

Elementary teachers, are you bothered by boys who seemingly can't sing and whose efforts usually consist of two or three notes in the vicinity of middle c or lower? Bear in mind that these boys, barring the possibility of some rather rare functional hearing disorders, should have perfectly good soprano voices, voices that would add much to your singing in the classroom. Instead of labelling them "monotones" (In twenty-eight years of choral work I've never found a genuine monotone!!) and placing them in musical limbo until their voices breaks, why not spend some time helping them find their real voice. Remember that the boy soprano voice is probably the most beautiful of all!

A possible solution to some, if not all of your problems, is the following two-step approach. First, eliminate the piano. Yes, work **without** the piano!!!! You may use a pitch-pipe if necessary, but rely on your voice as the principal instrument. The second step is to pitch the songs down so that the lowest note is in the vicinity of a-flat below middle c. Most youngsters can sing this low without straining. These two steps often will be sufficient; a few may require some personal attention, but the non-singers should begin to sing. After they have gained some confidence the pitch can gradually be raised to a normal level. Bear in mind that certain songs in The Psalter are pitched too high to begin with and can well afford to be sung in a lower key.

The above is written in the assumption that you are a woman. If you aren't, then you'd better start cultivating your falsetto. Most men have a perfectly good, but seldom used, high falsetto voice that can sing easily in the mezzo-soprano range. The recent revival of the **counter-tenor** voice is proof of the fact. A great many male altos possess normal baritone voices. A little work on your falsetto can work wonders in your classroom singing...!

If you have any questions I'll be glad to consider them. Just write or call at the high school.

by Roland Petersen

The Theological Basis For Teaching Writing

by James Huizinga

That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ.

I John 1:3

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We who support Protestant Reformed Christian education have chosen the ideal of a distinctive education, invigorated by the Word of God and true in all its parts to the doctrines of the Reformed Tradition. We insist that all instruction have a theological foundation. We believe that God's Word, not only inspires us to the task of educating our children, but that it also provides us with our purpose and establishes our goals. We maintain that Scripture, and Scripture alone, illuminates all of reality. Thus Scripture is the source and basis for all knowledge and all understanding. We, therefore, demand that a very real and vital Scriptural emphasis be present throughout all of the instruction given in each course in the Christian school curriculum.

We have made our position clear, generally, with respect to this theological foundation, in the constitutions that we have written for our schools, and in the principles of education that we have adopted. We have given our teachers the mandate, to work out and apply the specifics of this position in the various courses that they teach. Each teacher must understand the theological basis for his course, and it is his responsibility to make the implications of this theological basis meaningful in all of his teaching.

The task of teaching a course in the light of Scripture is an immense one, a humanly impossible one. It takes much thought, much study, and much prayer. One thing is certain, however. When teachers and parents have a clear understanding of basic principles, and when teachers and parents make a diligent attempt to communicate these principles to their children, we will be well directed toward achieving an effective Christian education.

The purpose of this article is to explore the theological foundation for teaching writing in our schools. We believe that the purpose for teaching

writing is clearly implicit in the doctrines that we hold precious, and we believe that the teaching of composition in our schools can not proceed aright unless these principles are clearly understood by parents, teachers, and students.

We desire, above all else, that our teaching be true to the demands of Scripture, that it satisfy the demands that Scripture makes for the lives of the people of God. There is always the danger, however, that the education in our schools be derivative: that it not be distinctive; that it be similar, if not in theory, then in practice to what exists in other institutions. Although this danger exists in every subject area, it seems particularly a threat to the teaching of writing. We too seldom think of the profound spiritual importance of writing. We tend to think of writing merely as a practical skill that we need, to get along in the world. Here we are influenced by the world and the world's view of education. The world says, "Learn to write if you expect to be a success in the world of buying and selling." "Learn to write if you wish to achieve the good life." We very easily share in this kind of thinking. If this be our motivation for teaching writing, we and our children will fail to see the more profound role that writing plays in the life of the child of God.

Besides the motive of materialism, there are other worldly motives for teaching writing that we reject. We do not teach our children to write for humanistic reasons. Traditionally, in the humanistic tradition, writing has been seen as one of the fine arts, a noble expression of the human heart and spirit. To learn to write well was to achieve something uniquely and grandly human. Writing was for the betterment of the individual and ultimately for the improvement of society and the human race. Humanism, however, always exalts man at the expense of God. This we do not want to do in our teaching

of writing.

More recently a new sound is being heard. It is the clamor of those who have become impatient and disillusioned with the humanists. The steady voice of the humanist has become the desperate cry of the revolutionary educationist. Refinement of the human race is no longer the crucial issue in education. Now the issue is survival. A book, written by Neil Postman and Charles Weingartner, first published in 1969, entitled *Teaching as a Subversive Activity*, is representative of this changing concern in education. The book expresses severe dissatisfaction with education in our country, charging it with gross irrelevance. The main thrust of the book is that "new education" can and must come to the aid of a sorely troubled society. The authors base their book on two assumptions:

- a) That the survival of our society is threatened by an increasing number of unprecedented and, to date, insoluble problems.
- b) That something can be done to prove the situation.

The list of problems that Postman and Weingartner present is truly startling: the mental illness problem, the crime problem, the suicide problem, the child beating problem, the misinformation problem, the civil rights problem, the electronic bugging problem, the sex problem, the drug problem, the population explosion problem, the birth control problem, the abortion problem, the housing problem, the pollution problem, the garbage disposal problem, the radio activity problem, the megalopolis problem, the super-sonic jet noise problem, the traffic problem, the who-am-I problem, and the what-does-it-all-mean problem. In the words of the authors:

It is the thesis of this book that change -- constant accelerating, ubiquitous -- is the most striking characteristic of the world we live in

and that our educational system has not yet recognized this fact. We maintain, further, that the abilities and attitudes required to deal adequately with change are those of highest priority and that it is not beyond our ingenuity to design school environments which can help young people to master concepts necessary to survival in a rapidly changing world.

What Postman and Weingartner have to say in their book characterizes a growing trend in education today. As the world's problems increase, the plea for relevance in education becomes more urgent. More and more the schools are being pressured to discard traditional values and methods in favor of programs designed to solve immediate problems. Increasingly, the resources of the schools are being turned in the direction solving the problems that threaten society. The teaching of writing, also, is part of this new emphasis. Writing is important today because writing is a means of communication. Communication is what man so desperately wants. Man believes that lack of communication is the root cause of most of the world's problems. Thus he presses writing in the service of solving these problems. Students in writing classes are taught to solve their personal problems through self-expression. The confused adolescent, the angry member of the minority group, the alienated teenager, the person with the "who-am-I problem," the person with the "what-does-it-all-mean problem": they are all encouraged to work out their problems by relating to others. In these situations writing becomes a kind of therapy, a method of survival.

In schools where the students' personal problems are not the pressing concern, students are allowed to do "issue centered writing." Students are given the opportunity to explore contemporary

problems, such as: the problem of war, the problem of over population, the problem of poverty, and the problem of race. Throughout their exploring, students are encouraged to discover the causes for the world's troubles and to propose solutions. New education hopes to create a new generation of people, sensitive to the problems of the world, able and willing to engage in an interchange of ideas that will eventually serve to make the world a safe place to live.

For the world, communication in all its forms is the key. Never before has man so urgently felt the need to communicate. Never before has man been so terrified by the threat posed by divergent elements in the society of men. Never before have peace and harmony and singleness of purpose been such dearly sought prizes. For modern man the issue is survival. He knows that his future depends upon undoing the confusion of tongues and upon regaining the glory of Babel.

The Christian teacher of writing does not want to share in the ungodly, Antichrist-seeking goals of modern education. Yet there is a danger. The danger lies in the fact that the goal that the Christian has for teaching writing appears similar to the goal sought by the world. Not that the Christian imitates the world, but rather that the world steals from the Christian. The world seizes the gift of communication and perverts it into the service of a kingdom, which for all its apparent goodness is really a counterfeit kingdom, and whose king is the most wretched kind of imposter. Christians, too, are interested in writing because it is a form of communication. They, too, desire peace and harmony and singleness of purpose. Christians, too, seek the establishment of a kingdom. However, the kingdom that Christians seek is entirely separate and everywhere opposed to the Kingdom of the World. The world trains its children for the Kingdom of the World.

We train our children for the Kingdom of God. The Christian school does not train children to be social activists. We are concerned about the problems of the world because they affect us. We are concerned about them because we know that they serve God's purpose. We are not concerned about them because our survival is at stake. For us the future is secure. Resting in the knowledge that our earthly existence is only temporary, we can pursue our primary goal of knowing God and our fellow Christians. Writing, as we will see, plays an important role in this activity.

The Biblical doctrine, then, that is the foundation for the teaching of writing in the Christian school is the doctrine of the Covenant. The doctrine of the Covenant has implications for every aspect of our lives. It has implications for every one of our natural gifts. When God created Adam, he fitted Adam for the Covenant relationship in which Adam was to live with God. God gave Adam the gift of communication. Adam by speaking and listening was able to live in close fellowship with God.

The gift of communication was in fact a Godlike gift, a reflection of the nature of God himself. For God, the Scriptures tell us, is a communicating God. He communicates first of all with himself. This is evident in Genesis 1:26 where God said, "Let us make man in our image." This communication of God within Himself, we believe, is evidence of the perfect fellowship and harmony of purpose that exists within the Trinity. When God chose to communicate with Adam, he established a Covenant of friendship with Adam. He formed the basis of this friendship by communicating himself to Adam. Adam could hear God's speech in creation, and he could also hear God's speech directly as is apparent in Genesis 1:29-30, Genesis 2:16-17, and Genesis 3.

Nor did God cease speaking to Adam

when Adam deliberately violated the blessed relationship that he had with his God. Although Adam could no longer communicate perfectly with God through creation, and although he was now spiritually cut off from God so that he could not naturally hear the voice of God, God continued to communicate with Adam by speaking the name of Jesus Christ. Thus the promise of Christ became the basis for the Covenant of Fellowship between God and man throughout the Old Dispensation.

And then the Word became flesh and dwelt among us and some of us communed with him face to face. And then the Promise was fulfilled as God spoke the central message of all time, the message that God continues to speak through his written Word, promising the joys of salvation to those who read it and hear it proclaimed. So God's speech to his people is the language of the Covenant. For those to whom he has given the ears to hear, God's speech makes possible the most blessed fellowship and communion with Him.

God's people, however, are not mere passive listeners. A strange relationship indeed it would be if God could talk to us, and we could not talk to him; an incomplete and unnatural relationship at best. The fact is that our role in God's Covenant is an active one. God has so designed and structured us that we are able to respond to him with our voices. He gives us the desire, not only, but also the ability to answer his speech to us. Covenant life also demands that we seek fellowship and communion with each other. As the family of God we feel compelled to know and enjoy our brothers and sisters in Christ. It is this truth that is the motivating principle for the teaching of writing in the Christian school.

Just as God chose the written word to communicate himself to us, so our written words serve to promote the communion of

the saints. It is this fact that we have to communicate to our students. We have to get them to see that writing is a useful and beautiful tool for the Kingdom of God. The essential fact about writing that we have to stress is that writing is sharing. The Christian writer is concerned with sharing knowledge of God and insights into the will and working of God. It is knowledge of God that the saints must seek, and the more they grow in the knowledge of God, the more they grow in fellowship and communion with each other. That the Church of Christ down through the ages to the present has had writers who have enriched the people of God by sharing their peculiar insights is plain enough. It is equally plain that Christ's Church in the future will need such writers.

We must impress our students with the fact that writing is sharing knowledge and insights about God. We must also show them that the Christian writer shares himself, that he imparts a knowledge of himself to his reader. No writer (unless he is writing something as coldly objective as a cookbook) can escape revealing something of himself. We say that all writing has a degree of subjectivity, meaning that all writing to some degree bears the mark of the author's personality. It is this insight into the mind and spirit of the Christian writer that is valuable to the Christian reader. A piece of writing may help us know God better, but at the same time it may help us to know the writer. When we recognize the knowledge of God in a fellow Christian, and when we see the unique way that he gives expression to this knowledge, our knowledge and enjoyment of this fellow Christian becomes more complete.

Thus it is important that we teach our students to be original in their writing. We have to teach them to avoid cliches, trite expressions, and over-worked forms. We want them to be true to themselves,

which is a way of saying that we want their God-given uniqueness to shine in their writing. We are not, however, exponents of unbridled freedom in writing. We do not encourage students to say what they want to say when they want to say it. Rather, we insist that our students learn to move freely in harness. We readily grant each student the freedom to be himself, yet we insist that his written expression be governed by a desire to foster the communication of the saints. If we can get our students to appreciate the importance of content in their writing, and if we can help them achieve a style of writing that is personally honest, then their writing will truly be a useful tool in the Kingdom of God.

We can be thankful to God that we have active writers in our churches today. We have **The Standard Bearer** and the **Beacon Lights**. We have people who write papers for society meetings and the like. These all serve the nurture and growth of the body of Christ. Yet the sad fact is that the writers among us represent only a handful. Why is creative writing (published creative writing at least) virtually non-existent among us? Why does the **Beacon Lights** staff find it difficult to get young writers? The teacher of writing starts with the assumption that every Covenant child has a contribution to make, and it is frustrating knowledge to him that many of his students will never use the

writing skills that he has tried to teach.

One reason for the lack of writing among us is no doubt the distractions of our age and the preoccupations that we allow in our lives. We do not seem to have the time nor the energy to devote to such a strenuous intellectual pursuit as writing. Maybe we have become too content with being mere listeners. Whatever the problem, our task as parents and teachers is clear. We have to promote writing. As parents, we have to see to it that our children master the skills of writing, then we have to encourage them to apply these skills. As teachers, we have to be diligent and thorough in showing the students the role that writing plays in the life of the child of God. One thing that the schools can do is provide more opportunities for the students to see their writing published. Students who write only for the teacher quickly see writing as a meaningless, artificial activity. We have to let them see their writing do its work.

The ideal of a distinctive, truly Covenant education is an ideal that we can hope to realize only in part, and that by God's grace. Also in the business of teaching written composition we fall far short of the glory of God. Yet we have every reason to believe that if we are faithful stewards of the time and opportunities that God has given us, our efforts as parents and teachers will bear rich fruits in this life and in the life to come.

“ . . . No covenant parent sends a brain to school; he sends the one, entire covenant child. Teachers may counsel. They must. It is impossible not to.”

“The Protestant Reformed Teacher”
Rev. David Engelsma