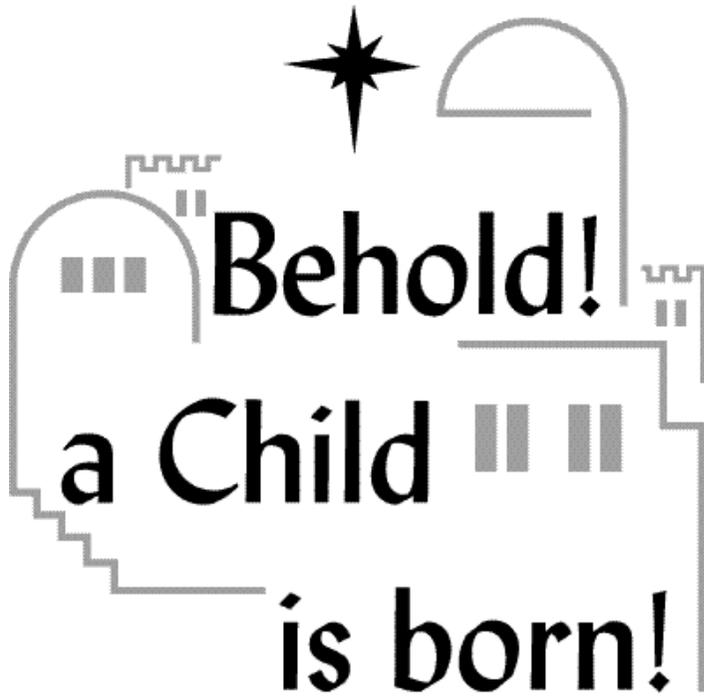# The
Lutheran
Educator

The WELS Education Journal

"Behold!
a Child
is born!

The Lutheran Educator

The education journal
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ARTICLES

DEPARTMENTS

Christian Forget-Me-Nots?

Have you ever wished that your students would forget you? Perhaps that thought crossed your mind after a less-than-stellar performance in the classroom. Let me rephrase the question: Have you wished on a regular basis that your students would forget you? Does that sound strange? Unhealthy? Downright weird?

Consider one of Kate Wilkinson's hymns *(CW* 467:6): "May his spirit live within me As I seek the lost to win, And may they forget the channel, Seeing only him." To the children of your classroom, you're a "channel." You're the one who, on a regular basis during the school year, brings Jesus to your students. The hymn writer voiced the desire that people would "forget" the channels, the human instruments that bring Jesus to others, and "see" only him.

Are we really to forget the people who brought God's word to us as children? Are we truly to forget the people who continue to bring God's word to us as adults? And, even more, are others to forget our ministries and us? Obviously the hymn writer is using hyperbolic language. Consider what the inspired writer to the Hebrews said: "Remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith" (Heb 13:1).

So what is the hymn writer's point? She was expressing the longing of John the Baptist: "He [Jesus] must become greater; I must become less" (Jn 3:30).

John was a man who understood his role in God's kingdom. His mission was to prepare people for Jesus' ministry. Once the Lord's ministry was underway, John needed to take a step back and not block people's view of Jesus.

That's humility in action. That's faith in action. That's a good picture of what Christian ministry is all about.

Our ministries are not about us. They're about Jesus. As we grow in my understanding of that, we will be content to be messengers of Christ, and not people who clamor to be at the center of attention, blocking others' view of Christ. We will strive to be creative, imaginative and energetic in presenting Christ to our students, but we will seek to find satisfaction in our work, not in people's reaction to our work.

A major league baseball umpire once fielded this question: "How do you know when you've had a good day at the ballpark?" His answer? "When people leave the stadium and can't remember who the umpires were." He felt umpires should not dominate the game and, if they did their job faithfully, everyone's focus would rightfully be on the players and not on them.

How do you know when you've had a good day in the classroom? When students forget your name? No. It was a good day when you pointed your students to Jesus as their Savior and they "saw" him and remembered him.

<div align="right">JP</div>

Teachers Need Christmas Peace

John R. Schultz

Meditations for Teachers ...and others

The angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord. This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger." Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angels, praising God and saying,

"Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests."

Several Christmases ago, a cartoon appeared on the editorial page of the local newspaper. It was captioned, "If Jesus Was Born Today," and pictured a lean-to stable featuring Mary and Joseph talking with two slick ad-men. One of them says, "The Son of God! Really!! Just think of the potential. We start out with your own designer apparel—shoes, hats, t-shirts, jackets, even swimwear. Then we'll do a workout video—call it 'Sweating with the Messiah' or something. Maybe get a book or movie contract."

Although this little piece of blasphemy may carry a message of anti-commercialism, it or any other attention-grab-

bing media blitz would not happen if Jesus lived today. The world would not want him today anymore than it did 2000 years ago. Many who saw and heard Jesus thought him to be no more than a human being. People said of him, "Isn't this the carpenter? Isn't this Mary's son and the brother of James, Joseph, Judas and Simon? Aren't his sisters here with us?" (Mk 6:3). His words rankled others. Soon the idea grew among the religious leaders that he could only be silenced by death—so they killed him.

Unwanted, reviled, scorned, condemned and finally murdered—looks like he could have used a Madison Avenue press agent. But wait! Hear the testimony of John the Baptist: "I have seen and I testify that this is the Son of God" (Jn 1:34). The entire Scriptures testify that he was true God and true man. We confess in the Nicene Creed that he is "very God of very God, begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father." John the Baptist testifies further that Jesus is "the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" (Jn 1:29). That is why his com-

ing is of such great importance. The angel set the Christmas theme when he announced to the shepherds: "Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you" (Lk 2:11).

Jesus the Christ came, lived, died, and rose again not to promote buying and selling so the economy rebounds. No, his perfect life, his atoning death, and his triumphant resurrection give us forgiveness of sins and life everlasting. What a Christmas gift! None can compare to this gift, which will last for all eternity. This is the true peace of Christmas of which the angels sang. This peace does not automatically assure us that this present life or this Christmas will be without stress, trouble, pain, or sorrow, but is a peace of conscience and a peace of mind. It is a peace of which your students will speak and sing this Christmas season. It is a peace which strengthens us to withstand the troubles and heartaches which come our way because of sin. It is a peace we need to lift us up and point us to a glorious tomorrow, when we will live with Jesus forever. With such assurances, we need no slick ad-men to distract us.

Read some more: John 14:27

Dear Lord Jesus, through your Holy Spirit help us to overcome fatigue and discouragement through the promise of true peace which we have through what you have done for us. Amen.

John R. Schultz served as principal/administrator of Minnesota Valley Lutheran High School. He is currently retired and living in New Ulm, Minnesota.

All Are Vocal in His Name

The silent skies are full of speech
    For who hath ears to hear;
The winds are whispering each to each,
The moon is calling to the beach,
And stars their sacred wisdom teach
    Of faith and love and fear.

But once the sky the silence broke
    And song o'erflowed the earth;
The midnight air with glory shook,
And angels mortal language spoke,
When God our human nature took
    In Christ, the Savior's birth.

And Christmas once is Christmas still;
    The gates through which he came,
And forests' wild and murmuring rill,
And fruitful field and breezy hill,
And all that else the wide world fill
    Are vocal with his name.

Shall we not listen while they sing
    This latest Christmas morn;
And music hear in everything,
And faithful lives in tribute bring
To the great song which greets the King,
    Who comes when Christ is born?

PHILIPS BROOKS

Teaching Bible Truth to a Digital Generation

Kenneth Kremer

With the 1987–88 presidential primary heating up, a political analyst asked Richard Nixon to evaluate the communication styles of the top contenders. The former president was candid. In his opinion Jesse Jackson stood head and shoulders above all others. In his own words Nixon paid this surprising tribute to a political rival "because the African-American leader of the Rainbow Coalition speaks the language of poets." Schooled in the rhetorical traditions of gospel preachers, Jackson's speeches were filled with cadence, colorful phrasing, parallel constructions, and meaningful imagery. The other candidates were mired in the prose of demography and historical details, spewing data as if their heads were filled with silicon chips. Nixon understood that the language of poetry is in some ways eminently more powerful than prose. He recognized that there is far more emotional energy in imagery than there is in empirical fact. It was simple Platonic logic: passion moves masses in ways that reason cannot. Prose is for the brain; it lacks the capacity to touch a human heart. Poetry embraces hearts.

Of course, prose and poetry each play their respective roles in communication. Both are essential. They express who we are, what we feel, think, and know. No other creature in Eden was given this remarkable gift. Cows can't remember their past or tell stories. Elephants find it impossible to plan tomorrow's activities or compose a sonnet. Pigs can't appreciate the beauty of a painting or squeal a simple musical tune. This blessing is unique to mankind.

The language of poetry includes rhyme, rhythm, melody, parallelism, repetition, cadence, and imagery. Poetry captures our imaginations. It lifts us to the edge of human experience, leaving us with the alluring sense of abandoning time and space altogether. Its structure is often cyclical.

Song is poetry. Melody, for example, mimics vocal inflections in pitch. The rhythms of music closely resemble the rhythms of speech. Song was a very early development. While Jubal is given credit for developing the first musical instruments (Ge 4:21), there is no biblical reason to doubt that song, or at least poetic speech, was a part of every-day life in the garden.

Prose, on the other hand, is rooted in the soil of logic and order. We know

from Scripture that Adam engaged in the first prosaic conversation (perhaps with himself) as he carried out the God-given task of identifying all the species of living creatures.

Dialog is prose. The language of law is written in prose. Witnesses testify in a

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> *From time immemorial, whether in the glow of a campfire, at the kitchen table, or projected on a silver screen, stories reflect the events of life.*
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court of law in a prosaic format. All communication associated with counting, measuring, stating theorems—the various sciences—all prose. Prose is earthbound language. It engages that part of our intellect that is interested in concepts that are actual and definitive.

Prose thrives on story, demonstrating a healthy respect for past, present, and future, which we know as history. In the Western mind story is linear. And every story in every culture has an arsenal of powerful devices to draw from: charac-

ter, setting, plot, conflict, reversal, resolution, climax. From time immemorial, whether in the glow of a campfire, at the kitchen table, or projected on a silver screen, stories reflect the events of life. Some stories entertain. Some teach. Some model heroes, or expose anti-heroes. Some sound an alarm. Some encourage. Some define values.

Stories also set norms. They tell us who we are, and who we are not. They tell us what is acceptable, and what is not. Society quickly disintegrates when it loses its ability to communicate its own story. Witness the collapse of the ancient civilization of Babel. By confusing their ability to communicate, God confounded an entire society hell-bent on imagining a human story to replace his story of grace and mercy (Ge 11).

Long ago our ancestors discovered an essential truth regarding story: *Whoever tells the story defines the culture.* When that axiom is applied to a contemporary world, one suddenly realizes that media has had a huge influence in the shaping of our culture. For more than a century a variety of electronically advanced media have been telling the stories. And the most powerful of these technologies have featured picture over word. In other words, the storytellers of the last century have been playing to the dominant sense of our species, which is sight. The old saw, a pic-

ture is worth a thousand words, is far more profound than previously imagined, so much more profound that our media-saturated culture now values image over word. And much like poetry, image aims straight for the heart,

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> *God's Word is a masterful blend of verse and story leads us to the inevitable conclusion that the author of this holy body of literature is the Poet Laureate of all time.*
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bypassing reason and logic, often distorting our perception of how things really are.

Image engages imagination better than it engages the cognitive intellect. Look at a picture, any picture, moving or still, in color or in black and white, photo or artist's rendering. From what you see, what facts do you know for certain? Does the picture tell you the names of the people in it, when their birthdays are, what they believe, what

their history is? What is the picture telling you about location or time? Now consider how the image makes you feel. This is where image shines! Without knowing the empirical facts of a picture you can still be moved by what you see. Pictures are compelling for the kind of impact they have on emotions. They touch us in human ways.

Image has impact in another important way. When you put an image aside, it lingers much longer than a fact expressed verbally will. And the stronger its emotional tug, the longer an image will linger in our memory. Furthermore, people with less education (especially those who are illiterate) are more likely to remember an image than they are to recall words. It is important for those of us who are interested in Christian pedagogy to remember that pre-literate children also belong to this demographic.

Since the invention of writing some five-thousand-plus years ago, mankind has depended on the written word for an objectivity that image simply did not provide. (For example, we trust a man's words more when his promise is captured in writing.) But in a world in which the value of an image is slowly (or perhaps rapidly) displacing the value of the written word, image-driven perceptions threaten to overtake word-driven perceptions. For some this is a frightening development. But there are some positives worth exploring in this dramatic new way in which the world goes about the serious business of knowing and understanding truth.

Poet Laureate

The Bible is a story of cosmic propor-
tion. It contains many sub-stories of peo-
ple (characters, heroes, antiheroes),
who long ago (settings) experienced
God's grace (resolution), working (ten-
sion, plot) in their lives. These people
were like us. They had the same human
needs to satisfy as we have. Their lives
are metaphors for our lives. In Job's suf-
fering we contemplate our own suffer-
ing. In Jacob's wrestling match with
God's Angel we see ourselves wrestling
with God. In Thomas' doubt we are
forced to examine our own weakness of
faith. With Peter's confession we mea-
sure our own confidence in Christ.
Both, as a unit, and as an anthology of
individual narratives, the story of
Scripture is quintessential.

But the Bible is also poetry. And every
bit of the Bible's poetry is just as
inspired as its prose. David wrote, "My
heart is stirred by a noble theme as I
recite my verses for my king; my tongue
is the pen of a skillful writer" (Ps 45:1).
The psalmist's noble theme-in-verse is
no less than God's plan to redeem sin-
ners. The Twenty-Third Psalm and
Mary's splendid Magnificat are extraor-
dinary exam-
ples of biblical
poetry—
extreme poetry
that leads to
extreme out-
comes. They
have the
capacity to
bring us to the

Genesis 39

very gates of heaven. And, because the
Bible's poetry is Spirit-breathed, and
thus filled with life, faith—its seeding
and feeding—is the extreme outcome
that we can expect to receive from read-
ing it.

God's Word is an inspired mix of
prose and poetry. Its masterful blend of
verse and story leads us to the inevitable
conclusion that the author of this holy
body of literature is the Poet Laureate
of all time. But for a gracious God, who
always gives more than we could ever
hope for, cadence and parallel construc-
tions are still not enough to communi-
cate everything he wants us to know.
Nor is character, setting, or plot. In love
our Poet Laureate reveals himself in yet
another dimension—a dimension
woven deep into the fabric of both story
and song—a divine media, complete
with power-packed imagery. We are
speaking of God's holy pictures—*shad-
ows* of our spiritual reality in Christ
Jesus. In the Book of Leviticus many of
these inspired shadows literally come to
life. In the sacrificial offerings, the festi-
vals and daily rituals, in the codes for
cleansing and purifying, God summa-
rizes his promises and his plan in the
simplest and most direct of formats—
one that common people could readily
understand.

The great literature of our world also
makes use of metaphor, analogy, and
other similar devices; but none with
such profound, life-giving meaning. In
Scripture's pictured themes we find
trees that give life, temples made of liv-
ing souls, stones that sing, blood that
cleanses sinful hearts, water that forever
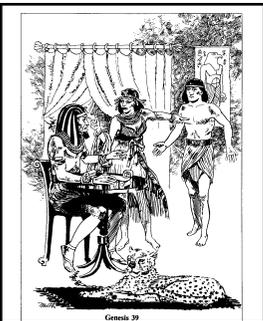
quenches our thirst for freedom, cups that overflow, fishing nets that catch people, winds that disperse people, and a city that draws them together. The Bible is full of imagery for the soul: clay pots, mustard seeds, yeast, blood, a doorframe, smoke, a stairway, a mother's womb, a lamb, a child, a star—all having deep spiritual meaning. All drawn from the simple things of human experience. Without these pictures, the story of God's love for mankind would be destined to remain flat, like a paper map describing a spherical planet. It would still be able to communicate saving truth, just as Mercator's projection helped sailors envision the globe as they laid out their course on a two-dimensional surface. But there would always be a certain amount of distortion. And a valuable dimension in our understanding—one that God intended us to have—would still be missing.

The story of the resurrection is quintessential prose. The empirical fact of Christ's victory over death is a history of unparalleled significance. It reads like evidence, meticulously gathered and reported for the eternal record in a cosmic trial, presented in the earthbound language of prose. It establishes the facts of an actual event, occurring in real time and in a real place. It has a definitive voice that provides for us real characters, real plot, real setting, real tension, and real climax. The headline echoes from all four gospels: "Christ Conquers Death!" What a compelling story!

But let's take a look at a few of the details: the garden, for example, the burial cave, the brilliant light, and the official seal. Are they merely part of the story's mechanics—stage props? We wouldn't be inclined to overlook them if we were telling this story to a classroom full of young children. They are too important. That's because they are also picture language—biblical figures that interface with many other points in Scripture.

Life had its origins in a garden. Adam and Eve were driven from that garden of perfect communion with the Creator. When Jesus said, "I am the gate," he was making an oblique reference to the entrance to that garden from which Adam and Eve were expelled. He is the only way to reverse their exit. When Jesus prayed to his heavenly Father, asking him to remove from him the cup of suffering, it happened in a garden. And what of the garden of God's love, where we are the fruit of his labors and he is the husbandman (Isa 5)?

Surely Joseph's tomb outside the city walls was much more than a prop. Jonah spent three days in the belly of a great fish, a powerful foreshadowing of Christ's three-day internment in the earth's belly. Jesus himself spoke about the temple of his body being torn down and rebuilt in three days—another word picture, and another reference to his death, burial, and resurrection.

Pilate's seal securing the tomb was more than a prop. Rome was a symbol of human authority. That wax seal represented the tension between mankind's kingdom of power and God's. Here was a picture of puny human authority pitted against the

Author of Life. Every time we pray the Lord's Prayer we seal our prayer with a doxology that glorifies the Victor: "For yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory, now and forever."

The bright light is hardly coincidental. Nor is it merely a device to enhance the Easter story's dramatic tension. Light filled the heavens on the night of Jesus' birth. Luke calls it the "glory of the Lord"—*Cavode Adonai*—God's physical presence among his people. Every Jew knew the significance of that expression. At Sinai the Children of Israel had first-hand experience with God's presence in the light of the pillar of fire. Then they saw the light on the mountaintop, felt the trembling earth, smelled the acrid smoke, and heard the sound of trumpets growing louder and louder. A few chapters later in Exodus we read of the searing light that even Moses could not face directly. When he returned to the people he had to mercifully place a veil over his face to protect the people from the effervescent reflection of Jahweh's luminous glory. John's gospel begins by connecting divine light with life and the Word (*Logos*). Light was the very first thing created. Christ himself was an active participant in the creative act,

Genesis 7

illuminating the spectacle that was yet to come. The light that confronted Saul on the way to Damascus was also Christ.

To God dark and light are both alike. There are Bible stories that similarly connect us to the imagery of darkness— a plague in Egypt, or the sky at noon on the first Good Friday. None of this is accidental, incidental, or coincidental. And what are we to make of the light shining in the darkness of our hearts (Jn 1)? Revelation 21 tells us that no artificial light will be needed in God's eternal city, not even the sun. (No one in the entire history of our planet has ever experienced life apart from solar energy.) And, lest we forget, it was Jesus who said, "I am the light of the world." What does he mean? How is his light placed in juxtaposition to the darkness of Satan and hell in John 8? And why does he use that phrase *I am?*

And what is the significance of all those *I Ams* in John's gospel? How do they connect with Jahweh, the name God used to reveal himself to Moses and the Children of Israel—the God who transcends time and space, and whose grace is totally independent and free of influence. And what about all the rest of the more than a hundred names the Spirit inspired Bible writers to record in Scripture? They represent a stunning collection of word pictures—The Vine, Living Water, Emanuel, Son of God, Son of Man, Chief Cornerstone and Capstone—each aimed at revealing another facet of our Savior. These names represent imagery of astounding depth and insight. They are there for our edification and instruction.

Unfortunately, we rarely get to talk about divine light, or *I ams,* or Jahweh names, or the Bible's gardens, or official

wax seals because the church's organizational plan—the so-called cradle-to-grave curriculum—rarely calls for studies that approach Scripture from a holistic perspective. As a result, when these valuable pictures come up they are often treated like props.

These inspired figures communicate truth. (A student of mine once said: "God wouldn't have put them there if they weren't important.") They provide perspective. They have impact. They linger in our memory. They go straight to the heart. While the theological bones of Scripture are law and gospel, the literary bones upon which the Bible's prose and poetry hang are these indispensable figures that hold the whole body of truth together as a unit.

A Nervous Overreaction

The Bible's shadowy pictures often leave people with an uneasy feeling. Analogs are elusive; shadows keep moving, shifting, re-connecting. The hard facts of Bible history aren't nearly as fluid. And poetry is…an art form. It's supposed to be a little more "out there." These figures of speech fit well with the Bible's poetry. But when figurative language is connected to biblical prose, or when it becomes a part of every day life (as it did in the camps of the Children of Israel at Sinai)… well, aren't there some pretty bad things that can happen when you get into that abstract stuff in which one thing means something else?

Actually there is a grave danger. Some will let their imaginations run unbridled and things will then be read into these

figures that God never intended. Why should we think otherwise? Man's imagination is no less tainted by sin than any

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other part of him. Babel's sin of imagining a new, homocentric story has been repeated often. The word *image* can also have a much darker connotation. When we tamper with God's truth in an attempt to make a name for ourselves, we set ourselves up as false idols.

The pagan world has certainly been guilty of mythologizing the Bible. But, sadly, more often the assaults on Scripture have come from within the

Genesis 2
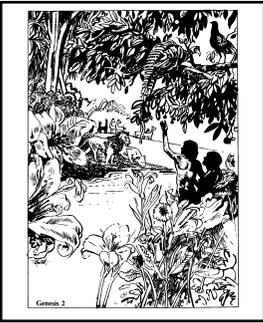
church. The allegorizing of the Middle Ages and, in modern times, the so-called historical-critical method of approaching Scripture are two dramatic examples of how human intellect can systematically pervert biblical truth (Kuske, 1995). These two experiences in history serve as fair warning not to let either our imagination or our reason play fast and loose with Bible truth.

Thankfully, the Reformation addressed both tendencies, and clear principles for Bible interpretation began to emerge. But the dangers still exist. The imagination of man's heart is still evil from his youth (Ge 8:21, KJV). The risk continues to be real and the consequences grave. Since the fall this temptation has been a constant concern for the handling of God's Word. For this very reason Christ promises to be with us. With the trail clearly marked, we have every sanctified reason to pursue our study of the Bible's imagery. We do this with the confidence that the Lord will bless us through our study. We are reassured by the words of Saint Paul: "I can do everything through [Christ] who gives me strength" (Php 4:13). And we "take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ" (2Co 10:5). We can, and we should, spend time and energy searching the Scriptures for the meaning hidden in God's picture album. We should teach God's people to do the same. These figures are there to edify and instruct. Failing to pursue them only frustrates God's purpose. To suggest that such a study is so risky that only those who have mastered Greek or Hebrew are qualified runs contrary to Luther's view. "Luther applied the scriptural doctrine of the universal priesthood of all believers to the matter of interpretation. He encouraged lay people to read and interpret Scripture for themselves rather than being bound to any interpretation imposed on them by popes and bishops. By this Luther did not mean that each person had the freedom to interpret Scripture any way he wanted to. Like his pastor, every lay person was bound to let Scripture interpret Scripture. This restoration of the freedom for each Christian to read Scripture daily was a hallmark of the Reformation" (Kuske, 1995, pp. 150, 160).

Furthermore, the risk has been overstated. David Kuske writes, "Sometimes the statement is made that the interpretation of figurative language in Scripture is one of the most difficult parts of biblical interpretation. Just the opposite is true. If we understand the known figure of speech and limit ourselves to one point of comparison, those passages that have figurative language should be some of the easiest for us to interpret. In turn, they should also be some of the easiest texts to explain in sermons or Bible class, Sunday school, and catechism class" (Kuske, 1995, p. 92).

The Double Box

Life as a sinful human being is fraught with difficulties. Very young children have no trouble articulating the problem: We can't see God! Neither can we touch him, smell him, hear him, or taste him. We have no experience in the spirit world. Every moment of our existence has occurred within the material parameters of time and space. We can only hope to imagine things spiritual. Yet, God is a spirit. When we try to grasp that concept our imagination is easily led astray. To the unspiritual mind the spirit realm appears as an anomaly. It is so outside the box of our experience that it's even difficult to imagine God when our mind's eye is operating with sanctified 20/20 vision.

The difference between physical and spiritual has been there from the beginning—an awesome aspect of God's creation—though sin has all but obliterated our appreciation for this difference. By creating man in his own image, God bridged the gap between a material world and his spiritual existence; it wasn't a problem. In the garden, Adam and Eve walked and talked with God. Creature and Creator understood each other perfectly.

Then the creature fell from grace. The gap between physical and spiritual took on immense new significance. It became an impenetrable gulf. Sin had destroyed man's understanding of anything spiritual. In fact, no matter how hard mankind might try, it would now be impossible for creatures bound in time and space to connect with their Creator. We didn't have the first clue of what to look for or where to look. We didn't even have enough spiritual sense to stumble over him accidentally. Nor was there any inclination to try. Sin gave us our own ideas about things like love and power. We loved self. And we were

> **Faith takes our spiritual understanding beyond time, space, and the obstacle of sin to give us the reality of God's infinite kingdom.**

satisfied to try to generate enough of our own power (in the form of wealth, influence, and intellectual acuity) to muddle through.

Luther said that natural man is an enemy of God, blind to his truth and, in spiritual terms, no better off than a corpse. Enemies reject God's gifts— sometimes they even reject life itself. Blind men can't find their way back to him. Dead men don't care. We simply have no natural resources for grasping the things of God. We don't even know

what we are missing. Divine knowledge? Divine wisdom? Divine justice? Divine love? Divine peace? We don't get it. And we don't really want to get it.

We are boxed-in twice: once by time, space, and our own entrapment in sin; and again by our own lack of a sanctified will to know this God who would go to any lengths to prove his love for us. No small problem—one that we were never going to fix on our own!

God had a solution: penetrate the double barrier …twice. He entered the box himself to become flesh, to live among his people, and die for them to expunge the curse they deserved. Then he penetrated the barrier once more by giving each member of his chosen family the gift of faith.

Faith takes our spiritual understanding beyond time, space, and the obstacle of sin to give us the reality of God's infinite kingdom. With faith we grasp things that are otherwise unknowable. How is a mystery too deep to fathom; but with the miracle of faith we escape the confines of our double box to enter into God's real kingdom.

This is where the Bible's literary figures go to work. Scripture's figures are constructed from the ordinary stuff of

human experience—finite stuff. They are God's holy media, shadows of a divine reality. Coupled with faith, this stuff has the power to transport us to a whole new vista of spiritual understanding—a kingdom truly not of this world—a kingdom of limitless power, incomprehensible wisdom, absolute truth, endless peace, infinite mercy, complete and unbounded joy, pure goodness, unqualified hope, uncompromising justice, love that knows no end to giving, eternal Life without suffering and filled with meaning, immeasurable glory, transcendent understanding. Abstract concepts like these are difficult to grasp (Ro 11:33,34). That is what makes God's multimedia projections in Scripture so indispensable. He surrounds us with a never-ending media extravaganza to demonstrate his infinite goodness and love. They take us not only from the known to the unknown, but from the known to the unknowable.

A New Age

Over the last four hundred years, science has been the dominant influence on our world's dreaming. The prose of science replaced the bad habits of allegorical Bible interpretation. But it was only one imagined story in exchange for another. For four centuries, in the name of science, a pall of suspicion would be cast over everything supernatural, including the mysteries of God and his revealed Word. In an enlightened world, if something could not be proven scientifically, it could not be real. As a result, Bible (spiritual) reality was often confused with things imagined (myth). The casualties of this 400-year-old skirmish included the mythologizing of

angels, devils, sin, heaven, hell, and even the Deity. From a secular perspective, science became an absolute, or perhaps The Absolute; or at least the only absolute worth considering as a source for truth.

Today we find ourselves straddling another demarcation in history. One foot is planted in an age obsessed with the prose of reason, logic, and empirical proof. The other foot is anchored in the swampy, image-enriched landscape of illusion, perception, and intuition. Precarious times! Even the false idol of science finds itself teetering, as mankind busily constructs a new story in the Babel tradition. Ironically, this new-age way of thinking was spawned in the soil of literature. What comes through the babble and fog of 20th century philosophy is a Godless story that denies the existence of absolute truth, deconstructs the foundations of Western (Judeo-Christian) culture, and views life as a banal extension of media (hyperreality). The story spun by contemporary thinkers is there is no meaning (neo-nihilism).
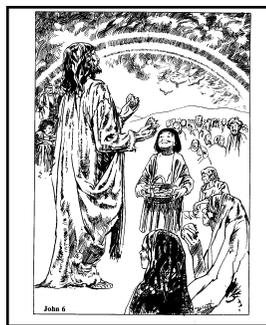
Today the flood of media images and sounds are telling the story and shaping the culture. In his book *Media Unlimited,* Todd Gitlin writes: "We vote for a way of life with our time. And increasingly… we are in the media torrent…The more money we have to spend, the more personal space each household member gets. With personal space comes solitude, but this solitude is instantly crowded with images and soundtracks. To a degree that was unthinkable, life has become an experience in the presence

of media" (Gitlin, 2002, p. 20).

The implication is clear: wired citizens of our world are the least connected people of all time. For many, family relationships are a sham. So are their relationships with friends. We fill the void with the false relationships drawn from the media. Gitlin describes these relationships: "Like flesh-and-blood people, the ones with whom we have face-time, the virtual personages on-screen have identities and invite our emotions. Sometimes we evaluate them as physical beings and moral agents. Often we find them desirable, or enviable, or in some other way they evoke the sentiments, the liking, irritation, or boredom, that flesh-and-blood individuals evoke . . . They take up ritual places as heroes, leaders, scapegoats, magical figures, to be admired, envied, loved, or hated; to matter" (my emphasis) (Gitlin, 2002, p. 21).

Worse, our disconnectedness has extended to God and his Word, which leads to spiritual starvation. In the emptiness of that vacuum, people are even more vulnerable to the proposition that there is no meaning in life. Without God it is true.

The Bible's picture language is a perfect fit for our contemporary world. Paul Kelm writes, "In a post-literate world, people are more likely to per-

ceive things through images and experiences than through logical propositions" (Kelm, 2002, p. 10). Image and experience with God's pictured themes tell a story about the only reality on our planet that has ever had any genuine meaning—the story of God's enduring love for his creatures.

People do not all see the world in the same way. My wife and I have found it necessary to carry two cameras on vacations. She enjoys taking snapshots of people. I prefer to shoot landscapes. In recent years the study of the human brain has made some progress in understanding how the left side of the brain and the right side work together. Each side has its own way of dealing with sensory information. Some individuals are dominated by the right side, others are dominated by the left. Some people operate better in the realm of imagination while others appear to do better with cognitive thinking. If this is true (and the evidence is already quite persuasive), the church will need to consider the implications for presenting the gospel. Kelm writes, "The God who created us as rational and emotional human beings, communicates to us in rational and emotional language; and he has chosen to make his saving purpose for our world dependent on his people's proclamation of his message" (Kelm, 2002, p. 7).

Ten years ago, when I began to develop the devotional magazine that later became *Lutheran Parent,* I spent a year on the road talking about daily devotions. Parents would tell me how much they appreciated those devotions their three- or four-year-olds could understand. I asked them to be more specific. A pattern began to emerge. The devotions they were talking about were based on Bible texts that contained picture language. Often a parent would add, "I like the Bible's word pictures, too." Since then I have made it a standard practice to encourage parents to talk more about the Bible's word pictures.

The age in which we live is a cauldron of new paradigms. Some would say it is Babel revisited. The change we see all around us is largely the product of man's imagination. For more than a century mankind has been obsessed with the dream of creating a better world. But the ongoing search for *something different (Le Differance,* a major theme of post-modern thinkers and writers) exposes his failures. In the significant areas of life on our planet, the human condition is no better off today than it was when the builders of Babel's tower foolishly imagined they could reach heaven through the new technology of fired brick. Apart from Christ, there still is no peace, no justice, no relief from suffering, no answer to death, no escape from the guilt of sin, and no real meaning in life. It would be easy for Christians to point to man's imagination as the cause for both the foolishness and the failure.

Such a conclusion would be entirely out of order. Sin is the problem, and God has dealt with it. In the light of our redemption, we must be careful not to throw out the baby with the bath water. Our imagination is an extraordinary blessing. Yes it has frequently gotten us

into trouble (a good reason to remain steadfast in our study of God's Word). But we dare not forget that with this marvelous gift God has also given to humankind the power to build skyscrapers, bridges, and dams. With our God-given ability to dream comes the inven-

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> *While there is hope in the basic message that Jesus loves me, there is also a wealth of transcendent beauty and spiritual knowledge hidden in God's pictures.*
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tion of new technologies in medicine, communication, and transportation. It takes imagination to learn how to fly, invent a light bulb, land on the moon, discover a continent, defeat smallpox, design robots, and envision a personal computer. Without the gift of imagination, we could never appreciate Shakespeare, Bach, Michelangelo, or Bruebeck. Nor could we ever fully appreciate the richness of Scripture's gospel message, for, while there is hope

in the basic message that Jesus loves me, there is also a wealth of transcendent beauty and spiritual knowledge hidden in God's pictures. Such lasting beauty has the potential to bring a special measure of joy and spiritual strength to God's people.

Today's young people are not readers in the traditional sense. But they are interested in story, and they are fascinated with the vocabulary of image and symbol. David Bosch explains, "Metaphor, symbol, ritual, sign and myth, long maligned by those interested only in 'exact' expressions of rationality, are today being rehabilitated; they not only touch the mind and its conceptions, and evoke action with a purpose, but compel the heart" (Bosch, 1995, p. 6,7).

Our sanctified imagination enables us to envision God's heaven through the eyes of faith. It gives us new insights into the past in which God's grace has been a constant in a world burdened with sin and devolutionary change. And it gives rise to exciting new ideas about how we might better worship God and serve his people. Our ability to dream and create, using the marvelous gift of our imagination, is among the greatest of all of God's blessings. The Bible's figurative language speaks to that imagination and informs faith, equipping God's people for the telling and retelling of that marvelous story of our redemption in Christ Jesus.

I love to tell the story
Of unseen things above,
Of Jesus and his glory,

Of Jesus and his love.
I love to tell the story
Because I know it's true;
It satisfies my longings
As nothing else can do.
I love to tell the story;
'Twill be my theme in glory
To tell the old, old story
Of Jesus and his love. ❧

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Drawings of Bible stories are by Donald Muth, from "The Picture Catechism" © 1983 Minnesota District of WELS.

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His Mother Kept All These Sayings in Her Heart

As o'er the cradle of her Son
The blessed Mary hung,
And chanted to the Anointed One
The psalms that David sung,

What joy her bosom must have known,
As, with a sweet surprise,
She marked the boundless love that shone
Within his infant eyes.

But deeper was her joy to hear,
Even in his ripening youth,
And treasure up, from year to year,
His words of grace and truth.

Oh, may we keep his words like her
In all their life and power,
And to the law of love refer
The acts of every hour.

WILLIAM CULLEN BRYANT

Using Cooperative Groups to Promote Accountability

Patricia M. Grabitske

I T SEEMS whenever teachers gather for a bit of shoptalk, the subject of "How do I get my students to complete their work on time?" becomes a major topic of conversation. High school teachers claim that holding students accountable for assignments is the biggest stumbling block they face. Elementary teachers use any number of management techniques and reward systems to encourage and entice their students to meet expectations for time management and assignment completion.

As third and fourth graders, the students in my classroom must make the transition to personal accountability for daily assignments. In the past I have had the children keep a daily assignment book which parents were to sign each evening. Theoretically, the parents were checking with the child on the completion of assignments each day. In addition, on Fridays I would award yellow slips to those students who had completed all assignments

ments for the week. Any child who had incomplete work would receive a blue slip listing the work that needed to be turned in by Monday morning. The blue slip asked parents to set aside time to help the child over the weekend.

This system worked up to a point. However, on a weekly basis, only 20 - 35% of the children were completely done with all assignments. Keeping track of incomplete work was taking up far too much of my time and energy. This time could be much better used for instruction.

My reading in professional literature led me to wonder if I could use peer pressure and cooperative grouping to improve accountability. William Glasser's choice theory states that people will choose to comply with instructions if they feel that compliance is to their personal benefit at the time. Glasser maintains that individuals who see personal benefit produce quality work and that working as a team benefits all the members of that team.

Putting this theory to work in the classroom, Glasser insists, would turn out

a better educational product. He urges teachers to make lessons valuable to the students and teach the students to work together as this is the best reflection of life outside the classroom.

Robbins and Finley, on the other hand, say that people do not naturally desire to work in groups. People are by nature self centered and wary of trusting others enough to collaborate on a project. However, they go on, teams are a way of life and therefore people must learn how to work together. It is necessary for each team member to see the personal value of working together toward an end product.

Johnson and Johnson explain how cooperative grouping can raise student achievement as well as promote social interaction. They also explain that forming heterogeneous groups works best, that homogeneous groups tend to put best friends together, and this tends to interfere with the learning process. Random grouping, the Johnsons maintain, gives results reflecting the terminology: random. Since the educator has no control over who will be working together, anything may happen. Random grouping may work well; it may have disastrous results.

With the opinions of the experts in mind, I wondered if I could lead the children to see the personal benefit of cooperating with a group to complete daily work and thus apply this strategy to improving accountability.

The thought that people need to be taught to work in groups to overcome their self centered natures struck a sympathetic chord. This truly lines up with the biblical teaching on the sinful nature of man and the need to apply the Law and gospel as we do every day. Working together for mutual benefit in cooperative groups also carries out the commands of our Lord to help and befriend each other and put the needs of others above our own.

I felt it was worth a try to form cooperative groups in my classroom for the purpose of increasing accountability, so I set up a plan of action to research the effectiveness of this approach. Over a period of four months, I tested the effectiveness of heterogeneous, homogeneous, and random grouping. In the last month I returned to individual accountability for the purpose of comparison. If all the members of a group had completed all of their assignments for the week on Friday morning, the group would earn 20 minutes of game time. Group members were to remind and encourage each other during the week so this goal would be accomplished.

To form the groups, I followed the advice of the experts, especially Johnson and Johnson, and ranked the children from most capable to least capable. Heterogeneous groups were formed by taking the top and bottom student plus two from the middle. Homogeneous groups were formed by grouping the top four, the fifth through eighth, and so on. To form random groups, I simply pulled names from a hat.

Assignment completion would be judged on the basis of awarding yellow and blue slips. A yellow slip on Friday morning means that all work is complet-

ed for the week. A blue slip lists assignments for which there is no grade recorded in the grade book and asks that these assignments be completed over the weekend. Data was tabulated by counting the number of yellow slips awarded each Friday.
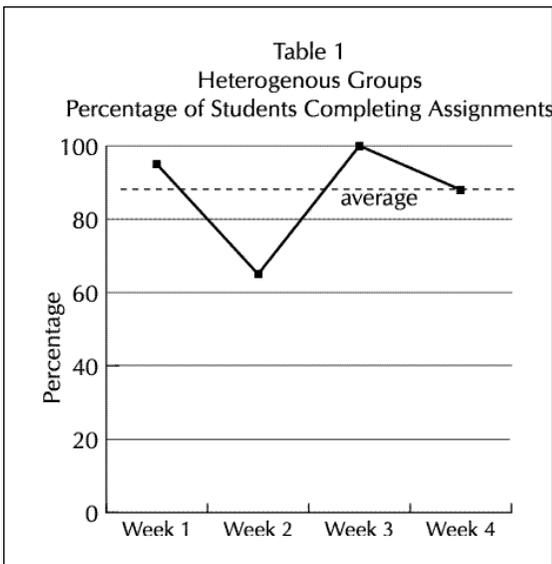
Results

During the first month students were seated in heterogeneous groups of four. Students were excited to earn game time but leery of trusting others in their group to help them do it. The first week was rocky. There were many complaints about others not doing their part. My reaction was always the same, "If you want to earn game time, encourage your teammates to do their part." By the second week the children realized that complaining would get no action from me and focused their efforts on not only encouraging, but also helping teammates to manage their time and homework. In week three, many little "mothers" developed in the groups as one child (usually a girl) would help another go through the desk at the end of the day to make sure all work was turned in or taken home to be completed. Scores soared that week! (See Table 1.)

In the second month, children were grouped homogeneously. Experts said this would not be effective, and I soon found out they were correct. After two weeks I had to break up the groups for purposes of management. However, the

children were told they must still work with the same team for earning game time on Friday. Even though the team members were not seated together, they needed to work together to accomplish the goal. (See Table 2.)

Results from this type of grouping averaged 78%. Although this was some-

Table 1
Heterogenous Groups
Percentage of Students Completing Assignments

what lower than the 87% average for heterogeneous groups, it was still a marked improvement over the 20-35% average before starting grouping.

The third attempt at grouping was random. Again, the results bore out the research. Groups averaged 75%, better than the original scores, but not as good as heterogeneous or homogeneous grouping. All three types of grouping greatly increased the percentage of students completing their assignments. (See Table 3.)

The fourth month saw a return to

individual accountability. This would be my preference in an ideal world since we all need to learn to be accountable for our own choices in life. For the first two weeks of that month, the children

Table 2
Homogeneous groups
Percentage of Students Completing Assignments

for the sake of being done. A few attempted to bluff their way to a yellow slip. (See Table 4.)

For the last two weeks of the project I decided to award game time at the beginning of the day on Friday. In this manner only those who held yellow slips at the start of the school day on Friday would qualify for the reward. It was my hope that this would prompt the children to complete their work on a daily basis instead of waiting until Friday and that the quality of the work would improve.

The first week of this plan resulted in 75% of the children holding yellow slips by the time the starting bell rang on Friday morning. Those children played board games while those with blue slips worked on assignments that needed completing. A few students holding yellow
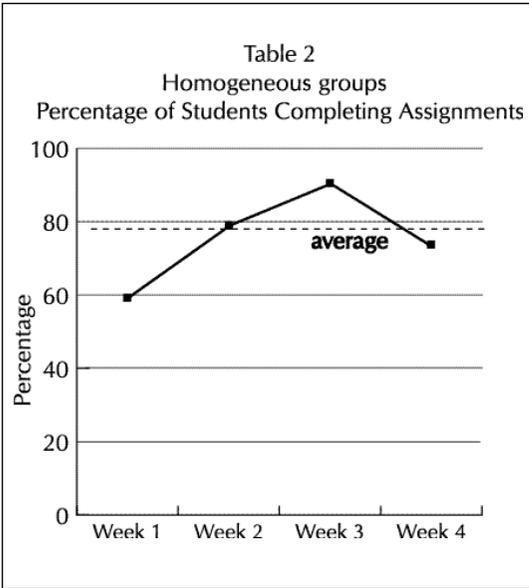
worked toward earning 20 minutes of game time on Friday. The first week 65% of the children had completed all assignments by the time we began game time at 11:30. The second week it was 60%. Both these scores exceeded the scores before the project began. However, I noticed that many children were working very hard on Friday morning to complete the work listed on their blue slips so they could earn a yellow slip before game time began. In doing so, they were not getting the benefit of immediate reinforcement of the Friday morning lessons. They were also sacrificing quality

Table 3
Random Groups
Percentage of Students Completing Assignments
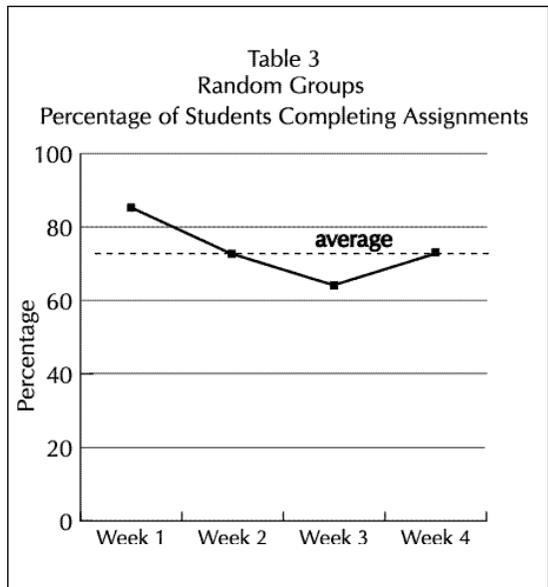
slips opted to use the time to work on publishing a writing project. This surprised me a bit, but they said they were not really interested in playing games.

The second week of early morning game time showed 80% of the children playing games and 20% working on overdue assignments. The transition to game time was much smoother when it was first thing in the morning. This time slot also gave me the time needed to help students through the rough spots as they worked on overdue assignments. This schedule proved to be a more natural "fit" for my students and me.

Conclusion

All four methods of grouping or not grouping the children to promote responsible accountability vastly

Table 5
Summary of Groups
Average Assignment Completion
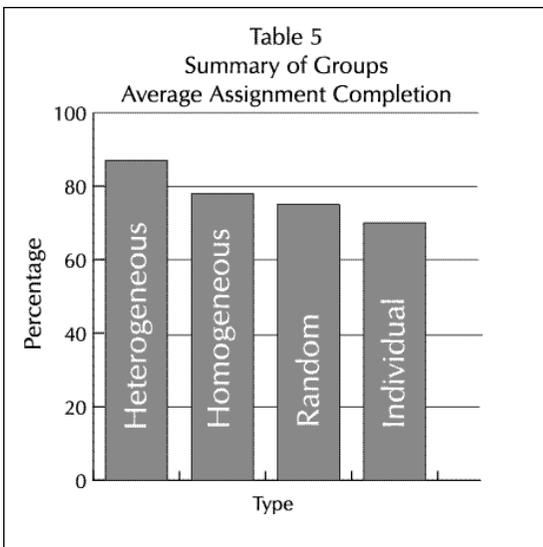
improved the rate of completion over what was happening before this plan began. The averages for each type of grouping were so close, ranging from 70% to 87%, that I was led to believe that it was the reward of game time that was the motivator rather than the peer pressure or encouragement from members of the group. (See Table 5.)
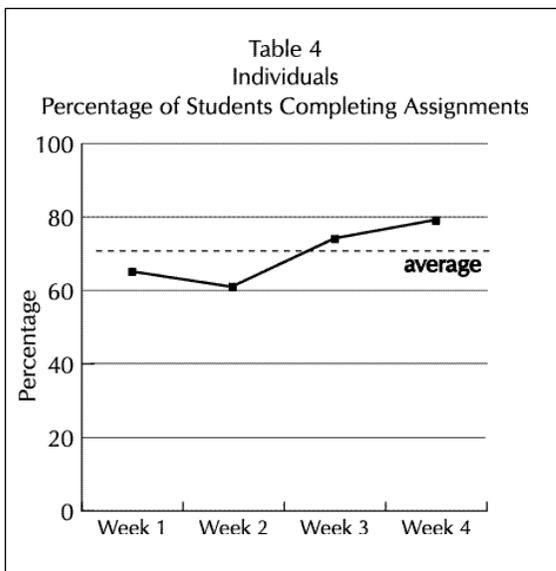
Even though the results of the individual accountability show that it was slightly less successful than the results obtained through grouping, I felt this method was more desirable. My hope with individual accountability was that the children had matured and would be able to handle time management on their own. However, these results could have been considerably influenced by a number of variables. The last two weeks of the project were also the last two weeks

Table 4
Individuals
Percentage of Students Completing Assignments

of the school year when our schedule was irregular and the number of assignments was greatly reduced. The children were out of routine at school and at home, and their focus was not on schoolwork.

This strategy needs more study. If my conclusion that the reward is the motivator is to be proved or disproved, some experimenting needs to be done with means of grouping, types of rewards, and possibly means of qualifying for the reward in order to find a trend. It was apparent that encouragement from me and encouragement from the parents meant more to the students than peer pressure.

In a perfect world all the students would complete all their assignments all the time. That will never happen this side of heaven, but we continue to strive to come as close as possible.

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Peace on Earth

Shepherds there were who in the fields by night
kept watch, not wisting that a chorus bright
Of angels would to them the news convey
The dawning of the world's most potent day.

Countless the nights of darkness and of fear
The world has watched through, but the message clear
Of prophets, martyrs, saints, and poets brought
The healing word for which it blindly sought.

Visions from God-through men must come the word,
Till the whole earth to action deeply stirred
From war and dread and hatred wins release,
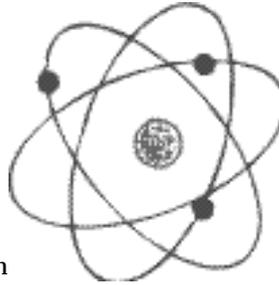And hails once more as King the Prince of Peace.

HELEN WIEAND COLE

A Model or Reality?

Paul L. Willems

UPPER grade teachers, high school instructors, and college professors who teach science must deal with the dilemma posed by the title of this article. As the teaching of science in these classrooms turns away from the study of nature, which is the science of the primary grades, it also turns away from the reality of the tree and its leaves, the pond with its fish and the rock-covered mountain. Science now becomes a study of information and methodology—deciduous trees, fish, DNA, and igneous rock formations. These more abstract ideas are conceptual entities of human imagination. They are far less real than simple physical objects. The distinction between real and invented concepts may not matter in the pragmatic world which asks, "'What is it?" But in the complex world in which humans live, "How does it work?" is also important. That's why models and modeling exist.

It is a fiction to think that any student in any classroom can discover all of today's science by himself or herself. There is too much to know. So humans have learned to classify objects and to make models so large amounts of data can be simplified and understood. In addition much of science is tacit and can be learned only by embracing basic assumptions held by the scientific community. These assumptions are difficult to articulate for they lie in the way science is done. They are acquired in a type of apprenticeship while working with other people. These tacit assumptions often involve modeling. Again science makes use of models when expensive or complicated experiment's with the real thing arise. Testing a fully loaded 747 to determine the ultimate forces its tail and rudder can sustain before failing is morally wrong and economically impractical. Even measuring the wind speed and air pressure inside a tornado is extremely difficult in real life situations. To investigate these phenomena science simplifies the problem and devises tests and strategies to produce approximations. This is model making. The model must be simple enough so its behaviors can be measured, but complex enough so the calculations produced from the measurements result in meaningful understandings of the

behaviors of the phenomena found in nature and help predict future behaviors in new situations.

Model making involves generating and/or collecting data. The data is then analyzed to discover patterns or predictable behaviors. The developed model must be able to explain the patterns found in the data and, ideally, be able to infer untested behaviors in new situations. Analogs or physical models are important tools to help visualize the behaviors that are being observed. One model for electricity is the fluid model. Voltage is analogous to fluid pressure in a closed system, while current is similar to the rate of fluid flow. The fluid model struggles to explain electromagnetic induction, and it fails completely with semiconductor applications. Electricity is not really a fluid, even though we may say, "Turn on the juice," when we want to apply electrical energy to a device. Models have limitations.

Physical models enabled Linus Pauling (1901-1994) to understand the molecular pattern for the polypeptide chain of proteins, now known as the alpha helix. His success spurred on James Watson (b. 1928) and Francis Crick (b. 1916) to use the model building approach to discover the structure of DNA. Nobel prizes were awarded to these men for their achievements. Researchers at the California Institute of Technology have developed an experimental model that uses mice to investigate and understand human fear disorders such as panic and anxiety (Wheeler, 2003, p. 25). However, often the best models of nature are the mathematical models. Mathematical models contain far less human emotional baggage since mathematics is simple and abstract. Mathematics is widely understood, is adaptable to changing situations and, therefore, can be a very flexible model. It is easy to change mathematics to accommodate the behaviors of many different physical phenomena. Simple mathematical models are sometimes called laws or formulas. $F = ma$ is an algebraic mathematical model for Newton's Second Law of Motion, a human conceptual model in itself.

When Nobel laureate Richard Feynman (1918-1988) was asked to give a simplified description for a quantum physics concept, he was surprised to learn that he could not reduce it to a "freshman level" explanation. "This means," he said, "we don't really understand it" (Gleick, 1992, p. 399). Reality was too subtle to model accurately. Another Nobel prize winner, Max Perutz (b. 1914), was mystified by gravity. He thought when he reached the university he would learn what it really was. He later rote, "I was disappointed when they merely taught me that gravity is what it does, an attractive force between two bodies that makes the apple fall with an acceleration of 10 meters per second squared (Perutz, 1989, p. 205). The reality of gravity remains unknown.

Scientists are not the only people who work with models instead of reality. Weather forecasters use computer models to predict rain and storms. Economists use mathematical models to predict money trends and so influence

the Federal Reserve Bank to adjust the prime interest rate. Psychologists use the Freudian model or the Piaget model to interpret human behaviors. Teachers use educational models to effect student learning.

Is science concerned only with models or is there some vestige of reality in science? We know science uses real objects in the laboratory—meter sticks, clocks, lenses—to obtain data. But the data observed is often not so regular as the textbook models would lead us to believe. What has happened? Data analysis, measurement approximation, averaging, error, and preconceived notions have happened. When Robert Millikan (1888-1953) was performing his now famous oil drop experiment, he kept doing the experiment over and over until he "discovered" data that fit his theory and so won a Nobel Prize for quantizing the charge on an electron. (Goodstein, 1980, p. 25). Was it reality he observed or did he "beat the data into submission" to fit his preconceived model? The algebraic algorithms written as the laws of science are generally better understood in their calculus form. And in this form, it is recognized that some terms are ignored or assumed to be insignificant and discarded so the model can be made useful for practical work.

Science changes and modeling helps foster its changing nature. The heliocentric model of our solar system replaced the geocentric model, not because it was simpler, but because it offered opportunities for further investigations. This fresh model led to new avenues of study and scientific work such as Newton's Law of Universal Gravitation and Einstein's concept of the speed of light. In the older geocentric model these areas were unknown

> *Are we teaching our students that we have now achieved a complete understanding of God's creation? Do we think we teach reality? Do we claim to teach true science? Can we comprehend the mind of God?*

and unexplored. Model building is a part of science that involves human imagination and does not necessarily reflect reality. Christians know God really created the universe. Science uses the "Big Bang" evolutionary model to explain the universe in which we live. Many quantum models used to explain the workings of atoms and of stars contradict each other and defy common

sense, but they provide workable solutions to everyday problems.

A study of the history of science reveals many descriptive models of nature. It sometimes appears that older models were simpler and today's models are more complex, but not all follow this prescription. Geocentrism, with its equants and epicycles, was not simpler than the elliptical planetary orbits of heliocentrism. We delude ourselves if we think the models of today are so clever they mimic reality. Are we teaching our students that we have now achieved a complete understanding of God's creation? Do we think we teach reality? Do we claim to teach true science? Can we comprehend the mind of God? Perhaps we, like Job of old, should say, "Surely I spoke of things I did not understand, things too wonderful for me to know" (Job 42:3).

I believe we should be as honest as we can as teachers and acknowledge much of what is called science is based on human imagination and is a model. Just because scientific theories are successful does not mean they are real. Some models cannot even be verified by direct experiment. Such models include how a star shines, how a cell can be alive, and the scientific theory of evolution. Even those theories which give verifiable results are far less real than is a rain drop, rich soil, or human beings. The model which presupposes the existence of virtual photons, tunneling electrons, or wave functions can easily do away with those same concepts if the model changes. Caloric fluid and phlogiston are no longer scientific concepts because the models that supported them changed. These concepts were not so real as they once seemed.

Science is not truth. The old models still work although science has abandoned them. Do we apply the heliocentric model when planning our summer vacation trip or do we assume the earth is stationary, as did Ptolmey's geocentric model? Do astronauts work out their equations with Einstein's new gravitational model or do they assume Newton's model is good enough? When our students ask the tough questions— "What is the meaning of life?" or "What am I doing here?" or "What happens after death?"—they will not find the answers in a scientific model. They need the reality of Scripture. There is also reality in the love of beauty, in the awe of a sunset and in a sense of humor or in a song. Science cannot model this reality either, but it exists. ✄

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O'Neal, Debbie Trafton. *Go Tell It on the Mountain.* Minneapolis: Augsburg, 2003. Illustrated by Fiona King.

Colorful illustrations accompany the text of the familiar African American spiritual, *Go Tell It on the Mountain.* A border offsets each page of the refrain. O'Neal has written an additional stanza brought to life through illustrations of a modern day family preparing for Christmas. Gospel outreach is the theme of the new stanza; "I want to share the good news with everyone on earth."

Classroom teachers could use this book to illustrate a hymnology lesson as well as using it as a springboard for a writing lesson. Families would appreciate the "family fun" section. Spreading the news of Jesus' birth is the theme for Christmas crafts that families could prepare. A copy of the song and sign language pictures complete the book.

CL

O'Neal, Debbie Trafton. *O Christmas Tree.* Minneapolis: Augsburg, 2003. Illustrated by Ande Cook.

The familiar carol, "O Tannenbaum," provides the text for this story. Illustrations depict a family's preparations for Christmas from buying to decorating a tree. O'Neal adds another stanza reminding the reader that the gifts we see at Christmas are a reminder of God's greatest gift for all.

A "Christmas Family Fun" section centers around the tree. Suggestions are given for decorating with garland, paper chains, and stars. Families would enjoy making a handprint tree skirt. This "skirt" could become a family heirloom. Activities would be appropriate for a variety of ages thereby getting all family members involved. A copy of the song, O Christmas Tree, along with sign language directions completes the book.

CL

Kunkel, Jeff. *What Scares Me and What I Do About It. Stories and Pictures by Sunday School Kids.* Minneapolis: Augsburg, 2003.

Childhood fears are explored in this book. Sixty children ranging in age from three to fifteen contributed ideas for this book. In his StoryArt groups, Kunkel asked children to brainstorm a list of fears. Participants were then asked to draw and write about the fear itself followed by suggestions for ways to cope with the fear.

The book is divided into topics: At Home, At School, Out and About, and Other Worlds. Younger children wrote of fears typical for a particular age—fear of the dark, shadows, things that go thump in the night. Others wrote of more serious matters, family troubles and terrorism. Teachers will appreciate reading what children had to say about

school fears.

A variety of strategies were discussed for dealing with fears. These ranged from the practical solutions (turning on a light) to sincere expressions of faith. Many children used prayer and Bible passages to cope with fears. The faith of a young child was illustrated as a five-year old stated, "I'm sticking my hand into God's so I can use his power and love." Authentic artwork and dialogue from the children make the book appealing to readers of all ages.

This book would provide an interesting start for a discussion or writing activity on fear. Christian families and educators would be able to highlight God's love and protection no matter what earthly troubles may occur.

CL

Bennethum, D. Michael. *Listen! God is Calling! Luther Speaks of Vocation, Faith, and Work.* Minneapolis: Augsburg, 2003.

It is not always easy to find good discussions of Luther's concept of the Christian vocation. There is Gustaf Wingren's (1957) *Luther on Vocation* (now republished by Ballast Press) and there is the Augsburg series of *The Christian at Work in the World.* But there is not much that goes back directly to Luther and makes applications today.

Bennethum's work is a welcome addition. He pulls together Luther's ideas and many of his quotes in a simple to read, relatively thin (90 pages) book.

Part of the difficulty on writing on this topic is a confusion that exists with terminology: Luther speaks of a call and a vocation, both of which can mean different things. Bennethum goes back to Luther and to Luther's studies of Scripture to define the Christian vocation as existing in the worldly kingdom. This is the kingdom of the law; of earthly, horizontal relationships; of obligations we have with family, employers, and government; of believers and unbelievers; of the means by which God provides earthly gifts that we need for our body and life. This is the world that is described in the Small Catechism in the Table of Duties and the answer to the question in Confession: "What Sins Should We Confess? Answer: Here consider your station…"

As Bennethum notes, Luther was attacking the notion of the Catholic church at that time: There is only one vocation that serves God—the work of monks and priests.

Bennethum also uses Luther to make the distinction between the Reformed view of vocation (the Protestant work ethic) and the scriptural view of vocation as a work of love that comes from faith and that serves others in love. A vocation is a mask of God through which God bestows his blessings on us and others.

The author uses his experiences as a parish pastor to show how Sunday and Monday can be brought together for members of the congregation. Such a bringing together may not be obvious because the work of pastors and Lutheran teachers often focuses on the work of the heavenly kingdom—preach-

ing and teaching Law and gospel in church and school. Lutherans do Sunday well, but for many in the pew, Monday presents unanswered questions about how does one testify to a living faith, how does one serve as a mask of God, how does one act honestly and with love in the workplace? Bennethum makes a good case that it can be done and it must be done.

The book is a good read for pastors, teachers, and laypersons. You might also check with the author on an outline on the Christian vocation for a weekend retreat that he has.

JI

May the Light of the world
the Hope of all nations
the Peace that surpasses our understanding
be with you and yours
this season.
The Editors: JI, PL, CL, JP