

His people, and we shall walk before Him in childlike obedience, subjects of His kingdom, in the home, in the church, in

society, and in the great land in which God has given us a place, acknowledging His one and only Lordship.

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## CREATIVITY AND THE REFORMED CHRISTIAN TEACHER

by Agatha Lubbers

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Preponderant sections of the professional literature written to stimulate teachers and to influence their thinking discuss and advocate either creative teaching or the teaching of creativity. I remember one of my college professors in the education department of Calvin College who insisted that every teacher must be an artist, and that an essential task of each teacher is to develop unique teaching procedures and original teaching materials. This undoubtedly can be considered a vital form of creativity.

The task of this paper is as follows:

1. To present a Biblical definition of creativity.
2. To present some ideas that will assist in the understanding of the cultivation of the creative mind.
3. To discuss some of the implications for teaching creatively so that creativity and imagination will be stimulated in the student.

### I. The Biblical Definition

The Scriptures begin in Genesis 1:1 with the explicit and simple statement: "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth." In order to present the Scriptural teaching concerning creativity

and the fundamental idea of creation it will be necessary for us to examine briefly this universal concept and this Scriptural truth.

There is a difference of opinion among Reformed scholars on one of the fundamental questions posed by the basic truth of creativity. There are those scholars within the Reformed and Christian academic community who insist that man's ability to think and to develop ideas and material objects is rooted in his being created in the image of God.

Although this idea has some appeal because man is different from the animals, it is my opinion that such thinking is not correct. Such thinking is rooted in a concept which speaks of the image of God in man in a wider and a narrower sense. The Reformed Confessions and the Word of God do not refer to the image of God in man as being represented by man's rationality and his intellect. Man, as an **image-bearer**, thinks and wills but the Scriptures and the Confessions denominate the image of God as consisting in "true righteousness and holiness" so that man "might rightly know God his Creator, heartily love him and live with him in eternal happiness to glorify and praise him." From that righteousness and holiness man fell and became instead an **image-bearer** of the Devil. It is from that depravity that the first Adam and all the elect had to be saved. In the sending of the second Adam, the Lord from heaven, our Immanuel, God with us, we are saved and have received

again the image of God. Only through the grace of God in Christ is this image restored in the elect. Paul says in Ephesians 4:23-24:

And be renewed in the spirit of your mind; and that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness.

A more detailed study of this problem by this writer can be found in the syllabus, *A Writing Program for the Covenant Child*, Federation of Protestant Reformed Christian Schools, 1972, pages 72-79.

The terms which need to be understood are "creative" and "creativity". These terms infer productivity and the ability to originate. Someone who is uncreative is likewise unproductive. The terms also imply something new or original rather than something imitated.

"In the beginning God created." God, by the word of His power in Triunity, gave to everything its form and content. The very form of the creature expressed the content of the creature. Adam, who was the king of Creation under God, had the prophetic power and knowledgeability so that he could understand immediately without specific instructions the creatures he was called to name. Adam could read the symbolics of creation and could express it "creatively". He was not imitating other men. He knew the names of the creatures. This was the Logos a Sarkos, (Word without Flesh in Creation prior to the Incarnation) of John 1:1-10. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not anything made that was made. In him was life; and the life was the light of men..." Adam saw the Word of God in all creation even though he did not yet see the Logos en Sarki (the Word made Flesh that came to dwell among us, i.e. the Incarnation) of John 1:14-18, and I John 1:1. This was the Word that was first promised to Adam and

to Eve in Paradise (Genesis 3:15).

Natural man does not see the Word in all things. He does not see Logos a Sarkos; i.e., he does not see the Word of God in creation. (Cf. Romans 1:18 ff. and John 1:10.) He holds the truth, but holds it in unrighteousness. As a result of his unrighteousness, "he changes the glory of uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and four-footed beasts, and creeping things." (Cf. Romans 1:22.)

The basic Scriptural term for creation in the Hebrew language is Bara, which means "to create", "to form", "to fashion", or "to prepare". Hebrews 11:3 says "...the worlds were framed (made thoroughly fit) by the word of God so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear." Rev. H. Hoeksema in *Reformed Dogmatics* gives the following as a basic working definition to understand creation. "Creation is that act of the almighty will of God whereby he gave to the things that were eternally in His counsel existence in distinction from Himself." (Cf. page 171.)

There is another word in the Hebrew which is Asah. This word permits greater variety of application and is perhaps the word for the Reformed Christian to use when he speaks of the "creative" acts of men. Man as a rational, thinking, imaginative person is not like a bird who always makes the same kind of nest, or like the mole who always bores the same kind of channel through the earth, or like the beaver who can be identified by the dams which he builds. Man has the ability to structure things differently. He does not operate according to a set of instincts. The Hebrew word Asah teaches this because it contains the idea of cultivating, dressing, trimming and culturing.

There are, therefore, Scriptural directives for the Reformed Christian thinker to follow. Likewise it is obvious that the creative thinking, the creative working, and the creative writing of man

is not of the same kind of forming and fashioning that God did in the beginning and which He continues to do in His providential control of all things. God is the Creator and man is a creature with limited "creative" powers. Man does have God-ordained responsibilities and God-given abilities which cause him to till and culture the earth; i.e., to be busy in all the arts and sciences, but man is not The CREATOR of all things."

This means that as an image-bearer of God who has been recreated in Christ Jesus, (cf. II Cor. 5:17ff.) redeemed man has the calling to work creatively and imaginatively in the cosmos of God. He does not sit down and wait until the New Jerusalem and all of its culture appears nor does he attempt to establish by his own efforts that New Jerusalem here and now. He works with the imaginative and creative powers God has given to him as a recreated and reborn image-bearer in this present creation. He does this to the glory and praise of God's sovereign grace.

## II. The Cultivation of the Creative Mind

I begin to hear rumblings. These disturbances indicate to me that you are perhaps saying, "This all sounds very good in theory but how does one put these Scriptural principles into practice?" I am being urged, therefore, to climb down from my "ivory tower" and propose ideas on the actual cultivation, the stimulation, and the development of the creative mind.

Implied is the thought that the creative mind can be cultivated and developed, or that man's mind can be cultivated and stimulated to become creative. Robert F. DeHaan, chairman of the department of psychology, Hope College, Holland, Michigan, and Havinghurst, professor in the department of education, University of Chicago, write the following in the book *Educating Gifted Children*, p. 166.

Creativity is something that can be taught. It is also something that

can be discouraged and allowed to atrophy. Since creativity can be taught, it is important for educators to put their minds to the task of developing it in every child but in particular in the gifted child.

Several years ago I discovered J.N. Hook's book entitled *Writing Creatively*. In the course of reading his discussion of the subject I discovered that Hook believes that; 1. all writing is creative, 2. no writing is creative, and 3. some writing is creative. These seemingly contradictory statements when elaborated will possibly have more clarity.

Hook suggests in the first place that every kind of writing is creative because something comes into existence which did not previously exist. Hook further states that no writing is really creative or originative because there is nothing new under the sun. No new matter is created and none is destroyed. Any piece of writing is only a collection of old thoughts, old emotions, old images, old words, old grammatical forms. Hook finally asserts that some writing is creative in the sense that it is more creative than is other creative writing.

The ideas and opinions of DeHaan, Havinghurst, and Hook intrigue me. I do not mean to suggest that I agree in every sense of the word with these men but I appreciate some of their emphases. Nor do I mean to infer that the teacher must worry or become frantic if everything that he or child does is not original. In most cases this is impossible. I do believe, however, that the teacher has the responsibility to stimulate and not to stymie the creative and imaginative genius which resides in the child.

I submit that when one believes that people are creative this means that there resides in the child some latent talent which needs stimulation and encouragement. The creative writer is one with the talent for affectively using words. The creative mathematician thinks originally and perhaps originatively in the world of

mathematical ideas; he has a logical and inventive mind. The creative scientist has mastered a body of scientific ideas and is able with these ideas to create and develop previously unknown scientific concepts.

Not everyone has the talent to be creative in the same way. Some are creative in the plastic arts, others are creative with the brush and the pallet, still others are creative with the pen and pencil, and there are those who are creative with the camera and other photographic equipment. In a certain sense of the word this talent for creativity is hereditary. More properly, of course, it is God-given but one's environment can certainly stimulate or can stymie the development of these hereditary God-given gifts.

These gifts we say come from God. God is the great artist. He is the great writer. He puts his thoughts into Words. The created works of God are His Words. His creative Word is the cosmos, the wonderfully created whole of heaven and earth. (cf. Heidelberg Catechism, question 26-27.) Man can write and man can paint and man can sculpture. Man can put this creation into human word and into human form. But the words and the forms are God's creation which man discovers or perhaps uncovers. Man is in the workshop of God and selects from God's infinite store of thoughts and forms a few of his own fashions and frames. Adam did this relatively well according to the Logos in Creation and the Logos in his mind before the fall.

But man fell. Fallen man does not read the Logos in all creation. This truth needs emphasis and repetition. He keeps the truth down in unrighteousness. He suppresses the truth. (Cf. Romans 1:18 ff.) Man changes the truth into a lie, Romans 1:25. The light that is in fallen man, as he is by nature is darkness. (Cf. Matt. 6:22-23.) The **Canons of Dordt**, Heads III and IV, article 4, teaches that

there "remain in man since the fall only glimmerings of natural light, whereby he retains some knowledge of God, of natural things, and of the difference between good and evil, and discovers some regard for virtue, good order in society, and for maintaining orderly external deportment. But so far is this light of nature from being sufficient to bring him to a saving knowledge of God, and to true conversion, that he is incapable of using it aright even in things natural and civil."

Fallen, natural man is a depraved sinner and commits the sins which originate with his spiritual father, the Devil. Satan is the father of the lie. Jesus speaking to the depraved Pharisees says: "Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do. He was a murderer from the beginning and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it. John 8:44"

Fallen and totally depraved natural man does the works and speaks the lies of Beelzebub, whose image he bears. Fallen man does this also in all of his creative and imaginative working. Many passages of Scripture declare this. "Genesis 6:5; And God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually." "Genesis 8:21: ...for the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth...." Fallen man fashions the forms and seeks in the hope that he might feel after God and find him. (Cf. Acts 17:27 ff.) All he accomplishes, however, is the acknowledgement that he is a creature dependent upon God and existing because there is a God. In Ecclesiastes 3:11 we read that God has "...set the world in their heart, so that no man can find out the work that God maketh from the beginning to the end." Even the pagan poets of Paul's day said: "In him we live and move and have our being." (Acts 7:28.) This is not the

knowledge of love in Christ. It is not the certain knowledge and hearty confidence of faith. It is that formal knowledge which every natural man has so that he is inexcusable before God. (Cf. Romans 1:20.)

The creative and imaginative qualities in man have caused men of every age to produce their artists. Soon after the fall men had become skillful in music and were artificers in brass and in iron. Men wrote their poems and praised themselves rather than the God who made them. Solomon, the inspired writer of Ecclesiastes writes that it is vanity because it contains nothing but the deep aspirations and ideals of humanism. Men served the creature and not the Creator. (Cf. Genesis 6:19 ff. and Romans 1:25.) God was not in all their thoughts. Although they employ His forms and His symbolics, they cannot know Him, and they cannot will to know Him. Natural man is like the rebellious child who sits in His father's lap and slaps the very father, who holds him and sustains him, in His face. This describes the fundamental spiritual content of the creativity of all those who do not possess the mind of Christ.

Christian creativity also presupposes a creative mind. The Christian creative writer, creative mathematician, or artisan is described essentially in question 32 of the **Heidelberg Catechism**. The Christian is radically different because he is a new man. The writers of the Catechism echo the Scriptures when they say that the Christian is one who is a partaker of Christ's anointing. The Christian has been changed into the image of his Lord Christ. "But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord. II Corinthians 3:18." The Christian has been recreated and therefore his creativity is characterized by a basic attitude which is not carnal, sensual or devilish. Paul in II Corinthians 10:5 writes that he is busy

"Casting down imaginations (reasonings) and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought (design) to the obedience of Christ."

Nonetheless creaturely creativity remains a natural talent and requires a creative mind. Not every Christian has the same talents and skills and will not be equally successful in his ability to produce new concepts and new forms. He will not be equally successful in formulating original sentences and unique thoughts. The natural talents must exist. They are the prerequisites but these talents given by God must be developed by the individuals to whom they are given. It is the "capital" wherewith a Christian is able to labor and fulfill his calling in this creation. Solomon says in Ecclesiastes 3:22, "Wherefore I perceive that there is nothing better, than that a man shall rejoice in his own works; for that is his portion...."

The creativity of the Christian is sanctified. This means therefore that the Christian writer is a sanctified writer. He writes words "seasoned with salt." (Cf. Colossians 4:6.) In Ephesians 4:29 Paul says "Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers."

This is not only a directive for the new man in his conversation, but it also refers to what flows from his pen, or is struck from his typewriter. In all the forms of literature and in all the forms of the other kinds of creative arts, it must be for edification; i.e. to build up in the knowledge of God. It must not be the "peeping and muttering of wizards" referred to in Isaiah 8:19, and Isaiah 10:14. The Christian, who creates, is one who is the light of world, the salt of the earth, a city on a hill top. Man must read and study the good words and works of Reformed Christian artists, and authors, who glorify their Father in heaven.

Creative activity for the creature is not easy. The creation of a poem, a novel, or the painting of a picture does not spontaneously and automatically happen. Creativity when viewed formally therefore for both the Christian and the infidel is hard work. Thomas Edison correctly said that "Genius is one per cent inspiration and ninety-nine per cent perspiration." A person must be willing to think; he must be willing to exert himself; he must be willing to sweat. Creativity likewise implies questioning. The creative person, especially the writer, asks the question why? Creativity furthermore demands that one see relationships among all events of his life and the tangible objects he contacts. He must be willing and able, therefore, to assemble, to reassemble, to add, to arrange and to rearrange. Creativity sees the end in every beginning and the beginning in every ending. To work and think creatively one must possess the largeness of soul that is stimulated by a sensitivity to the values and the events of life. For the Christian this is a God-fearing sensitivity and not merely a humanistic or moralistic kind of sensitivity. This psychical comprehensiveness is stimulated by having the windows of one's soul swung wide open to the varieties of experience. The creative person breathes deeply in the invigorating breezes of a fertile environment. The creative person feels free to vent his reactions and express his responses to the varieties of experience and the multitudes of stimuli that affect his soul.

It is at this point that the importance of the Reformed Christian teacher comes into focus. A teacher conscious of his responsibility before God to his students will attempt to understand the creative process, will attempt to understand and refine his own performance, and will attempt to develop his own abilities so that he can stimulate such creativity in his students.

### III. The Implications For Teaching Creatively So that Creativity and Imagination will be Stimulated in the Student.

I am convinced that the Reformed Christian teacher has the calling before God to teach creatively and imaginatively so that the Christian student will be stimulated to be creative and imaginative. The teacher may not stymie creativity although he will not let this creativity run rampant. The problem of sin remains. The regenerated Christian student is dead to sin but even within the covenant student sin is not dead. Sin has become exceedingly sinful. In Romans 7:9, we read, "I died but sin revives." The sinner must be retrained. There is a proper and healthy tension which the Reformed Christian teacher must recognize and must utilize. (Much more could be said about this important topic but this is a subject that demands a separate paper because the topic is basically "Censorship and Its Proper Role.")

In order that the teacher may stimulate creativity and so that he can influence the imaginative process, he must understand the creative process. Harold Rugg, a professor in the Columbia School of Education, in the book *Imagination*, 1963, and DeHaan and Havinghurst in *Educating Gifted Children*, discuss the creative process. Both of these sources state that there are fundamentally four stages in the creative process.

1. **The first is the period of preparation.** This is a period of baffled struggle during which time the person struggles with a concept or idea. It is during this time that the artist has experiences which can be compared to those described by Stephen Spender, 20th century British poet. He says concerning the making of a poem, that it all begins with "a dim cloud of an idea which I feel must be condensed into a shower of words."

2. **The second period or stage is that called the interlude or period of incubation.** During this time the worker appar-

ently gives up, pushes the problem back, down, or even "out of the mind". Here it is left for the subconscious to work upon it. Elizabeth Goudge in *The Dean's Watch* has Isaac Peabody, the watchmaker, say, "...Like all creators, he knew well that strange feeling of movement within the spirit, comparable only to the first movement of the child within the womb, which causes the victim to say perhaps with excitement, perhaps with exasperation, or exhaustion, 'There is a new poem, a new picture, a new symphony coming....' "

3. The third stage is one referred to by many writers as the time of a sudden unexpected "flash of insight." I think we have all experienced this in some limited degree. Ideas or concepts sometimes won't come into existence. A problem has been thoroughly analyzed but concepts and ideas cannot be synthesized. One goes to bed for the night and the next morning the problem is clarified or possibly better yet the problem is solved. What happens, however, in this third stage rarely happens unless there has been as the French mathematician Hadamard suggested, "a tenacious continuity of attention." This "tenacious continuity of attention" happens both consciously and subconsciously. Newton, when asked how he came to his discovery of the law of universal attraction, replied, "By constantly thinking it over." Whitehead said in describing the "flash of insight" which came after a long and disheartening period of confusion, "There is a state of imaginative muddled suspense which precedes successful inductive generalization."

Rugg in summarizing the "flash of insight" says, "I say, therefore, that the 'flash' will not occur unless the mind, conscious and unconscious, has been stored with a rich body of percepts, images, motor adjustments, and concepts that are pertinent to the new concept struggling to be born."

We do not merely apprehend the conditions and premises of a problem, drop it conveniently into the well of the subconscious, go to bed, sleep, and wake up the next morning with the problem solved. It is not that easy. It takes work and struggle. Then the "flash of insight" may come.

Brewster Ghiselin in *The Creative Process*, p. 6, 1952, quotes Anton Chekhov who confirms the importance of concentrated thought as follows: "...to deny that artistic creation involves problems and purposes would be to admit that an artist creates without premeditation, without design, under a spell. Therefore if an artist boasted to me of having written a story without a previously settled design, but by inspiration, I shall call him a lunatic."

4. Finally there is the period of verification during which the flash of insight is critically tested and reconstructed. It is during this period that the artist comes to a conviction of certitude. It is during this time that a mere event or happening becomes a recognizable experience. Dorothy Sayers writing in the essay "Towards a Christian Aesthetic" says, "He (the poet, or artist, A.L.) puts the experience into words in his own mind, and in so doing recognizes the experience for what it is. To the extent that we can do that, we are all poets. A 'poet' so-called is simply a man like ourselves with an exceptional power of revealing his experience by expressing it, so that not only he, but we ourselves, recognize that experience as our own."

For the Christian the period of testing and reconstruction of the experience would be marked by searching the Word of God. He would submit these ideas and constructions to the real touchstone.

We pause to note that for the Reformed Christian teacher the importance of the creative process means several things. In general the teacher is called to utilize the materials and methods



that will assist the student in storing the mind with events and percepts so that the student can image forth ideas from this stockpile during his creative moments. This is especially important for the teacher to remember as he selects reading and study materials for the student.

Furthermore the teacher should remember that if he is going to stimulate and promote creativity, he cannot be cruelly impatient. The artist must have time to work. Nagging won't help but genuine encouragement will be the best kind of assistance the teacher can give. This is difficult for all, and can be more difficult for some because it means that the teacher must "side-track" some of his own notions so that he can genuinely help and influence the thinking of his students.

The crowning results of this strenuous activity is revealed in the finished product of the artist. For each type of creativity this is unique. For the scientist there is the refined statement of the hypothesis. For the art of disciplined conversation the right question is asked. For the logician the crowning effort is evident when the correct premise is drawn. For the poet and writer the definitive word or phrase that was long sought has been discovered. For the painter or sculptor the inevitably exact proportion has been found. For the problem-solver the recognition or statement of the problem has been uncovered.

The teacher must therefore provide the environment and the opportunities so that creative thinking, creative writing, and other types of creative artistry will be advanced. DeHaan and Havinghurst indicate that the teacher can do this in a variety of ways. The following are some of these methods:

#### **1. Brainstorming.** Brainstorming can

"While a curriculum is a very important matter, I should never equate its importance with that of the faculty. A good faculty can squeeze a lot out of a poor curriculum, but no curriculum will rescue a mediocre faculty."

John H. Timmerman  
Promises to Keep, p. 39.

be done easily in class. The purpose is to obtain as many ideas as possible on a particular problem in a short time. Quantity and not quality is the goal. Combination and improvement are also sought during the session.

**2. Sensitivity to problems.** In trips taken by the class students may be asked to list questions that occurred to them as a result of their observations. Another possibility is to use the "what would happen if..." lead for classroom exercises. What would happen if we had only three fingers? What would happen if the ocean dried up? What would happen if the air all over the world would become radioactive?

**3. Ideational fluency.** In addition to brainstorming some of the following assignments may be used to help students increase their flow of ideas.

a. List on a piece of paper all the uses you can think of for a brick. You will have five minutes.

b. If you were exposed to extreme cold, what things might bring you comfort? You may use an adjective along with the noun but do not use verbs. You may write for four minutes.

c. In how many ways can water be made to work for you?

It is relatively easy to analyze the creative process. It is more difficult to create the situation which will stimulate such creativity. The challenge for each teacher is to promote an atmosphere in which students will be stimulated to be creative.

A genuine concern for the development of creativity in the Christian can have important and lasting results in the Christian school; on the individuals in the school, and for the total Christian community.