood tingled in the children's bodies, and the deepest, wildest voice they ever heard was saying:

"Narnia, Narnia, Narnia, awake. Love. Think. Speak. Be walking trees. Be talking beasts. Be divine waters."

(C.S. Lewis, *The Magician's Nephew*, p. 116.)

This can do nothing but distort and confuse the wonderful truth of creation in the minds and hearts of our children.

To portray Christ as Aslan the Lion, ruler over all Narnia, who continually comes to the aid of the "creatures" of Narnia, and gives his life to save a "Son of Adam" is anti-scriptural. The *only* place we read in scripture of Christ as a Lion is in Revelation 5:5, where the Lion represents Christ, the glorious conquering King. However, when Christ came to sacrifice Himself for His people, He came as the Lamb of God, *not* as a glorious King. Again, the Narnia books completely misrepresent the Son of God.

The second commandment requires that we in no wise represent God by images nor worship Him in any other way than He has commanded in His Word.

*THE HEIDELBERG CATECHISM*, XXXV, *Question and Answer* 97 reads: Q.: "Are images then not at all to be made? A. God neither can, nor may be represented by any means, but as to creatures; though they may be represented, yet God forbids to make, or have any resemblance of them, either in order to worship them or to serve God by them."

You wouldn't say that you worship God through fantasy literature,

but when the fantasy books are used to excite one to turn to scripture and thus serve God, we are breaking the second commandment.

But the question then is, why did God inspire the writers of the Bible to use images to describe Him? Listen to what Ursinus has to say in his commentary on the Catechism (p. 526).

"...Solomon had upon his throne images of lions, and had figures of palm trees and cherubims carved upon the walls of the temple by the command of God. . . . The law does not, therefore, forbid the use of images, but their abuse which takes place when images are made either for the purpose of representing or worshipping God or creatures."

THE MEANING COMES THROUGH CLEARLY: WE MAY NOT USE "ASLAN" TO REPRESENT CHRIST.

Calvin in his *Institutes*, vol. I, makes the following statements: "But God makes no comparison between images as if one were more and another less befitting. He rejects, without exception, all shapes and pictures, and other symbols by which the superstitious imagine they can bring Him near to them" (p. 91). "It is said that the images are not accounted gods. Nor were the Jews so utterly thoughtless as not to remember that there was a God whose hand led them out of Egypt before they made the calf. Indeed Aaron saying that these were the gods which had brought them out of Egypt, they intimated, in no ambiguous terms, that they wished to retain God, their deliverer, provided they saw Him going before them in the calf" (p. 98).

Just one more thing about images. God *did* inspire His saints to reveal Him through word images of nature: snow, summer, mountains, chickens, etc., *but* that does not mean that *we* have a freedom to do *whatever we want* with images. Notice the snow in scripture. To show us how our sins are covered, it *remains snow*. In order to show us that Christ is the Solid Rock, the mountain remains a mountain, exactly as God created it. The truth of Christ and His church is pictured in marriage only as long as that marriage remains what God ordained it to be. Thus it is that a lion talking, appearing and disappearing many times, living over a period of thousands of years, and dying and coming back to life again is not at all the imagery that God inspired the writers of scripture to use. It is a portrayal of Christ that is not permitted. Perhaps if we used the might of the lion as a picture of the power and might of Christ it would be different, but to give to the lion a multitude of capabilities that it was not created with in order to be a representation of Christ is blasphemy, and comes terribly close to what the children of Israel did with the golden calf.

In the Protestant and Orthodox Center at the New York World's

Fair in 1964, there was shown a movie entitled "The Parable" in which a very sad clown portrayed Christ. The clown began to take over the work of other members of the circus, began taking on more and more of their problems, their disgraces, their suffering, and finally died the death one of them deserved. The purpose of the film (which was without dialogue) was explained in a pamphlet which was distributed on the way out of the auditorium. It was to draw the viewers closer to the realization of what Christ did for them and to have them re-evaluate the meaning of their own lives. Blasphemous? Yes! What I am trying to say is that it is no less blasphemous to portray Christ as a talking, laughing, playing, miracle-performing lion!!!

One reason for Lewis' holding back from conversion for so long was his inability to find the Gospel story attractive. It evoked none of the imaginative response that was aroused in him by pagan myths. As he told Greeves, "the spontaneous appeal of the Christian story is so much less to me than that of Paganism." This was perhaps one reason why he now began to create his own fictional setting for Christianity.

*(The Inklings, p. 47.)*

If we have to use crutches such as fantasy literature to become excited about reading scripture, if we have to use fantasy literature to enable us to see anew the awesome power and earth-moving importance of scriptural events, if it gives us a better understanding and appreciation of God's Holy infallible scripture, then we are no better than the children of Israel in the wilderness. If, as fallen people in a fallen world, we need all the help we can get, there is a dire lack in our regeneration and we have a very weak Holy Spirit dwelling in our hearts, which, thank God, we do not.

What we have already seen is more than enough to make us turn away from these books (and by the way, remove them from our school libraries). But there is still much to consider.

We are told often from our pulpits, and rightfully so, that we must not use euphemisms, that when we do, we are transgressing the third commandment. Yet in recommending the Narnia series to our children, we are condoning such words as goodness gracious, Lord love you, By Jove, By heaven, Golly, I thank my lucky stars, Gawd, and such talk as a dem fine woman, and don't be such an ass.

It is through the names of God that we know Him. By His names He is revealed to us. "Jesus" tells us that He saves, "Christ" tells us that He is anointed by God, etc. What does Aslan mean? May we just pick a name and ascribe it to a "representative" of the Son of God?

Aslan comes and goes as he wills in Narnia. There is, of course, no

incarnation, no humiliation in life, a death for another with shed blood, but no cross, no burial, no rejection by the "Great Emperor-Beyond-the-Sea" (the series description of God the Father), and a coming back to life at the next sunrise that so closely resembles and yet mutilates the resurrection of Jesus that it makes one cringe.

Now there may be those of you who feel that I have gone into the books to find every example of blasphemy that I could find. I will admit that I did look carefully for mis-representations of God and Jesus Christ. Can't we then just give the books to our children and let them read them for enjoyment, for what they get out of them, or read the books to them without explaining anything to them? In other words can't the books be read as any other imaginative story? NO!

In the same issue of the *Perspectives*, there is an article on "Teaching Young Children Wise Choices in Literature," by Mrs. Gertrude Hoeksema. After giving some basics of what our children should read, the article gives us several "yardsticks for rejecting, (or using caution with) poorer books." I have found that the Chronicles of Narnia fail at least three of these areas and are therefore unsuitable literature for our covenant children.

The first area is that of distorted art. Mrs. Hoeksema writes concerning the Dr. Seuss and Syd Hoff books, "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."

Granted, Lewis may not have written of Fauns (half man, half goat), centuars (half horse, half man), bulls with man's heads, and Dryads (the living part of trees) for laughter, but they *are* distortions of God's wonderful creation and the artwork in the books adds to the problem. God created man in His own image, and horses for their own purpose, and trees for their own. We may not distort God's creation the way Lewis has.

The second area of poorer books we are warned about is that of those presenting a pseudo-religion — "those that never mention any worship of the Lord, nor a God-fearing walk. . . ." Now the Chronicles of Narnia are highly praised by many as books that give us a desire to look more into scripture. *However*, in the books I read; never do the children go to church, the Sabbath day is not mentioned, the children are on their own and never in a covenant family relationship. No mention is made of devotions or prayer (beyond "In the name of Aslan" or "Aslan, Aslan, Aslan"), and never is the Bible mentioned, that I read of, except *perhaps* the wonderful Book Lucy read in the *Voyage of the Dawn Treader*, which among cures for warts, a spell to



make oneself beautiful, how to call up wind, and how to give a man an ass's head, contained a story about a cup, a sword, and a tree, and a green hill. It is very clear that these books do fall under the category of pseudo-religious.

The last area of poorer books is that of those containing idolatry. There is just no way of getting around the fact that some of the characters C.S. Lewis uses in his books are taken strictly from pagan myth, and are idol gods. He even goes so far as to make the gods good characters; demi-men, fauns, dryads, and worst of all, he makes Bacchus himself, the Greek wine god, a friendly acquaintance of "Aslan." In one instance in *Prince Caspian*, Aslan becomes surrounded by tree women who shout Aslan, Aslan, and then they begin dancing and that's when Bacchus and his friend Silenus come and dance too, and soon there are grape vines growing all over the people and creatures, and everyone begins eating grapes, more than anyone could possibly want. "...and no table manners at all. One saw sticky and stained fingers everywhere, and, though mouths were full, the laughter never ceased. ..."

Remember, Aslan is supposed to represent Christ, and here we see him having a good time with a Greek wine god and "his wild women." This is very dangerous reading for our children!

I am firmly convinced, after looking into several of the Narnia books, that rather than reading this literature with the heart, we must reject it with the heart. God is not in this literature, and I am convinced that God does not use this literature to the benefit of His children. It is of our sinful nature that we desire more than He has given in His Word. He has blest us richly in giving us His Word, and we can understand it and appreciate it more and more by reading it more and more.

*I Timothy 1:4* "Neither give heed to fables and endless genealogies which minister questionings, rather than godly edifying which is in faith."

*II Peter 1:16, 17* "For we have not followed cunningly devised fables when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of His majesty. For He received from God the Father honour and glory, when there came such a voice to Him from the excellent glory, This is My beloved Son, in Whom I am well pleased."

It is hard enough in these last days to lead our children along the right paths. Let us all, parents and teachers, work hard to keep the minds of our covenant children free from *any* mis-representation of

Christ, His Word, salvation, heaven, and the walk of the child of God, and continue to feed them the Bread of Life and streams of living water.

*Hebrews 12:1, 2* "Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before Him, endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God."

Barb Dykstra

## RESPONSE TO "READING WITH THE HEART"

After reading the article "Reading with the Heart," in the 1982, winter *Perspectives* I am very concerned and alarmed. I believe that Brother VanDerSchaaf is in error on many key points and cherishes these fantasy stories to the point that he is forcing them into a Biblical framework into which they will never fit.

On page 20, Mr. VanDerSchaaf in reply to his own question of why God is in fantasy stories states "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." Almighty God does not use myth to lead man to Himself, God only uses Scripture and creation. Romans 10:17 "So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God."

Lewis and Tolkien both draw heavily from the pagan mythology which the apostle Paul condemns as idolatry. How then can Lewis and Tolkien combine Christ with Belial, yoke together righteousness and unrighteousness? II Corinthians 6:16, "And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols?" Mr. VanDerSchaaf goes on to show us that "high" fantasy literature is a Christian endeavor by paralleling metaphors and anthropomorphic language used in Holy Scripture with that of fantasy. Let us turn to Isaiah 40:18, "To whom then will ye liken God? or what likeness will ye compare Him?" How dare anyone contrast the Second Person of the Trinity with a half-animal, half-human, wizard, hobbit, or a talking lion! Blasphemy against the Most Holy One. God is a consuming fire and a jealous God and will punish

such image worship. Deuteronomy 4:16-17, "Lest ye corrupt yourselves and make you a graven image, the similitude of any figure, the likeness of male or female, the likeness of any beast."

We are not even allowed to make mental images of God or Christ in order to serve Him better. Mr. VanDerSchaaf writes that he contends "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." This is Roman Catholicism! The metaphors used in Scripture are inspired by the Holy Spirit and cannot be compared with a "subcreator" such as Lewis or Tolkien, these men are not scriptural in their pictures of wizards and talking lions.

In Revelation 5:5 Christ is called the "Lion of the tribe of Judah." Rev. Hoeksema in his book *Behold He Cometh* describes Christ as "the symbol of royal majesty and power to conquer and to subdue, as well as to reign and to be acknowledged as sovereign." To represent Christ in all His glory and might, in a fantasy book is a violation of the second commandment. Mr. VanDerSchaaf writes that he doesn't believe these portrayals are blasphemous, but I would like to see Scriptural proof why he believes this way.

I believe fantasy literature with its appeal to philosophy and intellect and now its supposed power to help us "see anew" and have a greater understanding of Scripture, will lead us away from Scripture and toward man-centered theology. Lewis and Tolkien are full of common grace and obviously deny total depravity. Statements that the gospels are true myth and "I have just passed from believing in God to believing in Christ" sound like heresy. I believe that we should even question these men's motives for writing these books.

Mr. VanDerSchaaf refers to Holy Scripture as "the Greatest Story Ever Told." This phrase seems flippant and without reverence when referring to the Divinely Inspired Word of God.

Mr. VanDerSchaaf writes in this article "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. . . . 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. . . . that as fallen people in a fallen world, we need all the help we can get." God in fantasy literature? Enable us to see anew? We need all the help we can get? God is not in fantasy literature any more than He is in Greek mythology. Fantasy literature with all its distortion, perversion of

creation and deformed metaphors supposedly paralleling Scripture, help us see anew? Where is the antithesis in our discernment of good literature. God's grace is sufficient help for all our needs and will not be derived from fantasy literature.

May we as brothers and sisters in the church of Christ always maintain a spirit of love and concern for one another. Mr. VanDerSchaaf's comment describing those who do not agree with him as having "the intelligence and sensitivity of a potted fern," does not promote this spirit.

I hope and pray that all teachers, parents and supporters of Christian education will try the spirits concerning this matter of God in fantasy literature and may we all remember the words of the apostle Paul in Colossians 2:8, 9: "Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ. For in Him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily."

Bernie Kamps

## REPLY TO ARTICLES OF RESPONSE CONCERNING FANTASY LITERATURE

Most of this reply is directed toward Mr. Kamps' letter, and that for two reasons. First, there is considerable overlap between the remarks of Mr. Kamps and Mrs. Dykstra, and secondly, Mr. Kamps has specifically requested a response.

At the heart of both replies is the conviction that the literature of Lewis and Tolkien is a blasphemous violation of the second commandment because such literature is itself, or is inducive to, image worship. That, I believe, is the point of the scripture passages, the sections from the confessions, and the quotations from the church fathers.

The scriptures, *etc.*, condemn the creating of images for the purpose of serving God through them; that is, they all condemn image worship. A sanctified reader or a covenant child under the direction of a believing parent or teacher will not, I believe, be tempted to or actually worship God through the mental image of a lion or hobbit, anymore than we are tempted to worship God or Christ through the lilies, pictured or real, that we find in our churches and on bulletin covers in this Easter season.

Is the very act of speaking of the Divine in images, of comparing Him to man, or to things in creation, or things created by man blasphemous? Mr. Kamps cites Isaiah 40:18 as evidence to the affirmative. Yet the context of that verse is one of comparison, a positive comparison to a caring shepherd (vss. 10, 11) and a negative comparison to an idol (vss. 19, 20). The point of the text is that any comparison will reveal the overwhelming supremacy of God, not that comparison is wrong. The shepherd, no matter how diligent and loving, remains a sinful, flesh and blood man, and the idol, despite man's efforts, will rot and fall. And God remains God: He is not lessened or blasphemed by the comparison. Christ Himself makes such a comparison for the edification of His people in the parable of the unjust judge (Luke 18:1-8). The Lord did not think it blasphemous to compare His Father with an unbelieving magistrate.

Scripture's use of metaphor, simile, and anthropomorphisms limits neither God nor our understanding of Him to the image evoked. God is not a shepherd, Christ is not a lamb, a bridegroom, a lion — God is more than all images put together. And the sanctified reader knows this. The point is that God in scripture uses word-images to talk about Himself in order to give us a better, clearer understanding of Himself. We use these word-pictures in our prayers, we hear them in sermons, and as sanctified believers we can use and read and understand them for what they are in poetry and literature.

Both writers also object to my remarks that the literature is a retelling of scripture and that the retelling can induce one to study scripture. In connection with this, Mr. Kamps considers it flippant that I refer to the Bible as "The Greatest Story Ever Told," and Mrs. Dykstra reasons that I believe there to be a "dire lack in our regeneration."

First, to Mr. Kamps' remark, inasmuch as a "story," according to Webster's first and second definitions, is "a connected narration of past events, a history, an account of some incident, a report; statement," portions of scripture are "story."

In reply to Mrs. Dykstra, my point is not that our regeneration is lacking or that the Holy Spirit is weak. Rather, our flesh is weak, and our sanctification is not complete. The Spirit uses as means creation, events in creation, and man-made objects to enable us to see and understand better the truth revealed in God's word. These things do not reveal more truth than scripture. Rather, they affirm in my heart, through and only through the operation of the Spirit, the truths of scripture. For instance, when the believer reads the evening paper,

filled as it is with reports of wars, civil strife, and lawlessness, does not the Spirit move him to see these calamities as signs of the times? Only as it is given by the Spirit will the believer who studies history be able to see the Four Horsemen running. When the believer reads an inspirational poem or story, it is the Spirit that reaffirms the truth of the word as echoed in the literature within the believer's heart. When covenant parents hug their children before putting them to bed, it is the Spirit that makes them mindful that someday Christ will gather us all into His bosom. For the believer, all things, no matter how small or mundane, are worked by the Spirit to drive him to God's word. Note too that in all of the examples, the things themselves are not grace, nor is grace derived from these things in themselves. Only through the gracious operation of the Spirit do all things work together for our salvation.

A re-reading of my article will show clearly that I said Lewis' idea of how fantasy works is wrong. There is no natural light by which man can appropriate these stories. Apart from the Spirit, as it compels me from the story to scripture, these stories are powerless. Like anything in the natural or man-made creation — a sunset or a symphony, a robin's song or Handel's "Messiah," *Pilgrim's Progress* or *He Gathers His Lambs* — fantasy literature is powerless apart from the operation of the Spirit in the believer's heart, compelling him to think upon the truths of scripture. As I said in the article, the child of God does need all the help he can get. The "help" is not anything in or of creation, including fantasy literature; it is the gracious help of the Spirit working all things for the establishment of God's church.

Then, too, it becomes a moot point whether or not the Holy Spirit moved Lewis and Tolkien to write or to question the men's motive in writing. Certainly wicked Cyrus did not see himself as an instrument of God's purpose (Isaiah 45); the great wickedness committed by Joseph's brethren in selling him into Egypt was, scripture tells us, meant by God for the good of saving for Himself a people. Why did Handel write the "Messiah"? For God's sake? No, for money and personal fame. Does that fact and the fact that Handel was a Godless profligate diminish the power of the Spirit to edify me through listening to the "Messiah"? Not in the least.

I can see that I erred in using some of Lewis' and Tolkien's terms, i.e., that God is "in" fantasy literature and that He "leads" men to Himself by it. I should have made clearer the relationship between the operation of the Spirit in the heart of the believer and what I called in the article the "power of fantasy literature." God is not "in" fantasy

literature anymore than He is "in" a mountain or a chicken, and I apologize for any misunderstanding caused by my inexactness.

Also, in the second paragraph of his letter, Mr. Kamps confuses Lewis' viewpoint with mine. I agree that "Almighty God does not use myth to lead man to Himself. . ." and said as much in the article. I can see, however, that my statement "(High fantasy) can lead us to a greater love and appreciation for Him and His word" can easily be misunderstood. Even if we remember that we are dealing here only with the regenerated believer, and not all men, the original wording does not make plain enough the operation of the Spirit in this case.

Finally, Mr. Kamps is offended because I compared anyone who disagrees with me to a potted fern. I did not do that. That was a gut-reaction, a temptation, to which I said we could not succumb. Surely, those who disagree with the article are not potted ferns anymore than those who agree with it are papists. It is because, as Mr. Kamps says, that we "maintain a spirit of love and concern with one another" that the article was written at all.

Speaking personally and as a *Perspectives* editor, I would like to thank Mr. Kamps and Mrs. Dykstra for taking the time to express themselves in the pages of our magazine. The *Perspectives* is supposed to be an open forum for the views and ideas of parents and teachers alike, and we encourage all of our readers to share their ideas and opinions with us as we labor together toward the high calling of salvation in Christ Jesus.

Gary VanDer Schaaf

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*"... The Christian is not yet in heaven and can in no way establish the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ in this life. He can only point the way to the city which hath been eternally founded on the finished work of Christ. The builder of that eternal city is our faithful covenant-keeping God. The Christian writer looks forward in hope, as he writes his metaphors of praise, to the time when the perfect poem will be sung — THE SONG OF MOSES AND THE LAMB."*

Literature Studies Guide, p. 50  
Federation of Protestant Reformed Christian Schools.

## EARLY YEARS' TRAINING IN THE HOME

*(This speech was given at the March, 1982, meeting of the Mothers' Club of the Adams Street Christian School.)*

The preschool years are extremely important for your child. It is during these early years of your child's life that the environment of the home and family are molding him. Because a child spends his first five years at home with his parents, they are his first teachers and his most important teachers. What a responsibility for our parents!

Let us look at who this child is that is being trained in your home. He is a covenant child. He is the Lord's heritage. Scripture says, "Lo, children are a heritage of the Lord" Psalm 127:3. He is God's child given to us for a little while to instruct in His fear. He is like an olive plant around your table. A tender olive plant that is easily inclined by a guiding hand. We must nourish these young olive plants in the Word of God. And how must we as parents nourish these children, these covenant children of God? From infancy on, these children must be instructed in the Scriptures. Deuteronomy 6 says, "And thou shalt teach them (that is the Word of God) diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house and when thou walkest by the way and when thou liest down and when thou risest up." Every day and every hour of the day we must busy ourselves with the task of instructing our children in the Scriptures. An impossible task, you say. Yes, by ourselves we cannot face this great and holy task. We must pray for grace from our Father above to provide us with understanding, patience, wisdom, love and joy for each day. These children are the covenant seed of the Lord.

What does it mean for us as parents to train the covenant seed of the Lord in His fear? Even as small children, reverence and respect for God and for His Word must be taught. As a small child sits on mother's lap during devotions at mealtime and listens to God's Word being read, reverence and respect are being taught. At a very young age children can be taught to pray in reverence to their Father in heaven. Children can learn that by means of prayer we speak to God and that for Jesus' sake God will surely hear our prayers. We must begin early to instruct our children in the simple truths of God's Word. God is great. God is



good. God loves me. I am a sinner. Jesus died for my sins. Read to your children Bible stories so that they learn to know the Bible. Approach God's Word with an attitude of deep reverence. In this way we teach our children reverence for God. We teach our children the facts of the Bible. They must learn to know the Bible. Seize every opportunity to teach your child God and His Word. Remember that we not only teach Christ through our words but also through our deeds. As parents we have a great responsibility to teach Christ by our manner of walk. Our attitude of devotion, humility and reverence must reflect Christ. Our children must be able to see Christ in us.

It is our calling as covenant parents to teach our children respect. Respect for God and for His Word. Respect for parents and teachers. In early childhood children must learn to obey. Teach your child obedience for God's sake. And demand obedience of your child. What a responsibility is ours! What we teach has eternal consequences! Let us not neglect this calling to teach our children in the ways of the Lord. "Train up a child in the way he should go; and when he is old, he will not depart from it" Proverbs 22:6. This is our privilege as covenant parents.

What are some of the experiences that you can provide for your child at home in his preschool years to prepare him for learning? Teach your child to listen. A child who is a good listener has a headstart in school. Children coming to school for the first time have had five years of listening experience in the home. From listening they have learned the language of the home. Yet young children generally have not been required to listen for some purpose. We can begin developing good listening skills in the preschool years. Have your child listen to and identify sounds around the house. Play listening games together. "Close your eyes and tell me what you hear." He may respond, "I hear the sound of the clock ticking." Or, "I hear the sound of water running." In this way we are training our children to listen carefully. Read nursery rhymes together and listen for rhyming words. Read poetry and make the child aware of the beauty of words, its rhythm and its rhyme. Listen to good music together. Read to your child. And read often. Make reading an enjoyable experience. And as you're reading to him, take the time to stop and ask questions to test his attentiveness and his listening ability. Or when you're finished reading the story have him tell part of the story in his own words. Reading aloud to your child is very important. I'm afraid we don't take the time to read good literature to our children as we should. In our day and age it is much easier just to use the TV as a babysitter. Do not let

the TV teach your child. It is your responsibility. And reading is important! I cannot emphasize enough the value of good books in the home. Books can develop good listening skills. Books are a valuable reading readiness tool. They broaden the child's experiential background. Books teach new concepts. Books promote the growth of new ideas and new vocabulary. By means of books your child develops a desire to learn to read. Preschoolers see that books are fun. They see that reading is fun. And they can't wait until they can read their own books. Preschoolers' attention spans are very short. But reading books to your child can increase his attention span. It is important to expose your child to a variety of good literature. Have good books in the home for your child. Go to the library and choose good books for him. And make reading an enjoyable experience for him.

Another invaluable readiness skill is teaching your child to listen to and follow directions. Begin by giving very simple directions that require only one thing to remember and then increase to two or three directions. But state the directions only once. In this way you are getting the child to pay attention the first time you speak. Help your child understand the spatial concepts of "on," "under," "above," "below," "next to," etc.

Listening experiences are important. Good listening experiences provide the foundation for reading, speaking, and writing experiences. They are important for your child's success at school.

Many varied real experiences provide a meaningful background for your preschooler. Real experiences give an opportunity for children to talk about their ideas and their observations. Take your child to the zoo, the nature center, the museum, the pet store and talk about these experiences together. In this way he is forming correct ideas. Or take a walk in the fall of the year through the woods and talk about the beauty of God's creation. Let him use his five senses to experience that beauty. He can very vividly experience God's creation by seeing the beautiful changing colors of the leaves, by smelling the fragrance of the woods, by touching the fall flowers, and by hearing the rustle of his feet in the woods. Or observe the birds of the air getting their food in your backyard and talk about God's care for His creation. Even as God cares for the birds of the air, He will also care for you and for me.

Language development is very important in the preschool years. What can you do at home to develop good language skills in your child? First of all, be a good model for proper language. Remember your child learns his language by your example. It is important that you speak clearly, distinctly and properly. Use good language to your child.

Never use baby talk. Give your child opportunities to talk. Take the time to talk with him not just to him. Let him express his own ideas. Take the time to answer his questions. Books are an excellent means for stimulating oral expression. Let the child tell the story by reading the pictures. In this way he is learning to follow the story line and to express it in words. Never laugh at a child's language mistakes. But rather repeat the word or phrase correctly for him. In this way he is learning good language. When children come to kindergarten they come with a variety of language abilities. Some will hardly speak at all. Others speak in one word answers. Some are using complete sentences. And others can tell a whole story by themselves. A child's language development depends in part on how much stimulation he gets from the people around him. The more we talk to him and listen to him, the more he will try to communicate to us.

Number readiness is another important area in which you can prepare your child at home. Count with your child. Use everyday experiences for counting practice. As an example, ask "How many people are in our family? Let's set the table. How many plates will we need? How many glasses will we need if each person is to have a glass?" The child is learning one-to-one relationships through these experiences. Counting regularly with your child is not only fun for him but also develops within him an awareness of the world of numbers. Much of this instruction can be done in a very informal manner. As you work around the home, as you ride in the car, seize every opportunity to teach. Books such as *Count and See* by Tana Hoban, *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* and *The Rooster Who Set Out to See the World* both by Eric Carle introduce the child to numbers in a very enjoyable manner. There are many more good number books available at the library for your use with preschoolers.

To prepare your child socially for school, give him many opportunities to play, share and take turns with other children his age. Teach him to respect the rights of others. Teach him to be kind. Teach him to share his toys with others. Teach him that he will not always be first but will need to take turns with others. Your child will be happier in school if he has learned to work and play in group situations.

There are so many experiences that you can provide for your child to help prepare him for school. Develop an awareness of colors. Develop an awareness of letters, of likenesses and differences. As his small muscles develop he can learn to use crayons, pencils, and scissors.

I have mentioned just a few of the areas in which you as parents can help your preschoolers. Preschool years are extremely important! The

training that we as parents provide in the early years of their lives help prepare them for their place as God's covenant children. We have a great calling and responsibility given to us by God to train our children to the utmost of our ability. This is the vow we took at baptism time. As parents we must pray for love, wisdom, patience, and understanding to fulfill this responsibility.

Lord, who am I to teach Thy way  
To these Thy children day by day  
So prone myself to go astray?  
I teach them knowledge, but I know  
How faint they flicker and how low  
The candles of my knowledge glow.

I teach them power to will and do,  
But only now to learn anew  
My own great weakness thru and thru.  
Lord, if their guide I still must be,  
Then let my children clearly see  
That I am leaning hard on Thee.

Marilyn Decker

★★★★★★★

*"...teaching as commitment should not be confused with teaching as calling. Calling is not of human origin; it is God's choosing and equipping of His servants for their particular functions. Commitment in Christ is the called person's affirmative response to selection. Commitment, then, is the self-consecrating, unswerving response to God's call."*

Education in the Truth, p. 146  
by Norman DeJong

★★★★★★★

*"If there is any one mark of unrighteousness that characterizes the secular educator, it is that he refuses to let the light of Scripture illuminate the concepts of history, jurisprudence, medicine, chemistry, and every other so-called secular subject. Even the designation of these subjects as secular, that is, outside the influence of God, is an indication of the devil's devious working. For the Christian, no subject is or may be secular."*

Education in the Truth, pp. 96, 97  
by Norman DeJong

## TEACHING OUR CHILDREN TO PRAY

A young mother was recovering from a very serious illness after the birth of her child. When asked whether she had found comfort in prayer during this critical time, she answered that she had never given a thought to prayer. That is hard to imagine. An old lady of 80 years lay on the brink of death in the hospital and admitted that she had never prayed in her life. Can you imagine that?

Prayer is an integral part of the life of the believer. Just as a newborn child instinctively seeks its mother, so also the child of God seeks his God. We are needy, dependent creatures who realize that in God we live and move and have our being. We are sinners who are daily burdened with the guilt of sin. We need forgiveness, and we have experienced the wonder of grace, which only God's people know, that we can be assured of forgiveness through the atoning blood of our Savior. We draw our spiritual breath from God, the source of every blessing. For us prayer is worship, praise, and adoration, for this God is our God forever and ever. Besides all that, prayer is fellowship with the living God, so that the closest we can attain to heaven in this life is the intimate communion between us as God's children and God as our heavenly Father.

For all these reasons, teaching our children to pray is an essential part of our own spiritual life. When Scripture teaches us to bring up our children in the fear and nurture of the Lord, this already implies that we teach them to pray, even as we seek our strength and refuge in prayer.

In a sense it can be said that we always do teach our children to pray, whether we do that deliberately or unconsciously. Already a one year-old knows what it means to close his eyes and fold his hands at the beginning and end of a meal, even though he cannot see or hear the one we are addressing in prayer. The important thing is to teach them to pray properly. Therefore, under the heading of "Teaching Our Children To Pray," I wish to consider the Necessity, and the Manner, and conclude with a few specific remarks.

As has already been mentioned, prayer is an essential part of our own *personal* lives.

This is one of the greatest and most amazing of all God's blessings. Our God says to us, "Seek ye My face," and our hearts respond, "Thy

face, Lord, will I seek" (Psalm 27:8). We need no appointment as we do with a doctor or other professional person. We need no letter of recommendation. We need not write a letter, or call by telephone, or use some other means of communication. We need not even dress up or prepare our speech in advance (although that is not always improper), as we would when approaching some dignitary. We have access to the throne of grace, and boldness to approach through our Lord Jesus Christ and on His merit. We can pour out our souls, make all our needs known in prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, never afraid that we come too often or linger too long. There is nothing that we need hide from God, for He knows our walk of life and even the deepest thoughts and desires of our hearts. With David we can confess, "As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God" (Psalm 42:1). We even understand what it means to pray without ceasing, so that we dare not venture forth without a prayer in our hearts and on our lips.

That implies a unique relationship between God and us. Although this may sound like a platitude, God is GOD. He is the absolutely sovereign Lord over all His universe and over every creature in heaven, on earth, and in hell. He is also sovereign Lord over our lives, for in Him is the source of our lives and of all things in our daily existence. In Him is our confidence of the future and our hope of eternal life.

That determines the content of our prayers. Our Lord Himself taught us to express first and foremost as our great need and deepest desire: Father in heaven, hallowed by Thy Name! Along with that we long for the coming of God's kingdom and wish for nothing more than that God's will may be carried out round about us and in our own lives. That is our deepest motive when we pray for daily bread, for the forgiveness of our sins and the desire to grow in sanctification and our ultimate perfection. For in our souls rings the doxology, "*Thine is the kingdom, Thine is the power, Thine is the glory forever!*"

That also determines our attitude in prayer. Scripture teaches us that he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a Rewarder of those who diligently seek Him (Heb. 11:6). Only the believer can pray, for prayer is an act of faith. We believe in God as our sovereign Lord, our Redeemer and our Savior, our Refuge and our Strength, our God in whom we may trust. That is implied when we confess to be Christians, followers of our Lord Jesus Christ, citizens of heaven and aliens in the world. Especially in our present time this bears a special significance. Already we can recognize the claw of antichrist reaching out for us because we are Christians. Even our government

has an entirely different view of Christianity than we do. Public officials consider anyone a Christian who is not a communist, or a pagan, or distinctively professing one, only true God. According to that opinion we are guilty of *discrimination*, and may well have to suffer for this in the future. This can only mean that we must pray to stand firm and that we may receive grace to live as citizens of the heavenly kingdom and as aliens in this present world, no matter what the cost may be. All of this makes prayer an essential part of our personal lives.

Prayer is also an essential part of our *family* lives. The strongest bond between husband and wife is the spiritual bond that unites them in the Lord. That is the bond that creates harmony and unity in their lives, makes their marital union a holy marriage in the Lord. This same spiritual bond unites parents and children. We realize that our children are a gift from the Lord. We confess not only, All that I am I owe to Thee, but also, All that I have is Thine, including my children. Organically we as covenant parents produce a covenant seed, the children of the living God temporarily entrusted to our care. I do not mean to say that all of our children are elect, nor that all are saved. But God does take out of our children His own precious jewels, who are entrusted to us that, by the grace of God, Christ may prepare them for their place in glory through our instrumentality. God loves His own with a deeper love than we could ever possess. He has first claim to them. What a glorious privilege we have to be stewards in God's house and to bring up our children in the fear of the Lord to the utmost of our ability. In Christ's name the father in the family is God's prophet, God's priest, and king under Christ. Who is capable of these things? Therefore prayer is an essential part of the training of our children. It is said that a family that prays together stays together. An even greater benefit is the fact that a family that prays together is knit together in a true spiritual bond of faith and grows together in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ.

Even as prayer is an essential part of our family life, so also prayer is an essential part of the life of our children. They need prayer as much as we do. They must always be reminded of that need that God has created in them. From their earliest infancy they must be taught to pray, and to pray properly.

The question before us now is, how must we teach our children to pray?

To that must be answered, first of all, that we do that indirectly and possibly unconsciously by our very walk of life in the family and in the

midst of the world. Children are very sharp observers. They see and hear far more than you and I do. Very little escapes their keen observation. How readily they recognize a "beautiful" prayer, full of nicely chosen phrases and moving sentiments, which is completely out of harmony with the daily language and actions of the parents. How soon children recognize the fact that our prayers are contrary to our walk of life! Moreover, children are great imitators, sometimes consciously, but even more often unconsciously. How readily a child picks up a bad habit, an improper word or expression. Yet this ability to absorb and copy can also be of great value as the child learns to follow in the godly footsteps of the parents. From this follows that parents must be careful how they speak and act, also in the presence of their children. Fathers usually recognize their responsibility of supporting their families and supplying them with some of the niceties and luxuries of life. But there is no small danger that they do this at the expense of the spiritual. After a busy day it may seem far more appealing to sit and watch a ballgame, rather than concern one's self with the spiritual welfare of the children. It is often tempting to neglect the office of believer as prophet, priest, and king in the home, especially when it comes to teaching and giving guidance in a catechism lesson or discussing the Scripture passage that was read.

Here is where the responsibility of the mother also enters in. She is her husband's helper. Since father is often compelled to be away from home because of his employment, the mother takes over in the place of the father. This is the highest calling, the best career that any covenant mother can possibly desire. I cannot imagine a Christian mother who would sacrifice her high calling in the family to pound a typewriter or work as sales-lady in a store for a few paltry dollars to add to the luxuries in the home. I can assure you that many children of unbelieving mothers will rebuke them in hell for not having taught them the proper priorities and the things of lasting value here on earth.

This also includes our prayer life. I can say that we have come a long way in respect to prayers in our family worship, at least in many homes that I have visited. Some years ago there were many fathers who did not dare to make an audible prayer in the presence of the family. Often, when the father did lead the family in prayer, this was done in such hushed tones that no one knew exactly when the prayer was ended. Often, when a prayer could be heard, it consisted of nothing more than a series of mere platitudes, which made little or no impression upon the children. Parents were too reserved to talk about spiritual matters with each other, much less in the presence of their



children. The personal needs of the parents and of the children, or of a specific child, were mentioned only under dire circumstances. Today our fathers are much more open in their family devotions. But it must still be stressed that prayer is vital to our family life as children of God. The specific needs of the family must be mentioned every day, and also the needs of the children as they go off to school, are in school and on the playground. I do think that it is very improper to use the family devotions as a time to reprimand the children for the wrongs that may have been committed during the day. But children must certainly be remembered in their preparing for catechism, for society, or for public worship. In times of illness and on other important occasions the individual child must be remembered before the throne of grace.

Along with this, we must teach our children to pray their own prayers. Even as in training the child, this should be done as early as possible, beginning with a formal prayer. There are parents who object to teaching their children a formal prayer for fear of making hypocrites of them. As covenant parents we proceed from the principle that God creates the need for prayer even in the hearts of very small children, and that therefore we should train them in prayer as soon as possible. As the child grows older, it may be well to teach him more than one prayer at meals and when he retires, so that he does not fall into mere repetition. Already at this point the child should be taught to be reverent in his prayers. He must be aware that he is speaking to the Most High God as a mere, dependent creature, even as a sinner, who must always be filled with humble fear when he addresses God. As the child grows up toward adolescence he learns the Lord's Prayer, which again must be spoken slowly, clearly, and above all reverently. Reverence in our prayers can never be too strongly emphasized.

In due time the child is able to formulate his own prayers. Now it should be stressed that he should have his private devotions, a set time when he reads Scripture and makes his personal prayers. As difficult as that may seem at first, he must learn to listen to God's Word speaking to him from the Scriptures. He needs guidance at this point. Yet by prayerfully asking, "Speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth," he learns to listen; he hears God speak to him, even as the Holy Spirit applies the Word to his own heart and circumstances. The child must be instructed to make *all* his needs known. This includes intercessory prayer for his parents, for the other members of his family, as well as for his teacher, minister, employer or fellow employees. He must learn to confess his sins in all sincerity. There may be times when a certain sin demands that the parent and the child pray together for forgiveness.

In any case, he must learn to seek all his salvation in the cross of our Savior, to call upon the Lord in every circumstance of life, that he learn also to commit his whole life into the keeping of His Almighty God and merciful Father.

It may be well to conclude with a few specifics. Although there are many aspects of prayer that I cannot even begin to touch upon now, there are still a few matters worth considering.

One of the common problems in our day is that our lives become so involved, that we have not time for family devotions, at least not devotions which include the entire family. It can very well happen that there are days in which not a single meal is enjoyed with the entire family present. This is so different from the days of my childhood. Almost without exception we had at least two meals a day at which the entire family shared in the devotions. I can well remember that we were called out of our slumbers at six o'clock in the morning, so that we could have family devotions together before my father loaded his wagon, hitched up his horse and went off to work. In order to have the entire family together at least once a day, we may have to go back to that very good practice.

The question has been asked whether a mother should lead the devotions in the home when the father is absent. Personally, I am strongly in favor of that. It is also a good policy to let the older children have charge of the devotions at a time like that. Our chief aim must be not to neglect our devotions and also to keep them reverent.

One of the common problems among our youth is that they are often ashamed to pray in public, ashamed often even of having their peers know that they pray and want to live accordingly. The right and wrong of anything is determined solely by peer pressure. Sad to say, this is even evident among Christians together. Our children must be able to stand up for their convictions. They must be able to pray, "Lord, what wilt Thou have me do?" and then DO it.

Finally, this is the more necessary because Christ is Lord over every sphere of our lives. We are living very close to the end of the ages. Already antichrist is lifting his vile head in a final attempt to wipe out God's Name and people from the face of the earth. Persecution is creeping in on us from every side as the government seeks control over every aspect of our lives, as wickedness is openly displayed and praised, as apostasy grows in the churches. Our children must expect to be hated, scorned, and rejected for their faith, even more than we ever were. They must be aware that they are aliens in this world, citizens of the heavenly kingdom, and therefore also always more than

conquerors through our Lord Jesus Christ, in whom we always have the victory. This may cost them success in the world, or their job, and even other afflictions, such as hunger, imprisonment and even death. With them we continue to pray, "Come, Lord Jesus, yea, come quickly."

Rev. C. Hanko

## ART EDUCATION IN THE CHRISTIAN SCHOOL

There are many reasons why art is an important subject, and we as students, teachers and parents must understand these. The world has much to say about art, but we as Christians ought to know what *we* mean when we say "art." So let us begin by looking at some common misconceptions of why we study art and what it is. Then let us see what art actually is, why we should study it especially in a Christian school, and therefore see how this applies to all of us whether we're in education or not.

First of all we find that the parable of the talents in Matthew 25 is often used to explain why we should develop our artistic abilities, but developing our abilities is not the point of the passage. Rather, it means we "receive a certain place in the kingdom of God," that we receive this place or talent *according* to our abilities, and that we must be content and labor in that place to which God has called us.<sup>1</sup> Now it is true that we do have a responsibility to develop the abilities we've been given, and if we have been given the place of artist then indeed we must labor in that, but there has to be more. If this were all we based art education on, then only those already gifted with artistic abilities need study art. Now there may be more interest shown from some students than from others, but whether it seems one is gifted or not, *art is connected to everyone's life.*

Art may be the painting in the museum, the music you heard at the concert, or the poem in your literature book, but what about the

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1. Herman Hoeksema, *Chapel Talks on the Parables of Matthew*, Grand Rapids, Michigan: Theological School of the Protestant Reformed Churches, 1972, p. 113.

painting on your wall and the pictures in your magazines, the music from the radio, or the novel you read last week? All of these things may be art, and more. But maybe not. It depends on how you define art. If we say that art must be pleasing to behold, then many of the things mentioned will be art to some and not to others. If we say that it's art if the artist says so, then at least the first three things mentioned, the fine arts, will be art, and I might add that there are many who would agree with this. But neither of these definitions seems true, for both involve subjective standards.

Instead, we find that there are objective standards or principles which art complies to. These principles, for example, rhythm, balance and unity, work together not only to make the work pleasing, but to communicate. This then is a point I want to emphasize — *art is a means of communication*. So let's look a little closer at what this means. First, many authors and art educators state that a work of art tells us something:

"...any art work is...a statement about the human condition," (Foshay).<sup>2</sup>

"The arts specialize in forms of knowledge that can not be translated or expressed in any other way. . ." (Rockefeller).<sup>3</sup>

". . .and it certainly is a truthful claim — that art is, among other things, a very important language," (Feldman).<sup>4</sup>

Especially consider this quote:

"It is the function of art, then to make values vivid and persuasive as no other medium can," (Smith and Smith).<sup>5</sup>

So art does say something, and what it tells us is fairly agreed upon too — the human condition, ideas, emotions and values. Now just as mathematical formulas are the best way to express scientific laws, so too art can be the best way to express these things which we might call subjective knowledge. Let me illustrate this. A few weeks ago there was a poem called "Tomorrow" in our church bulletin, which

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2. Foshay, "The Arts in General Education," *Foundations for Curriculum Development and Evaluation in Art Education*, Hardiman and Zernich, ed., Illinois: Stipes Pub. C., 1981, p. 20.

3. Rockefeller, "The Arts: A Better Primer for our Children," *Foundations for Curriculum Development*, p. 49.

4. Feldman, "Catalyst — the Arts," *Foundations for Curriculum Development*, p. 77.

5. Smith and Smith, "Justifying Aesthetic Education," *Foundations for Curriculum Development*, p. 89.

brought across an idea that had never struck me before. Although it could have been expressed in everyday language, because it was a poem it necessitated attention, had a lot of meaning in a few words, and therefore was a more powerful means to express the idea. Here is the last verse:

I have nothing to do with tomorrow  
Its burdens then why should I share?  
Its grace and its faith I can't borrow  
Then why should I borrow its care?

Poetry is an art form which is closer to the means of communication we're most familiar with in our culture, so we might understand that before we would understand a painting or a symphony, yet all of these forms are worth our attention. All of them say something.

Now we must realize that there are some serious implications when we understand that art communicates. First of all let us note that what art tells us, subjective knowledge, is as important as objective knowledge. I mean that our thoughts, ideas and attitudes must be taken as seriously as our ability to do mathematics or read a history book. We are called to love God with all of our being, and that includes what we study intellectually as well as what we know inwardly. Our thoughts and emotions, our values and priorities must be ruled by His word too. And in fact did not Jesus in the Gospels emphatically teach and warn us through the Pharisees that our hearts, and not only our outward life, must be pure?

Secondly this means that art, which can communicate what is in the heart, cannot be left to the whim of the artist, but his work "...must have at its center and heart the revelation of God and the truth concerning Him."<sup>6</sup> This is important, for here we differ with the world and even all of those authors earlier quoted. They say that when a piece obeys the principles of art, and when it is meaningful and says something, then it is art. Now that's true, *but that's not enough*. We are citizens of a different kingdom, and we have been given spiritual eyes to see that. Some say that an artist is "...outside the jurisdictions of moral imperatives as his work needs to justify itself only by aesthetic standards and cannot be 'right' or 'wrong' ethically."<sup>7</sup> But we must exercise our spiritual eyes, and then not only by those principles of

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6. Prof. Herman Hanko, *Principles of Education*, Adams Street Protestant Reformed Christian School, 1980, p. 47.

7. Smith and Smith, "Justifying Aesthetic Education," *Foundations for Curriculum Development*, p. 84.

art do we judge, but also according to another, spiritual standard do we see art, and we do say it's right or wrong.

To show how this is true, let us consider the familiar statues of "The Discus Thrower" and "Venus de Milo" that came out of classical Greece. Now these figures are certainly according to the principles of art, and in that sense they are beautiful. Neither are they meaningless, for you can see the strain and strength of "The Discus Thrower" and the graceful femininity of the "Venus de Milo." But the Greeks were thoroughly man-centered and worshipped human-like gods, and so also the proportions of these statues are "ideal" and are a little bigger than life-size for the purpose of glorifying man. We might be able to appreciate them in the sense that they remind us that we are "fearfully and wonderfully made," but be aware that the artist intended the opposite. From this we see that art can be contrary to Scripture, but this also illustrates the point that Prof. H. Hanko made in talking of a reprobate artist, "...he knows the truth and incorporates it in his work of art whether he believes it or not."<sup>8</sup>

Here we are led to the importance of studying art in the Christian school. We have to learn to be discerning when perceiving art. And not only do we consider what's in art museums, but we had better have an idea of what the novels we read, the pictures we see in ads, and even the architecture of our churches are saying. There is artwork which is unacceptable to us as Christians, yet that the world considers to be "beautiful." Now if we had one of these pieces in our living room because at first glance it looks as if it's fine, what do you think? Is ignorance innocence?

Open your spiritual eyes to your immediate environment — maybe it doesn't tell you anything profound, but it might tell you the interests and concerns of the people who live there. Open your spiritual eyes to the environment outside your window. See the trees and the sky, the lakes and the mountains — how great is our Father, the Creator, *the* Artist! You see, it's these things which are important in studying art. And not only do we learn to *see*, we also have to answer the question of how we make art to glorify God and reveal His truth. This takes technical skill, a knowledge and sensitivity to the principles and elements of art, an understanding of how art communicates, and most importantly a knowledge of His truth. We are all involved in some way with these things, and this must be involved in art education too. May we consider this in whatever area we study or teach. Let us see the work of God and praise Him.

Connie L. De Vries

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8. Prof. Herman Hanko, *Principles of Education*, p. 48.

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)

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

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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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