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A Vision for Christian Education: Believing Is Seeing



by Daniel Vander Ark

"I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints and his incomparably great power for us who believe." Eph. 1:18-19

Our son-in-law is a trained biologist, expecting to teach in a Christian college if God opens the door. He certainly has eyes for life; in the same terrain, he spots insects (his specialty) I would step on. And he is bug-eyed with wonder: "Hey, look at that!" while he gently pries a tiny beetle from a leaf; the mottled colors of both the insect and the leaf are the same; it is the insect's defense against predators.

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This man's trained eyes have opened my own. God's world is bigger and better because this biologist is my seeing-eye son.

By God's gift to him, he has a strong interest in life; early on, someone saw this "talent" in him and encouraged its growth. But he also had considerable training, dogged repetition of details to notice, encouraged, guided by his father, himself a trained insect biologist. Were it not for his parents' insistence that he look beyond insects, he may have become short-sighted, engrossed in bugs, oblivious to other wonders and needs. Given his Christian education, he sees more than bugs, sees with his eyes of faith, and sees the perfect future. He now has vision as a noun and a verb; as a noun, it is what the eyes of his heart see as truth now and forever; as a verb, it is what he does as a young man: "Your young men will see visions and dream dreams" (Joel 2:28). He sees better every day as God gives him more light: "In your light, we see light" (Psalm 36:9).

The word "vision" is hot but not clear. President Bush seemed to make it trivial by referring to "this vision thing." Christian Schools International recently published a monograph that resembles an educational creed entitled "From Vision to Action." The Calvin College Center's publication on Reformed Christian schooling is called *A Vision with a Task*. Some Christian organizations have scheduled "vision-setting workshops" which sound like the "mission-setting workshops" that are the rage in strategic planning in business. Some use the word "vision" to mean those "non-negotiable beliefs" that undergird a school's mission; others define "vision" as the "outcomes," the expected results of a Christian education. And rarely, some

Christian people use it disparagingly: "He has visions about Christian education but no sense of what that means in the classroom."

I want to describe a vision for Christian education as both a *goal* and a *way of seeing*. I will begin by briefly describing the *context* in which we conduct Christian education. I will then list a set of assumptions that underlie this vision, describe the vision as a noun and then as a verb, and, finally, describe how students can best "catch it." To paraphrase Francis Bacon: "Some talks are to be tasted; some to be swallowed whole; and some to be chewed and digested." My talk is the latter kind, with the emphasis on "chewing."

The Cultural Context

The context for Christian education today is a world of sensations, fragmentation, and speed. Many sum up this sorcery with the word "individualism." Some see this pervasive thinking in North America as the fruit of the Enlightenment or capitalism. Nathan Hatch in *The Democratization of American Christianity* says as much in his thesis that the Enlightenment emphasis on self now pervades American churches. It is almost as if the word "church" itself is an anachronism with each worshipper shopping for solace wherever she can find it. While one can find historical roots for facets of individualism, I think it is deeper in the human psyche than that; I think it is sin. It is what the Bible suggests in the word "flesh." God's will for his people is that they give up self to follow Christ. I will come back to that shortly. But let me first describe the current culture, to catch the context in which our children learn anything, not just in formal education.

All of us, not just our youth, are engulfed in sensations, primarily electronically—induced. Back in 1989 (that's ancient history to most youth!), more than 75 percent of the U.S. teenagers rented at least one video a week. Television viewing is as habitual as eating in most North American homes, more than three hours a day for children and probably as much for adults. Portable CD's and interactive video and "virtual reality" systems will help you feel the heat of the desert as you watch a video. Huxley's *Brave New World* back in the 1940's pictured a world of scientific advancement in which you would watch a movie inspiring lust while feeling a physical buzz from electrodes plastered to your skin. This terri-

ble trembling of our senses makes us jaded, worn-out, depressed, overstimulated and anxious, seeking one more thrill, one more buzz, one higher electronic fix that will take away the boredom, the ennui, the hurt.

These electronic educational tools are now legitimate. Recently *Business Week* had a feature on the wonderful tools available for learning: computers with a whole library of software, with whiz-bang graphics, color, flashing lights, and immediate feedback on the worth of the answer. Children work in carrels and send up little red flags when they need help or a white one when they want a new program. It has spawned a new word to describe this learn-

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ing: "edutainment." A mother of a four-year-old says, "They get so worked up they can hardly stand it." A software manufacturer says, "Once they feel the thrill, they'll search for it elsewhere—the park, the museum, the classroom." There's the argument: turn them on to sensations and they will become contemplative at the park.

Outside of school at least, the way we learn from electronic media is by means of flickering images and sound bites, with very little continuity in anything. The authors of *Dancing in the Dark* (Schultze *et al.*) claim that this *means* of learning is fragmenting: "We will contend that all media invariably emphasize either spatial or temporal relationships" that "work in subtle ways to disconnect audiences from local communities and traditional ways of life" (47). Youth tune in to the false intimacy of discs and tapes, afraid of silence and darkness. Young people early on, even in Christian homes, leave our meal times and night times to enter a bedroom world of noise and images, flickering off the walls. Our children become locked into a ghetto of adolescence, cut off from their parents who are too busy working to have time for intimacy. Schultze says, "Youth feel more at home absorbed in the airways of national media than they do in their parents' house" (63).

Television itself is a medium too few have analyzed. Those who have get as much hearing as

the Surgeon General does from her warnings about smoking. Todd Gitlin in *The Wilson Quarterly* says, "The flow of television is both—*rapid and interrupted*. The one continuity is discontinuity. TV's common currency consists of slogans and mockery. A free-floating hostility mirrors, and also inspires, the conversational style of the young who grow up in this habitat" (115). Even the news is surrealistic: a three-minute clip of blood and bodies in a mosque in the Gaza Strip, a beautiful woman's fall of hair to sell shampoo, a tearful Tonya Harding getting new shoe laces at the Olympics, another fast-food bullet-blasting, the shine of a new Buick, and so on. And remote control channel-grazing or surfing allows us to speed to even better sensations; we can catch Sports center and hockey night highlights in the middle of Bosnian bombings while phoning in an order on our portable phone for something we found sensational on the Home Shopping Network.

The fragmentation fits with the faults in our families. Barbara Defoe Whitehead sums up research on the effects of divorce. One out of four children growing up in the 1990's will enter a step-family. Even in marriages, "The proportion of working men who found marriage and children burdensome and restrictive nearly doubled between 1957 and 1976." What would it be today? And the consummate need to consume pervades our culture. "Things are in the saddle and ride mankind," Ralph Waldo Emerson said 150 years ago. For our children, and perhaps us, the entertainment business itself is what they consume most, spending loads of "tuition" to learn at the feet of the electronic god. Again Schultze says, "The teenager goes to the school of adolescence with entertainment as the friend and teacher" (87), and the main product he buys is newness: "The pursuit of perpetual and purchasable novelty has its own jading effect, which sometimes leads to numbness or a sated appetite for newness" (127). And we adults too often model a consumption that speeds up our "getting" to the pace of a rat on a treadmill; the faster we spend, the faster we need. As Stronks and Blomberg say in *A Vision with a Task*, "Christians may not simply wait for the rescue of their souls while working for the American dream" (59). Few of us are "waiting"; we, too, want it *now* and paradoxically cut off our children whom we say we are working so hard to help.

In the midst of these times, our students need an education, a "leading out," that will provide strength for now and their future. We teachers (parents, teachers, pastors, friends) need to help children see backward, forward, and outward through the eyes of their heart, as Paul expresses it in his prayer for the Ephesians. We need to provide a cure for our children's persistent myopia that will eternally kill them unless they see rightly from the heart. And in order for them and us to see the end, we have to put on faith glasses for our heart eyes, or we will be scared to death while our souls shrivel to hell on earth and after. My point is that believing is seeing: believing the Truth in person is seeing the truth forever.

Other assumptions implicit to my vision of Christian education are the following. I accept as truth that God has come to us through his creation and his written word, but also in person through his divine and human son Jesus; that this Jesus restored us to full God's-child status through his sacrifice (necessary because we all were full of sin); and that Christ's Kingdom came when Jesus came the first time and will be fully realized when he comes again. I believe we know now what God's Kingdom is (full of justice, shalom, peace, and the harmony of all believers no matter what the apparent differences) and that we ought to work on earth as God's servants for its completion. I believe all God's people, including children, are God-reflectors because he created them to do that; that each is gifted; and that each is sinful and needs redemption. Part of this sinfulness is our selfishness that, uncorrected, will lead us to hell. I believe that training and discipline are Godly and are means by which God and his servants correct and love us for Kingdom service. Finally, I believe that *parents* are mainly responsible before God for the education of their children. However, I believe God uses the whole church as assistant or surrogate parents to accomplish this task.

Vision as a Noun

Here is my vision for Christian education as a noun. I see each child as God-gifted but locked up by sin into herself. We are like Grandpa Shooks's horses whose harnesses had saucer-sized patches at the outside of the horses's eyes to keep their eyes from wandering when he wanted them to stay

focused on the job. I think all of us have blinders on from birth that focus our eyes *only* on ourselves. Some clinical work with children done by Jean Piaget supports the concept. For example, children can't understand that someone across from them would have a different literal perspective from theirs in looking at a picture book; these children believe their dreams literally happen within the confines of their crania; these children do not share because they believe all things belong to them alone. I could give personal evidence of my self-centeredness and the shock of learning someone else saw what I did differently from what I did. What we call "immaturity" or "childishness" in adults is essentially the selfish squalling we expect from children.

The goal of Christian education for me is that each child learns by trained practice to see himself as "not my own" but a "belonger" to God and a member in a body (I Cor. 12) that is as big as all of God's saints in the Bible and all of his saints in heaven. Sam Smartt, Chattanooga Christian School board president, says it is educating children from "I" to "He" to "we." It is educating children in God's purposes: that he calls us to steward his world, not own it, that our sanctification involves putting away the old self and becoming new, that "self-esteem" is stupid but that "being God's adopted child" is wonderful. It is an education not of "being everything you wanna be" but one of "belonging to God and knowing the world does." It is an education for serving God within the body, the community of Christians, while administering Christ's salve to the hurting, and righting the upside down world.

This vision of the goal of Christian education I can only see through the glasses of faith; faith is the evidence of things not seen, the sure hope that will not change or fade or fool. As a noun, the dictionary's second definition for "vision" is "something supposedly seen by other than normal sight; something perceived in a dream, trance, etc., or supernaturally revealed, as to a prophet." That is exactly how it happened. God revealed this to me supernaturally through a thousand natural means, "as to a prophet," because that is what each of us is. I know more surely than that I am typing these words that God is more real than this computer is. Because I believe that he is God and what he says is true, I see rightly. Believing is seeing. This vision of which I speak is not an illusion, a mirage,

a panacea. This vision is exact. The evidence that undergirds this faith is not only the Spirit's confirmation of Truth in me. It is also the thousand and one stories of faith that I learned from my mother to this moment, from the great saving acts of God I heard and read in the Bible, to my son's story of deliverance from depression I heard again last week. The center of Christian education ought to be the leading of children out of the darkness of self and into the light of God's grace through the thousand and one stories of faith that they hear in homes and churches and schools. Christian education ought to be the fitting of God's children into the family of faith. That's my *vision* as a noun.

Our children's persistent myopia will eternally kill them unless they come to see rightly from the heart.

Vision as a Verb

My *vision* as a verb is that Christian schools ought to sharpen God's glasses of the heart for 20-20 seeing. It is an essential living skill; it is the removing of the horse's blinders so that he can see backwards and forwards and outwards. It is a way of seeing that puts the least emphasis on the present in itself, precisely what the "now" generation is tempted to do. Rather than the existential moment, it is an education for seeing far beyond. It is a pair of glasses that helps our children to be freed from the fears of the moment and the future. It is an education broader than how these instruments may function in a global economy; it helps boards plan for a community rather than an economy.

First, we need to help students learn history, deep history, thorough history, personal history, God's history. That's not popular nowadays. Robert Bellah describes the trend toward cutting ourselves off from our history and our future: "Our children will end up forgetting their ancestors and their descendants." For most youth and too many adults, history is the "minutes of the last meeting." Much of the talk about strategic planning, even in Christian schools, is loaded with advice for collecting data of the present so that we can extrapolate, and guess the future, most of it in economic and social terms; it is a *megatrends* style in local school planning. Sort

out the words in these games and find out how little you hear praise for a heritage and how often you hear criticism of a dead tradition. Hear the talk about “new paradigms” and “new strategies” and “new ways of planning for the future.” You would think the world began this morning. And what was history is false, some say; revisionist historians are correcting the past everyday, from the left and the right. The leftists tell us that the Gospels are garbled, made-up sayings of Jesus; the rightists tell us that America’s founding fathers and mothers were somehow Christian while denying the divinity of Christ. Since history can’t be trusted, the logic goes, start over. Robert Kennedy’s 1960s romanticism fits with many Christians, “Some look at the way things are and ask ‘why’? I look at the way things might be and ask ‘why not’?”

Our children need to look *backwards*, all the way to God’s acts recorded in the Scriptures and all through times since then and in the lives of their parents and teachers. God acts always, through Christians and misbelievers (there are no unbelievers!). Good teachers notice that. As Henry Zylstra says, “Education is the harvesting of history in its concrete actuality” (88). In a recent issue of *First Things*, Thomas Sieger Derr writes, “As everyone knows, history is not just a recital of obvious facts. It does matter who tells our story” (9). But some historians’ lenses are horribly scratched. Good teachers know the Bible and know how to read the times, back then and now. History’s lenses are finer than the present’s lenses are. Someone has said that life is like driving in a car at 70 miles an hour on an uncertain road with an opaque windshield. We can look out the side windows and catch glimpses of reality, smatterings of images like TV news that tell us some things, but it is blurry at best. Only in the rearview mirror can we see things sharply and distinctly. We can evaluate because we know “from a distance” what happened and the worth of what happened. Living in the present is a bit like seeing our fingerprint with our finger two inches from our nose; we need to push it away in order to see all the fine lines. Studying history also refines our worth. Taking down the blinder of the past is humbling; I am not the center of the universe, but God is. Children learn that God has kept and provided for his people, that he has frustrated the arrogant people and nations, that he has revealed more of his creation in each passing decade. History also

prepares children for the future. Knowing how God acted in the past increases faith and calms fears. History teaches children they are small but important participants in the human story that calls for servants to steward the earth and support each other until the Kingdom comes fully.

Our children need to look *outwards*, all the way to heaven and back, all the way to hell and back, all the way around the globe. Christian education needs to fit children with the lenses of seeing out. Up there and in here and out there is God himself. The same Preacher who said that all of life is meaningless from a human standpoint said, “Stand in awe of God” (Eccles. 5:7). In a world that trivializes anything sacred, that damns God by means of the language he gave us, and that removes him from any discussion in the public square, teaching our children the holiness of God seems impossible. But unless our children learn through modeling and precept the greatness and sovereignty and holiness of God, our talk about community and faith and stewarding will fall on deaf ears and blind hearts. But the same myopia we have at birth also prevents us from seeing, except we receive lenses to look beyond, the needs and the gifts of a broader community of humans. Too often we are moved more by the grain prices at the local co-op or by the city sewer problems than by starving people in the Sudan or by the hopes and dreams of our sisters and brothers of all the races in South Africa. We need to teach our children to move from I to He to we.

And our children need to look *forward*, all the way to perfect justice, until shalom is full. Our children may think little about the future, excepting for a spouse someday, and a car, and a bigger and bigger home or job. But a Christian education will persistently hold before them what the world is *likely* to be like and *surely* to be like. There will be pain and suffering; there will be new heavens and a new earth; there will be life forevermore; there will be calls to serve with a towel more than with a hammer; every knee will eventually bow; Christians faithfully obeying Christ together will carve out a piece of this jungle of sin and restore it to its lost loveliness. Christian teachers will help each child recognize the gifts God gave him or her and show that person how to listen to God’s voice for peculiar service. A Christian education helps fit children with Godly glasses for seeing backwards and outwards and forwards. Corrie ten Boom caught

this goal: "Look inside and be depressed; look outside and be distressed; look to Jesus and be at rest."

Discipline and Story

Everybody can pontificate about the goal of Christian schooling and the lenses children need for their heart's eyes. As President Clinton has said, "the devil is in the details." Without claiming an authority beyond my thinking and my practice, I offer these *means* of teaching this vision as a noun and a verb. I have illustrated them in more detail other places, but these sketches will serve to at least illustrate the kind of teaching that will lead students to leave school with good vision.

Students need *training*, shaping, correction, the stick of failure, the sometimes boring repetition of a desired practice until they get it right. That is almost heresy in North American education. The lack of training, of discipline, of correcting, has produced a bevy of books that point out both the origins and results of *laissez faire* education. Andrew Nikiforuk's *School's Out* for Canadian schools and Kilpatrick's *Why Johnny Can't Tell Right from Wrong* for United States' schools are the two nastiest and specific indictments of North American public education. Both end up putting the blame at the feet of people who believe that children are naturally good and whose adult supervisors do not dare establish any kind of educational or moral standard that shapes this instinctive goodness at all. In the old days, child guidance was something parents were expected to provide and not submit to.

These critics are right both about prevailing beliefs in public schools and about the damage that such thinking has wrought in the lives of children. What I dare also say is that that thinking, which was celebrated in the 1960's with "Do your own thing," "Let it all hang out," and "I'm OK; you're OK," has permeated the Christian community. The baby boomers drank this liquor then and became addicted. The late Christopher Lasch says of their off-spring: "Like all students, they are looking for moral wisdom and intellectual guidance about the things that matter, which can be summarized in a single phrase as the conduct of life. They want to grow up" What they get instead are "forms of talk that implicitly encourage them to remain children. This is the deepest sense in which the young today are ill-served by their elders. They're constantly told that

these are the best years of their life, and they don't believe it. Their experience contradicts the platitudes they're supposed to find so appealing" (62). It shows itself in churches, homes, and schools. In schools and in theory about schools, including much of outcomes-based education theory, you will hear language that celebrates giftedness in children until it shapes our metaphors. The guiding metaphor of *A Vision with a Task* is "the unwrapping of gifts." I agree with that, but most of the language in the book to explain that concept criticizes teaching methods that bind in or shape or restrict these gifts and celebrates those methods that allow each child freedom within community without

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adult-imposed standards. One way to capture our *own* thinking is to consider the farming metaphor for the education of our children and ask to what degree students' gifts should be fertilized or pruned. Fertilizing is in; "as the twig is bent" is out.

Most glasses seem uncomfortable at first. The effects of sin in us and our children include the resistance to wearing Godly glasses. Our selves squirm to hear God's message of sacrifice and service and community. Children and adults need the discipline of mind and heart that comes from persistent correction, from the Lord and his servants. Love is never easy; it wasn't for the Lord either. Teaching our children to obey means that Christian schools need to set the boundaries of the stage on which children act out their gifts. Teaching our children to obey this Lord means that we must tell our stories of faith so convincingly that they sing the same tunes with new words to express their faith. Teaching our children to obey means chastising them when they sing the devil's songs, when they refuse to act rightly, and when they sit down and refuse to sing at all. Teaching our children to obey means having them repeat songs for which as yet they see no meaning. Christian teachers insist that students write sentences, read passages, and memorize timetables and proverbs even though they don't appreciate the meaning or even understand the concept. This discipline of the mind and heart God

uses to help his children eventually express their obedience and love for him.

Secondly, to help students catch the vision of Christ's Kingdom and their place and service in it, teachers need to show them *stories*, imagined and real, *exempla* of virtue and vice. For imagined stories, children need to read and hear portrayals of bigger-than-life characters who exemplify what is good and what is evil, according to God's Word. These fantastic stories ought to pervade a child's early years. I think of the great oral epic *Beowulf*, a hero story with Christian elements added in the telling once it got to Catholic England. In it, Beowulf, the fantastic hero who exemplifies the virtues of courage, generosity, and strength inspires all listeners to be like him; on the other hand, Grendel and its mother exemplifies everything evil in the extreme: sneakiness, greed, cannibalism, etc.; listeners are horrified at this fantastic portrayal of evil and are inspired to shun it. Much fantastic literature since, especially the stories of C.S. Lewis in our times, conveys its meaning similarly. Walter Wangerin, Jr., with *The Book of the Dun Cow*, uses an old fable of Chanticleer and the Fox to put the heroism of Jesus our Lord in this exemplum form to inspire listeners toward Jesus and away from evil. To help our children catch the vision of the Kingdom of God, they need to hear fantastic, engaging stories of imagination that portray God's Kingdom in contrast with the devil's.

But to catch the vision of God's Kingdom, especially that all the earth is the Lord's and that faith means trial and hope, children need to hear *real* stories in Christian schools. First of all, Christian schools need to make *biography* a much more crucial aspect of their education, at every level. I fault our schools for ripping humanity out of knowledge. As T.S. Eliot complained,

Where is the life we have lost in living?

Where is the wisdom we have lost in knowledge?

Where is the knowledge we have lost in information?

Mathematics teachers refer to Euclid as if he were a principle; science teachers refer to Newton's laws of motion as if Newton had no history, had no meals, and had no family; history teachers refer to Napoleon as if he were a force; art teachers refer to Michelangelo as if he were an angel who formed the Sistine Chapel ceiling in "the twinkling of an eye." All these people have a story, a real story,

filled with temptations, dreams, and schemes, filled with incidents with details that, once known and related to children, would impress our children both with these real citizens' feet of clay and the grandeur of their accomplishments. This kind of education might lead children to see how God reveals himself and his creation through flawed people much like ourselves. This kind of education might inspire children to paint, compose, and design instead of assuming that everything good comes through "great" people who were almost as perfect as God himself.

The wrong turns these flawed heroes took, these sins they committed, these near-sighted views they had—may also lead students to avoid wrong; it is moral education through vicarious experience. A story I read as a boy, a quite real story about a 17-year-old boy who was tempted to visit a prostitute, corrected some wrong fantasies of my own. The boy, a tough athlete who would bloody his knuckles on a telephone pole and then brag to his friends that he had been in a fight and really "decked the guy," thinks that he will really be a man if he goes to the seamy side of the city to visit a prostitute and then brag about it afterwards. The story does not go into detail. It depicts the boy going up to the door in a hotel, afraid and nervous, seeing ugliness all over the halls, and fleeing. Just that description helped me see the folly of bad fantasies. God used that story to help me see evil without having to experience the pain of acting it out and suffering consequences. The Kingdom of Darkness became clearer through that story: my own lusts, my own dark side, my own salvation. Except for God's grace through that story and the teacher who taught it, there go I further on the "primrose path to the everlasting bonfire."

Thirdly, Christian teachers and parents need to tell their *own* stories of faith, highlighting their own doubts and wrong turns and God's illumination and correction. Most Christian parents and teachers are reluctant to do this, either out of a false modesty or the guilt of their own sinfulness or out of a perverted notion that education is the explanation of principles that get fuzzy when mixed with anything personal. When the angel of the Lord rescued Peter at midnight from prison, the angel said, "Go, stand in the temple courts and tell the people the full message of this new life" (Acts 5:20). I take that to mean that he and we are to speak

our faith as it permeates our character. The mathematics teacher who describes her struggle in faith at trying to understand God's ways with her when she could not "get high school math," when she doubted that Christians could do any good in the world, or when she arrogantly gave an answer in class that turned out to be completely wrong is "telling the full message of this new life." One of my teachers was an elderly lady whose muscular dystrophy had entrophied every muscle she had except for a squeaky, tiny voice that expressed her vision of her role in heaven: "I'm going to dance and dance and dance." Children will catch the vision by hearing teachers with this Pauline boldness: "Imitate me as I follow Christ Jesus."

Discernment and Analogies

Not only do teachers need to discipline children's hearts and minds and behavior, not only do they have to tell hero stories and real stories, but these teachers need to fit children with glasses of the heart that make fine distinctions and connections. Again, I will only suggest what I mean by these two skills, habits of heart, really. First, Christian schools need to teach children *discernment*, that ability of heart to see differences, distinctions, and depth. In most education, this ability is called analysis, the ability to cut things into pieces and measure. It sometimes follows rules of logic and deduction or induction; the scientific method is one tool to analyze, to find patterns, to get below the surface, to check initial prejudices or guesses for accuracy. Facts are big in this way of thinking.

But this skill is very important in serving in Christ's Kingdom and seeing the Kingdom of darkness for what it is. No one achieves Godly wisdom without it. The Proverbs persistently label this ability discernment; so does Paul. At its simplest, it is Paul's advice to the Thessalonians: "Test everything. Hold on to the good. Avoid every kind of evil" (I Thess. 5: 21-22). It is a built-in deception-detector that needs expert fine-tuning within Christian schools through persistent practice and good guidance. Sometimes it is through the microscope of zooming in on a small matter that would go undetected otherwise: literally, the bacteria in our saliva, but also the way our allowance of government-sponsored gambling is an injustice to the poor who have the most attraction

for it and who suffer the most from it. Other times, it is through the telescope of pulling away from the immediate to see the whole: literally, the history of resistance to government or church authority, but also the idolizing of physical pleasure from the Golden Calf to MTV. Our children should have these lenses of discernment thoroughly fitted in our Christian optometry schools.

Beyond glasses of discernment, Christian schools need to fit children with glasses that make connections, glasses that integrate faith and knowledge, that pull what is out there into what is in the heart, that bring wholeness to what more and more is pieces, tidbits, and shards. More than ever before,

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Christian schools need to integrate knowledge out there within a heart and mind of faith. D. Bruce Lockerbie, former headmaster at Stoney Brook, sees these unique functions of the home, church, and Christian school in leading our children to catch the vision: "The Christian home *incubates* a child's character, providing those moral and spiritual conditions favorable to the child's healthy development as a believer. The church *inculcates* a knowledge of its creeds and doctrines. By preaching and teaching, by observance of the holy sacraments, and by being a community held together in common worship, fellowship, and service, the church impresses the child with his responsibility to participate in the Body of Christ. But the Christian school *integrates* every element of human knowledge and experience into a view of life that can be whole and wholly Christian" (129).

This integration occurs when students hear stories of faith, God's saving acts throughout history, stories of high and low example, and stories of men and women through whom God revealed more of his creation: Pasteur, Newton, Ten Boom, and Currie. Students learn the intricacies and connections of creation the more teachers teach together and in units that show relationships more than divorces.

Chronological history can be separated from literary history and from art history but shouldn't be too often. Were I to design Christian school curricula, I would keep a steady keel throughout schooling between the extremes of only trees or only forest. If we have erred in the past, it has been to emphasize particulars; lately, the pendulum is swinging hard to the whole. Floridian Marion Brady in a letter in a recent *Utne Reader* believes the design of learning ought to be like the way we do a jigsaw puzzle, first and often looking at the picture on the box and then fitting pieces: "Without this orienting image, the task is a blind search for meaning." His criticism of our current methods is this: "We send them to school and there hold before them, for a few minutes each, bits and pieces of mathematics, language, history, and physical and social sciences, the humanities; we expect them to do what professional educators have thus far been unable to do." The children are to do this cold: "There is no picture on the lid of the box." In Christian schools, there is a picture on the lid of the box; children have seen it at home and in church before we educators see them; Christian schools ought to design learning so that students persistently see the big story while they fit in the pieces. What Brady calls a *supradisciplinary* curriculum, Christian schools are best able to teach.

A final teaching method for Christian teachers I want to propose so that students catch this vision is the teacher's and the student's use of *analogies*. I believe that making apt analogies is the heart of good teaching and learning. It is the gossamer thread between concept out there and learning in here, learning of both the heart and the head. Analogies are conceived in the heart and imagination more than in the logical mind. An analogy is a comparison, a ratio, an explaining of something unfamiliar to an audience with something that is familiar to them. Any analogy is always inexact. But by this means, good teachers connect what is unfamiliar for students to what they know already. The DNA structure which no one can really see is a bit like a twisted ladder which almost all have seen; the shifting of cultures from too much order to too much freedom and back again is like the swinging of a pendulum; a seedling breaking ground is like a rocket taking off. Analogies help us connect what we don't understand with what we do;

they help us see something familiar (a seedling) in a new way (a rocket taking off).

God himself used them in his Word and by *the* Word. Jesus is God's analogy, the Word, whose appearance in flesh conveyed the meaning of God's love. The Bible is replete with analogies beyond that: God is a good shepherd, a door, a vine, a light, and more. Jesus on earth used all these teaching devices to convey the Kingdom, to lead his disciples, including us, to catch the vision. Jesus disciplined, chastised, warned, and corrected. He set out the truth in precept; he told stories that weren't actual happenings but led people to reject sin and pursue the Kingdom; and he drew strange but common analogies that helped the people to know the Truth. Christian teachers need to create fresh and helpful analogies that help children connect the unfamiliar to what they know already. Thus, good teachers, as Jesus did, must know their audience. If most of their students are familiar with sports or farming or the city or animals, the teachers ought to use comparisons that their students know. In order to know their students, good teachers have to study not only their subject but the lives of their students. To use an analogy of a pomegranate for children unfamiliar with that fruit is carelessness and ignorance. To describe ice cream for a tribe at the equator by comparing it to icebergs is stupid. Good teachers help students integrate learning by making apt analogies.

And Christian teachers help students invent their own analogies, praise them for fresh ones, and correct inappropriate ones. Every child has the gift for invention; every child has the ability to see things in a fresh way for the benefit of the community. Sometimes these inventions are puns: a man who calls his backyard his "Garden of Weediness." Sometimes these analogies are poems: the boy who called snow in the cracks of asphalt "snakes of snow." Sometimes these analogies are in reaction journals in which students compare what they have learned to something they know well, like the student in a Bible class who compared pornography to smut on a corn ear, making evocative again what is only a cliché to most. When teachers compose them rightly, they help children catch the vision; when students compose them imaginatively, they lead all listeners to awe at God's gift of language for the building up of the body.

I have claimed that Christian schools need to tell the next generation the "praise-worthy deeds of the Lord" throughout history in ways that help students catch the vision of the Kingdom as a noun and as a verb: to know for sure through the glasses of faith that God has come in person and will come finally, to see one's self as God's child gifted and trained for service to God and his body, and to see all of life as God's story. For us who by sin love our selves, Christian education is learning deeply within God's story, that "I" given to "He" who gave all for "I" means a lifetime of offering to God and his people. Believing in God's story is the right glasses for the eyes of the heart. John Bolt calls the Christian school a "visionary community of memory." He says it joins "characters and events in a plot over time. A narrative joins past to present in memory and then joins both to the future in anticipation or hope" (188). Believing is seeing: seeing God's goodness and greatness in the past, seeing God's providing care right now, and seeing through the windshield of faith the eternal beginning of Christ's fully-completed community. The same prophet Joel who said our sons and daughters would prophesy and see visions had the long view: "Tell it to your children and let your children tell it to their children, and their children to the next generation" (Joel 1:3). Whether we have minutes or millennia left, our children need this vision for the eyes of their hearts.

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