

# ctj

## The Christian Teachers Journal

NOVEMBER 2022 vol 30.4

**Transformation:**  
What are we  
talking about?

**The school, the  
wilderness, and the  
garden of delight**

**Creation:**  
The backdrop or  
the mainstage for  
Christian Education?

**Developing a  
transformative  
journal**

**30th anniversary  
edition reflections**







**TEACHING IN TASSIE**  
Picture Perfect

# MAKE THE MOVE



## BETHANY'S STORY

I'm very thankful for the way I was supported to become Principal! From ongoing professional development to mentors and opportunities, the school has always been supportive of my leadership, advancement, and growth.

In Tassie I've seen some incredibly beautiful places and the running here is great! It didn't take me long to find my place here.

**PERFECT.**



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## EXPERIENCE

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## TIME IN TASSIE

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NORTHERN CHRISTIAN SCHOOL  
BRIDGEWATER

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All contributions welcomed.

Do you have a perspective you would like to share? A curriculum approach or a gospel-shaped pedagogy that you want to write about for your own professional development? We would love to hear from you.

Articles, book reviews, curriculum responses, stories, etc. welcome.

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### A JOURNAL FOR CHRISTIAN EDUCATORS

The vision of the journal is to affirm the lordship of Christ in education. It aims to serve Christian educators, challenging them to a fuller understanding of their task and responsibilities; raising issues critical to the development of teaching and learning in a distinctively Christian way. The Journal is supported by Christian Education National.

The *Christian Teachers Journal* is published by teachers as a forum for the exchange of ideas and practices for teachers to advance the cause of Christ in education.

Views and opinions of writers and advertisers do not necessarily represent the position of this journal nor of the publisher.

**CHRISTIAN**  
EDUCATION NATIONAL

## editorial



Information, transformation, and dedication

As we look back on 30 years of publishing the *Christian Teachers Journal*, there is a consistent thread of Christian education being transformational. Teachers who have used *CTJ* to inspire their teaching have found that presenting curriculum through a biblical lens can truly transform the lives of both teachers and students. Developing these practices is a continuous process. Many teachers have been inspired meeting in small groups to develop ideas as to how they can creatively present the curriculum to reveal how God sent His son Jesus to transform our lives, our leaders, our schools, our environment, into communities that reflect God.

The challenge for Christian schools 30 years later is to continue to develop creative ways in which to deliver our ever-changing curriculum, providing teachers with challenging articles and sharing programs that reflect our God and His transformative power. Key people in the early years of developing transformative education, such as Doug Blomberg, Jack Mechielsen, Andrew White, Allan Long, Geoff Wilson, Harry Burggraaf, Martin Hanscamp, and others, provided an amazing foundation and we honour them in this 30th anniversary edition. It is critical a new generation of educators continue this work.

If your school has some archived copies of *CTJ* we encourage you to go back and read the articles. Be challenged afresh in ways that curriculum is presented, acknowledging God as our creator and redeemer—using your God-given imagination to do this creatively.

We pray that God will continue to bless our schools and that *CTJ* will remain faithful to its statement of purpose:

The vision of the journal is to affirm the Lordship of Christ in education. It aims to serve Christian educators to a fuller understanding of their task and responsibilities; raising issues critical in the development of teaching and learning in a distinctively Christian way.

*Tim White and Suzanne Mitchell*

## contents

<b>Transformation – What are we talking about?</b>	<b>4</b>
Rod Thompson	
<b>The school, the wilderness, and the garden of delight</b>	<b>10</b>
David Smith	
<b>Creation: The backdrop or the mainstage for Christian education?</b>	<b>14</b>
Chris Parker	
<b>Developing a transformative journal</b>	<b>20</b>
Suzanne Mitchell	
<b>WOW 30 years of publications!</b>	<b>23</b>
Christina Belcher	
<b>Time line</b>	<b>26</b>
<b>Reflections of <i>CTJ</i> editors and team members &amp; messages from CEN leaders</b>	<b>32</b>
<b>Remembering two giants in <i>CTJ</i>'s history (Transformational education MECS)</b>	<b>33</b>
<b>Top 12 books from My top shelf</b>	<b>34</b>
Jill Ireland	



# TRANSFORMATION:

## WHAT ARE WE TALKING ABOUT? WHERE TO

By Rod Thompson

**INTRODUCTION** In the past 14 years, recognition of the importance of transformation across cultures, and certainly within educational institutions, has only increased. The stories told by advertisers such as Levi's® Jeans and Coca Cola, referenced in the article, were compelling at the time. Advertisers and entertainers continue telling new versions of that same transformation story. These remain edgy and compelling, seeking to woo our attention and allegiance.

New authors, such as Carl Trueman (2020) in *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self*, for example, have added their wisdom to our understanding of human identity and formation.

Christian authors quoted in the 2008 article, including Stuart Fowler, Doug Blomberg, Nicholas Wolterstorff, John Van Dyk, and Steven Garber, remain insightful and helpful as we seek wisdom for life and education. Of course, the Scriptures are still the grounds from which the fruit of formation and transformation grow.

May we continue to humbly seek renewal and transformation for God's purposes in our lives and schools.

*This article was written in 2008 by Rod Thompson and published in CTJ's May edition that year.*



# FROM HERE?



## Popular promises of transformation

Consider the following:

- **Levi's® Jeans commercial – Levi's 501 change**

Levi's jeans have the power to transform a dark, isolated room into an urban kingdom. When a young man recognises the power that is in the jeans, he not only escapes his lonely room, but makes contact with a young woman who is already clothed with Levi power and is seeking to connect with someone else who is also “born again”.

- **Coca-Cola – Blizzard and Coke's special commercial**

Coca-Cola gives courage to young women afflicted by a sleazy man. It transforms them into superheroes, while at the same time reducing the beastly male to a weak wimp. It ensures the triumph of goodness and justice.

- **Hyundai commercial**

Kids in nappies are part of the “next generation” if they live in a spotless home with no adults but with keys to a Hyundai. Here is a Kingdom vision of the “now but not yet” of the future. Fresh whiteness is everywhere in this vision of freedom—a “drive your way” lifestyle which leads to the beach where there are no other people—paradise is just a boy, a girl, a surfboard, a sunset, and of course, a Hyundai. What more could one want?

- **Jaguar XK8 commercial**

Let the journey transform you—this is a world of power, beauty, and above all, endless possibilities; a world where nothing is certain, because being human means having unlimited choices, even with regard to your gender. To enter the gates of this kingdom, one needs a Jaguar. It is the promise of the future.

- **Dove commercial**

One advertiser is taking this dominant message of transformation—the commodification of humans—for their own advertising purposes via a counter-message.

(To view these advertisements go to [www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com) and type in the name of the commercial.)

Within education and schooling as practiced by Christians, we have used the language of transformation for some time.

But what do we mean by using terms such as transformed minds, transformed culture, transformed hearts? In our wider society, promises of transformation are everywhere!

The transformation story being told in these ads may be summarised as follows:

Humans need to and can be transformed! We are living in a world of endless possibilities. Commodities have the power to transform. They are the good news of a Kingdom.

To be without hope is to lack these commodities.

- The essence of humanness is to have virtually unlimited choices.
- Transformation is primarily external. It is about appearance and ability.
- Transformation is individualistic—all you need is the commodity. Community is not required.
- Transformation is immediate—there is no struggle.
- Transformation is only for a select group—the young, wealthy, and healthy. It is outside the reach of the very elderly, disabled, and impoverished.

This story of transformation is both compelling and troubling. It portrays humans as adventurers with power, control, and initiative, living in a world of opportunity—indeed, almost “limitless” opportunities within the “limits” of a consumerist world.

However, the starting point for the story is that of autonomous humans who are “empty selves” in need of filling, who indeed need to be preoccupied with self and the opportunities to become something more than empty—and then to be filled over and over again. Self-liberation through consumption, writes Philip Cushman (1996), makes for a great deal of “abundance and stimulation, isolation and loneliness” (pp. 6-7).

Balswick, King, and Reimer (2005) argue that this primary conception of the self as empty “is a product of the modern project”, the autonomous human “pursuit of truth, universals, freedom and control.” They continue by affirming that the “modern project has become the modern predicament, resulting in an era of fragmented, lonely, isolated people.” They assert that perpetuating the image of humans as empty selves in need of filling is “neither helpful nor healthful” (pp. 18-19). Nor is it accurate to the biblical story of God, reality, humanness, and the promises of transformation found therein.

### **Biblical promises of transformation**

What do the Scriptures mean when they speak of transformation? There is much to say, however we will only focus on one key biblical passage: Romans 12:1-2.

I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

“Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed” the apostle commands. There is a dual command (“Do not be ...” and “Be ...”). These are not commands immediately achieved, but have ongoing, repeated force. Gordon Fee (1994) affirms that these are the basic imperatives in the letter (p. 541)! Transformation is not

**The grounds for transformation are the many mercies of God—culminating in the gospel of Christ’s life, death, and resurrection.**

an option for the believer in Christ. It is commanded. And it is premised by the entire argument of Romans up to this point, concluding with the exultant words of 11:33-36—thus the strong “therefore” as Paul commences this section of the letter.

The grounds for transformation are the many mercies of God—culminating in the gospel of Christ’s life, death, and resurrection, the rule of Christ at God’s right hand and the consequent presence and power of the Holy Spirit throughout the creation and with His people. The age to come has broken into this age, the Kingdom of God has come, those who have responded by faith in the gospel are the people of the future living in the present in Christ—so, “be transformed.” There is no human autonomy. There is responsiveness and obedience. There are no “empty selves” rather “responsive responsible selves,” image-of-God bearing humans, being redeemed in Christ as citizens and agents of the Kingdom of God. And in the light of God’s mercies, the attitude of those being transformed is one of both humility and gratitude.

Of what does such transformation consist? Paul describes it in terms of “the renewal of your mind.” This, for Paul, is the particular, gracious work of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer within the community of God’s people within the created order. Such renewal does not consist of not thinking about the things of this world—as though people in Christ are thinking less, or perhaps not thinking at all. Nor is Paul mainly referring to thoughts themselves, that is, the content of the mind, though that is partly in focus.

For Paul, mind renewal means the renewal of the person—of the heart, of the very being of humanness. God’s people have “the mind of Christ” Paul insists in his Corinthian letter. Through the Spirit of Christ we have access to Christ’s understanding. We make connections. We take directions. Paul is talking about the renewal of humanness from the very core of one’s being. This emanates in



knowing the purposes of God for life: the good, acceptable, and perfect purposes of God. And in keeping with Romans 12:3 renewed minds are not arrogant, rather sensible, and renewed life is lived out in community relationships that are good and pleasing to God.

Promises of transformation from biblical foundations may be summarised as follows:

- Humans need to and can be transformed! The Kingdom of God has invaded the present age. God's abundant mercies have been revealed.
- The gospel of Christ has the power to transform. It is the good news of God's renewal of humans and the entire created order.
- Real hope, grounded in the resurrection of Christ, is both personal and creational.
- The essence of humanness is to trust in God and participate in His purposes.
- Transformation is wholistic—our entire humanness is subject to God's gracious renewal.
- Transformation is relational—living with the triune God in community.
- Transformation is ongoing as we choose to not conform to this age and its idolatries.
- Transformation is for all people—whatever age, whatever nation—who respond by faith to the gospel.

### **Transformation through education and schooling**

In the light of the Scriptures, what can we say about transformation through education and schooling? Fowler, in Fowler, van Brummelen, and Van Dyk (1990), characterises education, and specifically schooling conducted by Christians, as prophetic witness from within prevailing cultures, from the midst of societies, that testifies to “the transforming, life-fulfilling power of the gospel” (p. 47).

He continues:

We do not represent the human activity of schooling as a power

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## **Education is fundamentally about people being transformed, and that transformation starts with the educators.**

to transform human life for good. As witness to the gospel, it points beyond the human activity to the transforming power of Christ who alone by his Spirit can transform human life for good.

This witness is not a witness that accompanies schooling but a witness that is given by the activity of schooling itself. It is given, not by adding the story of the cross to the school's curriculum, but by showing the meaning of the cross in the fabric of schooling itself. If the gospel appears as something added to schooling, something apart from educational practice as such, the witness will be ineffective. It can be effective only as our educational practice shows the decisive impact of the transformed mind of Romans 12. Only as our educational practice shows the distinctive imprint of the gospel do we give an effective witness to the power of the gospel in schooling. (p. 47)

Fowler's (1990) words are incredibly helpful. In what follows, I want to suggest several ways to think about transformation through education and schooling. In doing so, it is critical to affirm, along with Fowler, that transformational, renewing, life-giving power resides in the gospel. Transformation is always a consequence of gospel grace. There can be no triumphalism in what we have to say. There can only be humble dependence on the mercy and grace of God and a persevering desire to participate in God's purposes as educators who know the gospel and its power in our lives.

So, what do we mean by transformation through education?

May I suggest the following:

We mean that we are being transformed. We are “being-transformed” educators. Transformation begins with you and me, it begins with us. Education is fundamentally about people being transformed, and that transformation starts with the educators.

### **What do being-transformed educators look like?**

Being-transformed educators are gospel people. Our lives, worldviews, knowledge, and educational practice are all grounded in and governed by the gospel of Christ's death, resurrection, and rule. We live in and out of—and teach in response to—the biblical story. We are to be gospel shaped human beings. This remains, in my view, the greatest challenge we face in our schools. We only become gospel shaped educators as firstly, we read and interpret the Bible well. And secondly, as we make connections between the written Word of God in Scripture and all the “stuff” of twenty first century living, particularly the stuff that we teach. One of the greatest challenges our school communities face—perhaps the greatest—is to make spaces so that this can happen and continue happening. It will involve determined action by boards, associations, and school leaders. It is not an optional extra, it is the main game. It must have the highest priority.

Being-transformed educators—gospel people who read and interpret the Bible well, making connections between the foundational Word of God and their educational practice—live in intimate community relationships with the triune God and God's people: particularly colleagues within the educational community. The local public school near our home in Sydney displays a statement of its educational goal which reads: “Towards independence”. This strikes me as the exact opposite of educational purpose as shaped by the Scriptures—both for teachers and students. Our fundamental educational stance is one of dependence and interdependence, not independence.

John Van Dyk's (2007) book *The Maplewood Story: Fostering a Reflective Culture in the Christian School* describes education that is truly Christian in the following terms:

As Christian educators, we profess that everything we do in a school be solidly based on the Word of the Lord. Indeed, Christian schools are Christian not because they offer Bible courses and conduct chapel and devotional exercises, but because the entire educational process, from classroom teaching to finances, from the principal's office to the bus routes, from curriculum to lunch menus, is to be controlled and directed by the Holy Spirit. To make this sweeping claim a reality requires, it seems to me, profound and prayerful reflection. Currently, I see reflection not merely as an occasional activity, a time-out to review our educational practices, but as a comprehensive and continuous approach to everything we do as teachers and principals. To make this clearer and provide some structure, I suggest that we see reflection as an interactive process consisting of three facets: foundational reflection, reflection in action, and reflective review. (pp. 9-10)

Van Dyk is right. Teaching has been described as "offering yourself to your students as one whose life is worthy of imitation." One critical dimension of that which we offer—both as individuals and as communities—is humility, prayerfulness, interdependence, and a reflective engagement with God and one another in the task of education. This is a critical aspect of "being-transformed" educators.

As being-transformed educators, we are transforming educational, specifically schooling, structures. This is our intention and our responsibility.

What do we mean by schooling structures? We mean the organisation of teaching and learning within schooling communities: timetables, faculties, assessment methods, leadership, staffing, subject areas, dress codes, etc. All of these

must be evaluated in the light of the gospel. For all of them we need to ask the questions, "Why?" and "What for?" in the light of God's Word.

Blomberg (2007) in his book *Wisdom and Curriculum: Christian Schooling After Postmodernity*, does just that with regard to curriculum structures. He asserts that curriculum is always "a description of the world"—in other words, it conveys a worldview. This is true, Blomberg insists, "not only of the substance of curriculum but also of its form" and continues:

While many Christian schools do recognise that education should be (among other things) worldview education in respect to its content, they can at the same time overlook that curriculum structure itself carries a worldview. What schools need to acknowledge is that the structure of the curriculum might work against the worldview that they are seeking to convey by its means. A significant implication of my present investigations is that form might fight against intended function. (p. 123)

Blomberg (2007) adds:

The curriculum is a painting of the world in miniature, as well as the world viewed from a certain number of preferred standpoints. What is selected for attention and how it is organized will provide students with a particular map with which to chart their way. (p. 125)

Not only curriculum content but curriculum form is in focus as Blomberg (2007) develops his

**As being-transformed educators, we are transforming educational, specifically schooling, structures. This is our intention and our responsibility.**

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curriculum model characterised by the model of play, problem posing, and purposeful responding. This is really helpful work and I recommend it to you. And it is but one example of thinking from God's foundational Word to educational structures.

As being-transformed educators who are transforming educational structures, we intend that our lives and work be transformational. Initially, we are seeking to see transformation in the lives of our students. We seek to see our students become being-transformed humans. This is not something we can guarantee. It is not something that we, for example, promise to parents when they enroll their children in our schools. Nor can we make it a measure of educational "success". It is nevertheless our desire and intention. It is that for which we work and pray, strive and struggle. In this way we seek to be involved in being-transformed educational communities where students are caught up in this remarkable process of being-transformed along with all other stakeholders—teachers, parents, all staff members, and so on.

### **What do we mean when we speak about being-transformed students?**

We are talking about students who imitate us! That is, they are gospel-shaped, being-transformed people who, as we do in education, seek to transformationally renew structures throughout cultures and societies in which they serve the Lord—in economics, business, sport, parenting, political involvement, science, medicine, building, and the like.

These will be young people who have been educated to:

- Recognise and rejoice in God's goodness throughout enculturated creation.
- Discern and resist: the distortions and disobedience that spoil goodness, beauty, and truth in God's world.
- Confront and renew: those distortions and that disobedience as redemptive agents of the Kingdom of God.



These will be young people of—

- Convictions (worldview): that they are able to defend when confronted with alternatives, and when there is opposition, complacency, ridicule, and at times hostility.
- Character (core, cost, consistently): particularly, clarity and courage.
- Community (network): ongoing participation in prayer, accountability, and long-term relationships shaped by faith, hope, and love.

As being-transformed educators, who are transforming educational structures, who seek to see our students being transformed, we intend to be transformational in a broader fashion. We seek to be participants in God's purposes to renew the creation! We pray that our own lives, the educational structures we develop, our being-transformed students and the structures they set in place, will signpost the renewal of the world under the sovereign rule of God. This is our desire and intention in dependence on the sovereign grace of God.

### What sort of a “transformed” world are we talking about?

Wolterstorff (1983) has written about Christianity as being not a “world-avertive religion,” rather a “world-formative” religion. He writes,

The Word of the Lord and the cries of the people join in calling us to do more than count our blessings, more than shape our inwardness, more than reform our thoughts. They call us to struggle for a new society in the hope and expectation that the goal of our struggle will ultimately be granted us. (p. 22)

His words provoke us to ask the question, for what are we, as Christian educators, responsible?

Wolterstorff (1983) quotes the words of political theorist Michael Walzer concerning the Puritans of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries: “The saints were responsible for their world – as medieval men were not – and responsible above all for its continual reformation” (p. 3).

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## We pray that our own lives, the educational structures we develop, our being-transformed students and the structures they set in place, will signpost the renewal of the world under the sovereign rule of God.

In a similar vein, Steven Garber (2007) in his book *The Fabric of Faithfulness*, tells the story of Hans and Sophie Scholl, members of a group called The White Rose in Munich in 1942 who protested against Nazi atrocity. He records how as Hans and Sophie Scholl undertook their studies, both formally at the university and informally with mentors, they began to see that they were responsible for Germany. At the time there was widespread consensus that German culture was decaying. At a meeting in 1942, someone ventured the opinion that the way to cope with the situation—the Nazis—was not through protest but simply by hanging on, tending to one's cultural obligations and tasks as scholars, and just waiting out the nightmare. Garber writes that a dark and scowling Hans Scholl interjected: “Why don't we rent ourselves an island in the Aegean and offer courses on worldviews?” (p. 168).

For what are we responsible? We have used three terms; being-transformed, transforming, and transformational. This is what we are responsible for.



Rod has taught in both government and Christian high schools. In 2003 he completed a PhD exploring the foundational impact of the Bible on Christian schooling in Australia. Rod served as the national principal/CEO of Laidlaw College in New Zealand from 2010-2015. Rod is now a minister in the pastoral team of Springwood Presbyterian Churches, Emeritus Principal of the National Institute, and is part of the CEN professional learning team.

Each of these terms is important. We are responsible for:

- being transformed educators transforming educational structures
- being transformational in the lives of students.

We pray that the consequences will ripple out in the following fashion:

- being transformed people
- transforming structures throughout society
- being transformational in the lives of others

And again ... and again ... and again ... so that we are participants in the purposes of God as He brings about the renewal of the world through the gospel of Jesus Christ.

This is what we mean by transformation.

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# The school, the wilderness and the GARDEN OF DELIGHT

By David Smith



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**ABSTRACT** This article was first published in *CTJ*'s May 2008 edition. The piece captured a keynote address presented at the Transforming Christian Education Conference in Hobart January 2008. The presentation made a great impact on teachers and the way they not only viewed their students, but also the way they reimagined their classrooms as “gardens of delight”. Such imaginations were part of staffroom language for years after.

The piece has been edited for this anniversary publication by David with some adjustments for today's context. We hope you are encouraged to start playing in the garden!

"It has seemed puzzling to me how greatly attached to the Bible you seem to be and yet how much like pagans you handle it. The great challenge to those of us who wish to take the Bible seriously is to let it teach us its own essential categories; and then for us to think with them, instead of just about them." Abraham Heschel (Middleton, 2005, p. 33)



We are all in some measure children of our imaginations. The ways in which we picture the world to ourselves exert an influence over the ways in which we act in that world. To understand the world is in many cases to see it as fundamentally this kind of thing rather than that kind. To see, for instance, knowledge as a house with foundations or schools as families or marketplaces. The images in our minds are not just the fruits of individual fantasy; we share in the imagination of our society and people groups.

An image of schooling that circulated for a considerable period of time in Europe pictures passive, bored learners with funnels inserted in their mouths or heads. Teachers, either singly or in groups, can be seen ramming large quantities of books down the funnel: learning as force-feeding. (You can see examples by doing an Internet image search for “Nuernberger Trichter”.) More recently, another image has come to predominate. It now comes naturally to talk about learning in terms of input, output, and processing of information. Our dominant metaphor these days seems to be the human mind as a computer and learning as information processing. Imagery of students as customers and schools as factories or marketplaces have also exerted visible influence on the ways education is discussed.

I suggest that we would do well to meditate on an older image for teachers and learners, not only because it might break open some of our current mental habits, but because it offers an intriguing example of an educator allowing scriptural imagery to inhabit his educational imagination, thinking with the Bible rather than just about it.

The educator in question is John Amos Comenius (1592-1670), a Moravian bishop and important Christian educational thinker. Throughout his various writings on schooling, one of his recurring images is that of “gardens of delight” (Smith, 2007, pp. 188-21). He sees both the school and the learner as gardens, the teacher as one who waters, cultivates, and prunes, the learners as grafts and saplings, and

suggests that school textbooks should be named after parts of a garden. While this might evoke Romantic images for us, living as we do further down the intellectual river—learners as little flowers to be left alone to blossom in their own time in the sunshine with minimum adult interference—such thoughts have little to do with what Comenius had in mind (Smith, 2007).

*The Great Didactic* is one of Comenius’ most influential texts. (All references to it below, indicated as *Didactic*, are my translations from the Latin text in Comenius, 1957. An older and not very reliable English translation that is especially poor with theological passages is found in Keatinge (1969), and is downloadable as an eBook from <http://www.pedagogy.net>). It is prefaced by a dedicatory letter, that opens thus:

Having in the beginning created humans out of dust, God placed them in a Paradise of delight, which he had planted in the East, not only so that they would watch over it and cultivate it (Gen 2:15) but so that they themselves would also be a garden of delights for their God.

For as Paradise was the most delightful part of the world, so humanity was the most exquisite of the things created, ... In Paradise was brought forth every kind of tree that is beautiful to look at and provides fruit sweet to eat ... Paradise had the tree of the knowledge of good and evil; humanity had the mind to discern and the will to choose among whatever is anywhere good or bad. In Paradise was the tree of life; in humanity was the tree of immortality itself; that is to say, the wisdom of God, which put down eternal roots in humanity.

And so each human being is truly a garden of delights for their God if they remain where they were placed. Similarly, the church, which is a gathering of humans devoted to God, is often compared in Scripture to a Paradise, a garden ... but alas for our misfortune, we have lost the Paradise of bodily delight in which we were, and we have at the same time lost the paradise of spiritual delight which we were ourselves. We have been

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## The images in our minds are not just the fruits of individual fantasy; we share in the imagination of our society and people groups.

expelled into the wildernesses of the earth and have ourselves become a wilderness, a foul and squalid wasteland.

Notice that humans are seen both as placed in a garden of delight and as themselves being a garden of delight; accordingly, Comenius goes on to view both the learner and the school as called to become gardens of delight. The learner, like the first humans, is not only to inhabit a garden of delight in the guise of a justly ordered classroom, but also to be a garden of delight insofar as he or she grows in learning, virtue, and faith.

There are three main biblical sources for the images Comenius is using. Most obviously, the garden of delight is the Garden of Eden. Genesis 2:15 is rendered in English as “The LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it” (NIV). “Eden” is, however, also a Hebrew noun meaning delight, and the phrase “Garden of Eden” can therefore be translated instead as “garden of delight” (The Latin Vulgate renders it *paradiso voluptatis*, the Paradise of desire, referred to in the passage above). The garden of delight is a place of divine-human fellowship and spiritual drama, a place of generous beauty, grateful enjoyment, and ethical consequence.

A second biblical strand concerns kingship. If you were a great ruler in the ancient Near East, what would you boast of as signs of your greatness? Some candidates are easy to guess—wealth, wives, chariots. Prowess at gardening is perhaps less likely to leap to mind. But look at what tops the list of Solomon’s royal achievements in Ecclesiastes 2: 4-9:

I undertook great projects: I built houses for myself and planted vineyards. I made gardens and parks and planted all kinds of fruit trees in them. I made reservoirs to water groves of flourishing trees. I bought male and female slaves and had other slaves who were born in my house. I also owned more herds and flocks than anyone in Jerusalem before me. I amassed silver and gold for myself, and the treasure of kings and provinces. I acquired men and women singers, and a harem as well – the delights of the heart of man. I became greater by far than anyone in Jerusalem before me.

In a water-scarce environment, the ability to spare the resources and labour to irrigate gardens for the purpose of pleasure was a sign of wealth and power; in various passages God's royal greatness is similarly pictured in terms of His ability to keep things watered (e.g., Psalm 104:16). The presence of exotic trees from the nations was a further sign of success in either trade or war—kings would boast of their ability to make trees transplanted from other countries flourish better in their own gardens than in their place of origin (this may be the image behind Psalm 1:3, where “planted” can be rendered “transplanted”).

A garden of delight is a royal environment, a place prepared at great cost and adorned with treasures, a place to refresh kings, and a sign of their power.

Third, the prophets must have their say. In passages such as Joel 2:3 and Ezekiel 36:35, Eden is contrasted with the wasteland brought about by war. Here the garden is land that is cultivated to sustain human community. Formative human activity has a key role in shaping the community of peace, or making it desolate. While God sends judgement, it is soldiers who will ravage the fields. While God promises to resettle, rebuild, and cultivate it will be human hands that dig the furrows and lay the bricks. The land is like the Garden of Eden when the fields are diligently cared for and produce good food, when people live together without fear of violence, when cities prosper; it is a wilderness

as a result of human violence. A state of communal well-being, in which relationships are well-ordered and can produce delight, is brought about in significant measure by the care and diligence of people.

In Isaiah 5, Israel is pictured as a vineyard planted with vines by an owner who hoped for a plentiful harvest. When he returned at harvest time, however, he found only bad fruit. In response the vineyard owner declares:

I will take away its hedge, and it will be destroyed;

I will break down its wall, and it will be trampled.

I will make it a wasteland, neither pruned nor cultivated,  
and briers and thorns will grow there. (Isaiah 5:5-6)

Again, a garden becomes a wilderness. The passage continues:

The vineyard of the Lord Almighty is the house of Israel,

and the men of Judah

are the garden of his delight. And he looked for justice, but saw bloodshed;

for righteousness,

but heard cries of distress. (Isaiah 5:7)

The people of God are not just given a garden of delight, they must labour to cultivate it by seeking justice. In doing so they are not just to be in a garden of delight, they are themselves to be God's garden of delight. A garden of delight is a place of social justice, a place of careful cultivation, a place of community that promotes human flourishing, marked by ethical attentiveness and care for the distressed rather than by selfish acquisition and the flourishing of the powerful. Compare Isaiah 58:9-12 for a very similar use of garden imagery.

Look back at the passage from Comenius that I quoted a little earlier; you will see all of these themes present. Comenius did not begin his book by quoting a few verses that mention teaching and then making deductions. Instead, he sets a biblically-informed imagination to work and invites us

## The people of God are not just given a garden of delight, they must labour to cultivate it by seeking justice.

to see schools and learners as sites where the wasteland battles the garden. He urges in another book, the *Pampaedia* (or *Universal Education*) that schools should “be restored to such pleasant use that they become gardens of delight” (4.20 All references below to the *Pampaedia* are my translations from the Latin text in Comenius (1960); a hard-to-find English translation is Dobbie (1986)), places where the intellectual, the spiritual, and the ethical come together and a just community that delights God and its participants can emerge. The ultimate aim is that the human learner should be led through all of creation to God as its pinnacle and “readily consent to be captivated, carried away and swallowed up by him (with God's help)” (*Pampaedia*, 2.23).

The school is consequently to be a place that seeks pleasure. Play—as distinct from what he calls “mere amusement” (*Didactic*, 26.5)—, comes to take on an important (and historically innovative) role in Comenius' approach to learning. The following prayer (compare Proverbs 8:30-32) prefaces the *Pampaedia*:

But you, eternal wisdom, who plays on the earth's sphere, and who delights in humanity, make us now delight in you! Open the ways to us more fully, so that we better understand your play with us, promote it more eagerly among us, and finally play in your presence more capably, to your sweeter pleasure, our eternal delight! (Comenius, Intro. 6)

Comenius goes as far as to describe the purpose of human existence as being “to serve God, creatures, and ourselves, and to enjoy the delight that God, creatures, and we ourselves disclose” (*Didactic*, 10.8). Schooling, accordingly, is to



pursue this threefold service and delight as its goal, fostering, for instance, a sense of the attractions of disciplined absorption (remember, delight is not “mere amusement”) in the intricacies of creation. We are to “enjoy God, finding such rest in his love and favour that nothing in heaven and earth is more desirable to us than God himself” (*Didactic*, 24.3). Pleasure in self (a goal that might sound odd coming from a seventeenth century bishop if we have imbibed the usual historical stereotypes) is defined as “that sweetest delight that a person devoted to virtue enjoys in their inward dispositions, seeing themselves ready for everything that the order of justice requires” (*Didactic*, 10.13). This kind of pleasure in self is what learners should be urged to seek, in place of the frothier varieties available at cheaper prices.

The connection between piety, pleasure, and the order of justice points us outward beyond the individual to social relationships. Delight is not to become narcissistic. For Comenius, spiritual, rational, and ethical growth are not to be separated, and are all bound up with our human responsibility for our neighbour and for creation. Therefore, the restoration of the garden of delight in the individual has to be reflected in how the neighbour and the rest of creation are attended to and treated. Youth must be taught from the beginning “that we are born not only for ourselves, but for God and for our neighbour, that is, for the society of the human race” (*Didactic*, 23.12), including those of other cultures and ethnicities.

Not only people, Comenius notes, but also the rest of creation has suffered from human misuse and longs for deliverance. “It is certainly to be desired,” he urges, “that what creatures long and hope for should be pushed forward, and everything everywhere should proceed more justly, and all creatures should have cause to praise God with us” (Psalm 148:8), (*Pampaedia*, 2.14). This will not happen without learning that focuses on informed, ethically-motivated service and on the

maintenance of just relationships with people and with creation. Comenius sums up the ultimate aim of Christian schooling in terms that go far beyond the spiritual comforts or worldly successes of the individual. The aim, he says, is that “the world in its entirety will become a garden of delight for God, for us and for things” (*Pampaedia*, 2.25). Each participant is called to realise their humanity in such a way that they not only become gardens of delight themselves, but in doing so contribute to the realisation of the garden of delight as a wider social and ecological reality. Individual piety, social justice, and care for creation are regarded as part of the same larger whole.

Finally, Comenius argued (more than 350 years ago!) with explicit reference to the common creation of all humans in the image of God that education had to be provided in common to both rich and poor, to those of both greater and lesser intellectual ability, and to both boys and girls, lest false distinctions of worth between these groups should lead to pride (*Didactic*, 8-9). One of his hallmark commitments is to universal education; this commitment both underlies the title and fills the opening chapter of his *Pampaedia*, (1.6) where he declares:

It is desired that not just one particular person be fully formed into full humanity, or a few, or even many, but every single person, young and old, rich and poor, of high and low birth, men and women, in a word, every person who is born so that in the end, in time, proper formation might be restored to the whole human race throughout every age, class, sex, and nationality. (*Pampaedia*, 1.11)

He goes on to explain that this is necessary because “all are human

beings who have the same life in the future world before them, and have the way there shown to them by God, but it is beset with traps and obstructed by various rough places.” Of course he soon sets this in the context of his hope that “God’s whole garden, the human race” might be filled with “saplings” that have been nurtured to think, act, and worship in ways that express to the full their God-given humanity (*Pampaedia*, 1.15).

An image does not tell us exactly what to do. That’s not the point. My aim here has not been to offer a set of tips, but rather some food for the imagination. I want to suggest that it would do us no harm at all, and perhaps considerable good, to meditate on the biblical imagery of the garden of delight and the ways in which Comenius applied it to schooling—to meditate long and at leisure—and then to turn our eyes back to our own classrooms and ask where there is wasteland, and where there is fruit. If we do, perhaps we will find that it is not tips that we lack, but courage and vision.

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After graduating from Oxford University, David worked for six years as a secondary school teacher teaching German, French, and Russian. He then completed a M Phil F at the Institute for Christian Studies in Toronto and a PhD at the University of London, both times focusing his studies on the ways in which teaching across the curriculum can contribute to the spiritual growth of students.

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# CREATION

## The backdrop or the mainstage for Christian Education?

By Chris Parker

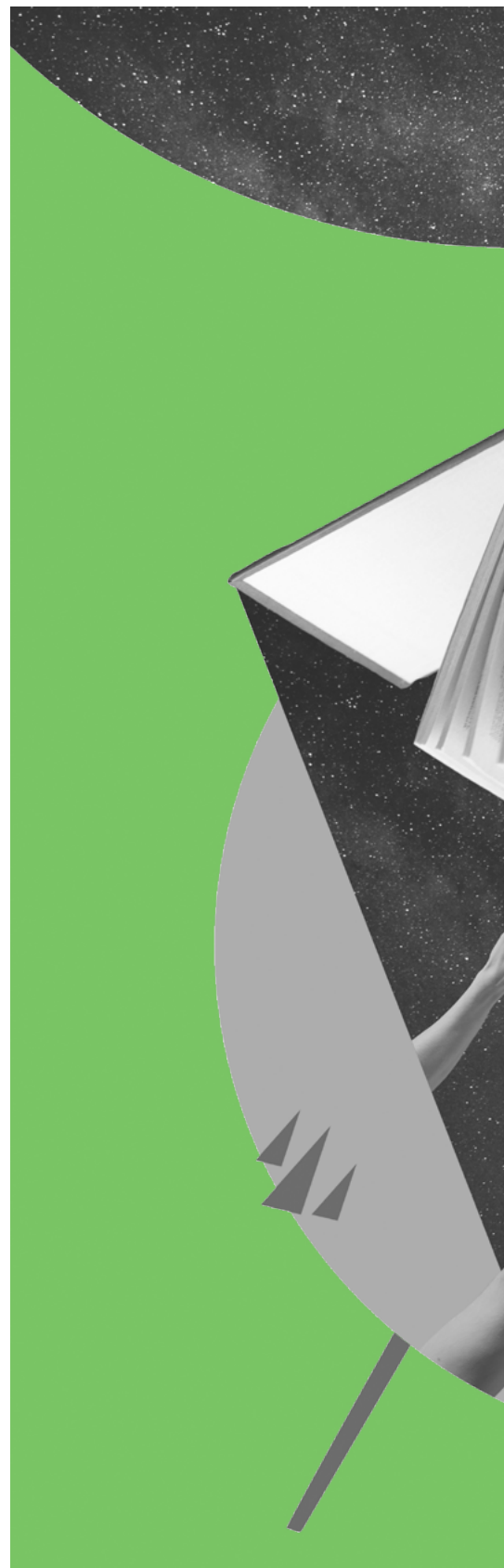
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**ABSTRACT** Chris Parker served on the *CTJ* editorial committee from 2006 to 2010. He began working for Christian Education National and as lecturer for the National Institute for Christian Education in 2009. With Suzanne Mitchell retiring in 2013, Chris was appointed as editor of *CTJ*. Through until 2021, Chris was instrumental in keeping the journal faithful to the mission and vision of Christian education. He brought a fresh approach to its presentation, working alongside Tanya Deenick at Taninka Visuals in the graphic design work. It is the outstanding quality of not only the content of the journal, but also its visual excellence that is so appreciated and cherished by its readership and a credit to Chris' keen mind and attention to detail.

Chris was asked to submit an article for this 30th anniversary edition of *CTJ*, honouring not only his significant past editorial influence and contributions as a writer, but also as a continued strong voice in Christian education. His extensive years of work in schools position Chris well to ponder the cultural landscape of Christian education.

Chris currently serves on the teaching team at Wycliffe Christian School.

*A form of this article first appeared as a chapter in the book Heartbeat: Encouraging Biblically-Faithful Christian Education (2021), a National Institute for Christian Education publication edited by Dr Chris Prior.*







### **Creation:**

#### **In the beginning**

The gospel, or the good news of the Bible, flows unapologetically out of the full revelation of Scripture from first page to last. Therefore, a claim that the gospel begins in Genesis 1 should not, on the theological surface at least, cause any great concern for evangelical, Bible-believing Christians, and therefore for Christian educators. However, when we plumb the depths of this claim—as many Christian schools have done—we don't unearth a gospel of personal salvation sitting merely within a backdrop of creation. When we begin at the beginning, we uncover an expansive good news about life and living unfolding within a planned, precious, and purposeful creation that includes a rich array of cultural potential for humans to subdue and cultivate. Unfolding the creation to young people through schooling will not only invite them to understand the creation through the lens of the gospel, but will invite them to participate in the richness of the full creation, motivated by the gospel.

#### **What is creation?**

When flying south out of Sydney airport heading to Canberra, Melbourne, or Hobart, the plane performs two banking manoeuvres that provide quite contrasting

**The gospel, or the good news of the Bible, flows unapologetically out of the full revelation of Scripture from first page to last.**

scenes. When the wings dip one way, views of the city are evident. The airport is in a highly developed part of the city—roads, stormwater canals, car yards, factories, houses, schools, office blocks, apartments, tennis courts, waste disposal facilities, trampoline centres, retail strips, hospitals, and so on. After a few minutes of this city vista, the plane climbs, turns, and banks, and a completely contrasting scene appears. Out of this side of the plane we are introduced to the Royal National Park (Australia's first)—expansive stretches of eucalypt forest and coastal heath meeting up with magnificent sandstone coastal cliffs pounded by the bold blue waves of the Tasman Sea with the cliffs interrupted intermittently by small bays backed by a blonde beach and the turquoise blue of shallow water.

Which of these panoramas is most likely recalled when reflecting on the creation account of Genesis 1 and 2? The tendency to suggest the National Park might come from a limited appreciation of the scope of God's creational work. Could it be that the ordering, structuring, and developing of creation, seen in the landscape of the city, is only possible due to the rich potentialities that God has created and woven into the creation? Deeper behind the scenes of the city are created norms like family, community, leadership, language,

## The full creation narrative of Scripture—from creation to new creation—presents Jesus as being centrally involved at creation

honour, humour, innovation, justice, and work. When these cultural potentials are subdued, ruled over, and cultivated, humans are fulfilling the call of God, and the result can look like the southern suburbs of Sydney. If sea kayaking and being humbled by the grandness of the vast ocean and blue sky, can foster an appreciation of God as Creator, so too can visiting a community meeting in your suburb where new methods of waste removal are discussed in a well-led community forum.

This understanding proposes a creation that is oozing with potential to be developed. Watkin (2017) suggests a human partnership with God to continue the creation task in His image:

God entrusted Adam and Eve with a world that they and their offspring were to order and subdue. Similarly, today God does not unilaterally cook our meals, service our computers, or find a cure for our illnesses. He has left us this gap in the world to strive to bring to completion the work of creation (a task that will not be completed before the second coming of Christ). God has given us a world not to accept just as it is, but to improve and help flourish. (Watkin, p. 115)

When answering the question of “What is creation?” the answer must highlight that God created in a way that is physical and non-physical (cultural). However, the answer needs also to explore the centrality of Jesus in the creation. Paul suggests in his letter to the church in Colossae that the cosmos was created by Jesus, created for Jesus, and that the creation is sustained and unified in Jesus (Colossians 1: 15-17). Plantinga (2002) concludes that Jesus, therefore, not only has a role in redemption but also in creation, “we can now see that those mysterious places in the New Testament that speak of creation happening

through Christ reveal that the agent of redemption is also the agent of creation” (p. 21).

The full creation narrative of Scripture—from creation to new creation—presents Jesus as being centrally involved at creation, then humbly becoming part of the creation as a baby, then being resurrected in a way that ushers in the beginning of a new physical creation, and ultimately ruling over this new created order when everything is brought to fulfilment. Keller (2014) highlights that for Christians, matter matters, and that Jesus' incarnation is pivotal in a full exploration of what is creation:

Indeed the biblical doctrine of creation harmonises with the doctrine of the incarnation (in which God takes upon himself a human body) and of the resurrection (in which God redeems not just the soul but the body) to show how deeply “pro-physical” Christianity is. For Christians, even our ultimate future is a physical one. (p. 51)

### The creation gospel

#### *The beginning*

The framing of the good news of the Bible as the creation gospel, doesn't, and ought not, suggest that salvation is found in, or through, creation. It is shorthand for good news that flows from the fullness of Scripture—good news that has its beginning, and a call to response, flowing out of Genesis 1 and 2.

The alternative is a gospel having its grounding, and implications, begin at, and flow out of, Genesis 3—rebellion and sin. Both gospels, with their differently emphasised starting points, acknowledge the centrality of the cross and therefore the reality of sin and the need for salvation outside of human capacity. However, when sin becomes the launch pad for the gospel, the scope and implications may be significantly diminished. The gospel will tend to focus on, and



emphasise, the salvation of souls, with a lived response emphasising personal piety and the preaching of the gospel for the salvation of souls. Creation simply becomes the setting, or backdrop, for where this occurs.

This truncated gospel comes at the expense of fully embracing and engaging with the good creation—both the physical creation and its interwoven cultural norms and potential. This might be described as a salvation emphasised gospel, as opposed to a gospel that embraces the redemption of all things—including creation—through Christ. A gospel emphasising redemption begins and ends with creation and new creation respectively. It appreciates the scope of what was achieved on the cross to be the redemption of all things, including God's people. Hence the term creation gospel.

This holistic redemption is described by Plantinga (2002) to include souls and bodies, and all that human communities cultivate:

At their best, reformed Christians take a very big view of redemption because they take a very big view of fallenness. If all has been created good and all has been corrupted, then all must be redeemed. God isn't content to save souls; God wants to save bodies too. God isn't content to save human beings in their individual activities; God wants to save social systems and economic structures too. (p. 95)

This shift in the framing of the gospel might, on the surface, seem a somewhat pedantic nuance. However, when this more expansive gospel is engaged and embraced, a paradigm shift unfolds that has significant, and unavoidable, implications for faith, life, and theology (and therefore Christian education). As Wittmer (2015) testifies, "If redemption restores creation, then creation counts for more than I had ever suspected" (p. 160).

One might counter-argue that

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## A gospel emphasising redemption begins and ends with creation and new creation respectively.

building such an expansive theology on the opening account of the origins of the creation, is not allowing the full arc of the progressive revelation of Scripture to frame a full-arc theology. However, it is hard to escape the expansiveness of redemption also presented by New Testament authors. Although both Jesus and Paul, at many points, speak of redemption and reconciliation with a focus on God's people, when the context allows for a more expansive description, they boldly suggest it extends to "all things":

Jesus said to them, "Truly I tell you, at the renewal of all things, when the Son of Man sits on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. (Matthew 19:28)

With all wisdom and understanding, he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, to be put into effect when the times reach their fulfillment—to bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ. (Ephesians 1: 8b-10)

In the opening of Paul's letter to the church in Colossae, he emphasises the extent of the reconciliation of "all things" using a category listing that has absolutely no exceptions:

For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making

peace through his blood, shed on the cross. (Colossians 1:19-20)

The grandness and import of the creation account of Genesis 1 and 2 makes it difficult for creation to be treated merely as background to the gospel, and a neutral stage-setting for the drama of our lives. The nature of humanity, and the task provided—bearing God's likeness and being creation cultivators—make it difficult to render engagement with the creation as a distant second in comparison to the pursuit of piety, prayer, and the preaching of Christ crucified.

Genesis 1 and 2 provide an invitation, inspiration, and a forthright instruction (often referred to as the creation mandate) for humans to engage as stewards of the full creation—both the physical and the cultural. Plantinga (2002) describes how this might impact a Christian's framing of purpose:

So when Christians strive to make God's purposes their own, they tilt forward toward God's restoration of all things, the final coming of the kingdom. They think about it, pray for it, study and work in ways that accord with it. Thinking personally as well as globally, they want the kingdom to come in their own hearts as well as in the whole world. (p. xii)

### *The end*

If our framing of the gospel emphasises Genesis 3 and human sin as ground zero, with an under-emphasis on the full view of creation and its redemption, then it may also tend toward a truncated end point—both in what is hoped for, and in terms of lived response as disciples. If the scriptural narrative ends at Revelation 21-22, is it reasonable that the good news of the Bible also culminates there? We see a "new heaven and new earth" prophesied by Isaiah (65:17, 66:22), and looked forward to by Peter when he states, "But in keeping with his promise we

are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, where righteousness dwells” (1 Peter 3:13). Quoting Isaiah, John shares this vision:

Then I saw “a new heaven and a new earth,” for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Look! God’s dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God”. (Revelation 21: 1-3)

When the gospel includes the full framing of a redeemed, restored, and reconciled creation, it is oozing with Christian hope wider and deeper than a mere hope of personal salvation. Plantinga (2002) describes the scope of this hope:

Biblical hope has a wide angle lens. It takes in whole nations and peoples. It brings into focus the entire created order—wolves and lambs, mountains and plains, rivers and valleys. When it is widest and longest, biblical hope looks forward toward a whole new heaven and new earth (Rev 21) and in which the son of God receives the treasures of nations who parade into the city of God (Rev 21:22-26). (p. 13)

A salvation emphasised gospel can tend to bring the gospel train to a stop somewhat short of the platform. This gospel framing can tend to end at the final chapters of the epistles where the authors unfold implications for righteous living. In some extreme expressions of this gospel, the final paragraph of Matthew 28 (often referred to as the Great Commission), can become the strongest defining response. Even when the full Bible is recognised and read as God’s revelation, if the picture of the gospel is painted from a truncated Bible, we are not painting

with all the available colours. Our response, as disciples, may not be flowing from the full, beautiful, revealed vista.

It is important to state that we are not talking about different gospels. The core of the gospel in both expressions is the same. What is being explored is a contrasting framing, and a subsequent contrast in emphasis—often implied, sometimes overt. This shift of emphasis has implications for discipleship and responsive faithful Christian living, and for wider human engagement with creation and its cultural potential—and therefore Christian education.

### **The creation gospel and Christian education**

A starting point for a discussion on the place of the creation gospel in Christian education is given by Keller when he states that, “Education is basically creation studies; therefore education principally involves the creation mandate” (2014, p. 58). Keller is speaking of education broadly. Whether the teacher or the learner is Christian or not, the task of education is to explore the nature of the world, how humans interact with the world, and the stories that humans tell about their interactions with the world. It is only the very narrowest views of education that focus on the preparation of the

**... there must be more thought (and much practice) given to the idea of how the Kingdom of God must shape the whole educational endeavour ...**

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student to be trained and certified for life after graduation.

Many Christian schools speak of the intention to offer a gospel-centred education. If a school tends towards a salvation emphasised gospel, then this intention will usually express itself in an emphasis on preaching Christ crucified with a call to repent and be saved. The desire will be to take all opportunities to do this in the life and times of the school—there may even be specific opportunities strategically developed: chapel services, evangelistic parent assemblies, special guest speakers, and the like.

However, a school that emphasises the good news of the Bible as the redemption of all things in and through Christ, will express this intention more holistically during its life and times. It will seek to design curriculum from a conception of “creation studies”. It will develop classroom practices and cultures that invite, and inspire, students to partake in the creation mandate as responsive disciples (rather than merely learning for their own personal progression). It will communally design policies and procedures as an expression of God’s invitation to partner in the redemption of all things. In such a school, there may be no less commitment to unsaved members of the school community hearing the good news of what Jesus has done for them personally, however, this desire will be expressed within, and out of, a gospel that begins at the beginning.

The creation gospel, when embraced by schools, doesn’t limit the framing of the curriculum to creation studies. The commitment to participate in the ongoing expression of the creation mandate is richly evident in the full breadth of learning endeavours: agriculture, music, textiles, computer studies, and so on (and even the act of teaching itself!). Keller (2014) explains:

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## The world that we live in, and interact with minute by minute, is not neutral and of no eternal significance.

Farming takes the physical material of soil and seed and produces food. Music takes the physics of sound and rearranges it into something beautiful and thrilling that brings meaning to life. When we take fabric and make a piece of clothing, when we push a broom and clean up a room, when we use technology to harness the forces of electricity, when we take an unformed, naïve human mind and teach it a subject, when we teach a couple how to resolve their relational disputes, when we take simple materials and turn them into a poignant work of art—we are continuing God's work of forming, filling, and subduing. (p. 59)

When we offer an education that invites students to participate in the “forming, filling, and subduing” of the world that God has entrusted to them—even while they are learning and preparing for life after school—we are inviting them to express their in-His-imageness. We have been created to create. We don't create out of nothing as God does. However, when we work alongside God to further form, flourish, and bring the creation to fulfilment, we participate as paracreators (Watkin, 2017).

The good news that we have to share with students—which centres on the redemption that began with Jesus—is that their engagement with the world that they are studying isn't irrelevant to, and separate from, their faith. The world that we live in, and interact with minute by minute, is not neutral and of no

eternal significance. Every situation in life has the potential for us to be celebrating and participating in the redemption gospel. Faithfulness doesn't simply mean that we don't need to wait for, or construct, opportunities to speak about Jesus—though we should do that too!

Inviting and equipping students to participate in this “supreme reformation project” (Plantinga, 2002, p. xii)—where all of life can be an expression of being made in His image and participating as paracreators—may well provide the richest possible education for children and young people. It is what many schools mean when they claim to be attempting a gospel-centred education.

### In the end (conclusion)

In the beginning I suggested that the gospel of the Lord Jesus is the heart of Christian education. When the gospel considers the full arc of the scriptural grand story beginning in the beginning and ending at the end, the scope of the adventure of Christian education is wide and deep. The invitation for students as they learn about the world—and their place within it—is to participate in the grand story of redemption. A big story that includes their personal salvation as well as an invitation to participate in the good news of the redemption of all things in Christ.



Chris currently teaches technology and applied studies at Wycliffe Christian School and is an Associate Lecturer for the National Institute for Christian Education. He has previously taught at Nepean Christian School and Shire Christian School. Chris lives with his family in the Blue Mountains and besides reading about culture, he loves trail running, luthery, and annoying his teenage kids with dad-jokes.

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# Developing a TRANSFORMATIVE JOURNAL

by Suzanne Mitchell (Editor 1998 -2013)

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**ABSTRACT** For this 30th anniversary edition of *CTJ*, we approached past editor, Suzanne Mitchell, to pen her reflections of the journal. This was a significant period of growth in not only the journal's quality, but also its circulation and readership. Suzanne's memories provide insight to the complexity and volume of work that goes on behind the scenes in producing such a publication ... perhaps made a little easier these days through further developments in technology!

I began working with CPCS (Christian Parent Controlled Schools) in 1993 when I became the editor of *Nurture* magazine. I had completed a Bachelor of Arts and then a Grad Dip Ed and was teaching at Wycliffe Christian School at Warimoo in the lower Blue Mountains. The *Christian Teachers Journal* based in Victoria was first published in 1992. In the first few years only one or two editions were published each year and a few years later Jack Mechielsen, the CEO of CPCS, asked me to become the editor of *The Christian Teachers Journal* and produce four editions each year and expand the subscription base. I initially declined as I was studying a Masters degree in Public History at the time, but in 1998 I agreed to the challenge and was employed one day per week. I continued to operate with the committee from Melbourne who were a great source of inspiration and support.

The first year we published four editions was 2000. A strong subscription base was subsequently established. During the late 1990s it was envisaged that CPCS could possibly merge with Christian Community Schools and Maria Russo from Melbourne was invited to become part of the committee. The intended merger did not come to fruition and subsequently CCS became CSA (Christian Schools Australia). CPCS changed its name to CEN (Christian Education National) in 2008.

When editorial meetings began to be held as phone conferences, the committee expanded to include people from Western Australia, South Australia, Victoria, New South Wales, and Indonesia. It was always a challenge to develop various edition

themes, decide what kind of articles were required to cover various aspects of the topics and then identify potential writers.

I attended many conferences both nationally and internationally and widened the scope of contributors to ensure fresh and updated content, incorporating the latest research on topics. A close relationship was begun with the New Zealand Christian schools who also contributed to the journal. We published theme-based journals with special conference editions featuring prominent speakers from Australia and around the globe. Themes included Indigenous education, environmental education, teaching diverse students, sexuality, gender education, bullying, body image, world religions, mathematics, science, the arts, history, vocational training, IT, drugs, sex and rock 'n' roll, creative ideas for the curriculum, sustainability, cross-cultural education, literature and literacy, and many others. These themes are still very relevant for the current generation of students and teachers.

Circulation increased and we began to receive contributions from students from international Christian institutions. We had subscriptions from Australia, USA, Canada, New Zealand, South America, Asia, Europe, the United Kingdom, and Africa. It was a fantastic opportunity to come up with fresh and stimulating articles that would strengthen Christian educators as they were challenged with fresh perspectives on what Christian education looked like in the classroom. I met so many dedicated and creative teachers who were committed to God and their students. They were truly inspirational.

The editorial committee I worked with were fantastic and I would like to thank each one of them for the support and input they provided. Having teachers from various states and different areas of expertise generated a wide input of articles from a large number of schools and institutions.

In the early days I would travel to Melbourne for some of the editorial meetings and as our team expanded to other states we began phone conferencing which allowed further inclusion. Once a year we would all physically meet in Melbourne where the majority of the team lived. The editorial committee were actively involved in the editing process and during meetings we would discuss the sequence of articles in each journal to provide a coherent, considered, compilation of the finished journal. Each of the committee members from many schools would contribute feedback from their colleagues. It was a wonderful collaborative effort.

The process of how we published journals changed dramatically as we embraced the digital age. Articles would be sent to the office and retyped. When a hard copy was finalised we would physically drive to the typesetter's place nearby where she would prepare the journal for publication and send it to the printers. Hard copies would arrive in bulk at the national office in Blacktown, the journals would be individually packed and addressed and then driven to the post office to send around the country and

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the world. Using computers revolutionised this process. Articles were requested to be sent by fax or mail accompanied by a floppy disk in IBM format.

We could not afford to engage a graphic artist until Tanya Deenick began to provide her expertise in 1995. This greatly enhanced the quality of the journal which continues today. Once the CPCS office had the appropriate technology, digitising all articles and the process of editing and communicating with authors became much more efficient.

In 1999 we used Openbook Publishers, part of the Lutheran Church based in Adelaide, to print the journals. They received all articles digitally, printed the required journals, and did all the mail outs which greatly simplified the amount of work required by the office in Sydney. Later, in 2008, we worked with Signs Publishing, part of the Seventh Day Adventist Church based in Victoria to do this work. The National Library in Canberra received a copy of every journal and free copies were provided to tertiary institution libraries across Australia and some in the USA and Canada.

Parliamentarians in Canberra were given a free copy and I received a number of faxes from politicians from both sides of parliament congratulating us on a well-produced and challenging journal. These included a deputy prime minister and deputy leader of the opposition. This feedback was a great encouragement. I received a lot of valuable feedback from teachers at conferences as to how they used *CTJ*, improvements

that could be made, and what kind of articles were widely read and valued.

We began referring to the journal as *CTJ* as it was much easier to say for a number of years before the title was changed officially on the front cover design.

I attended a workshop in Sydney facilitated by the not-for-profit sector for groups in the sector who published journals. The facilitator was the editor of *the Financial Review* and provided us all with a greater insight into the challenges of publication. The *Christian Teachers Journal* received very positive feedback from the attendees as a good example of a high-quality magazine produced with very little financial resources.

One of the highlights in my time as editor was an invitation to attend a conference organised by Dr David Smith from Calvin College (now University) in Michigan USA, for editors of Christian education journals in the USA, Canada, and Australia. Some of these organisations were much larger than CEN and had a wider circulation of their journals. Their experiences in facing the challenges of the digital age were really helpful for us in deciding how we in Australia embraced the digital age in our publications and to be able to learn from them how to improve our own journal. In Australia we had considered digitising the journal, but based on the experience of those in the USA we decided not to do so at that point in time. It was very encouraging to receive positive feedback on how we in Australia crafted our journal and how effective it was.



*Suzanne first became involved with Christian schools when her eldest daughter Kara enrolled in Wycliffe Christian School in 1983, followed by Ben in 1984, and Joel in 1985. She had been living in PNG for 8 years with her husband Rick and three children prior to moving to the Blue Mountains. Suzanne subsequently became a board member, Year 12 student, and then a teacher. After completing a BA Dip Ed she became the editor of *Nurture* in 1993, attained a Masters in Public History, and became the editor of the *Christian Teachers Journal* until 2013. Her involvement in Christian education expanded to the national and international level. Suzanne has 10 grandchildren, three of whom currently attend Wycliffe Christian School where her son Joel and daughter-in-law Jenni teach.*

Many North American journals were for an academic audience; a few covered more practical aspects of Christian education in the classroom. *CTJ* was one of the few journals that sought to do both. We received affirmation from the Americans that we had successfully negotiated this balance.

In 1996 the first international Christian education conference was held in Sydney and we heard a wide range of speakers from the USA, Canada, UK, Africa, Asia, and South America. These contacts and insights provided a rich supply of writers of future journals. Our organisation has always had strong ties with Christian educators in Canada; the first edition of the *Christian Teachers Journal* in 1992 published four articles from Canadians.

As the National Institute for Christian Education grew in Australia, we also had wider input from Australians who had developed their thinking and practice in Christian schools in our country.

To quote Leonard Cohen, as “I approach the foothills of old age” I am grateful that God has enabled me to be a part of growing Christian education in Australia and beyond and that *CTJ* has provided a rich heritage in Christian education. I feel very privileged to be part of a group of people who have sought to inspire and encourage teachers as they seek to develop their thinking and practice of Christian education. I pray that God will continue to inspire and equip a new generation of educators in a challenging education environment.



# WOW

## 30 years of publications!

*CTJ* 30th anniversary edition reflections

Christina Belcher

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## **INTRODUCTION** Christina Belcher, Professor Emeritus from Redeemer University shares her reflections on the 30th Anniversary of *Christian Teachers Journal (CTJ)*.

How time flies.

Congratulations *Christian Teachers Journal*!

This memoir emphasizes the role of *CTJ* in bringing to awareness the significance of people, writing, and philosophical encounters that bridge culture and faith. It encapsulates my life journey and the presence of *CTJ* within it.

I first became aware of the *Christian Teachers Journal* when working with the National Institute for Christian Education (NICE) in the late 1990s.

At the time of my first encounter with *CTJ*, I knew many of the folks at NICE, but not as many at *CTJ*. Over the years, I have held wonderful discussions with those who have served as *CTJ* editors and served as long-time members of the editorial committee. The warmth and grace these people demonstrate, and the humble character of assisting others to flourish as they generate manuscripts which in turn will hopefully engage many school conversations amid teachers, remains evident.

I remember my first submission to *CTJ*. There was some disequilibrium brewing around whether Christian schools should censor a book written by a previously unknown author. You may recall it now, as J. K. Rowling's first book in the *Harry Potter* series. To expand the fabric of the argument, I was asked by *CTJ* to draft an article on the topic of this controversy. Thus, in 2001, this became the first article I submitted to the journal, but not the last. *CTJ* has proven to serve a vital purpose in creating discussions amongst the teacher population in

Australia and abroad that interact with real-life issues in the classroom and profession of teaching from a Christian perspective.

*CTJ* has continued to thrive and provide a wonderful service to teachers and professors across the landscape of education. During its 30 years of publication, the needs of teachers and students have not changed. To this end, the fabric and tools of teaching continue to be blessed by the articles in *CTJ*, and its ongoing discussion of the dynamic of faith and belief in teacher education.

### **The importance of the act of writing**

Writing and reading are important to me because they prove the power of the written word. Writing is both an introduction to, and a thermometer of, a cultural way of life. T. S. Eliot, known for his poetry, authored a wonderful book, *Christianity and Culture*, which I consider to be one of his greatest offerings to a reader. Eliot pens that politics tends to dominate culture, instead of keeping to its place within a culture. He states:

There is also a danger that education—which indeed comes under the influence of politics—will take upon itself the reformation and direction of culture, instead of keeping to its place as one of the activities through which a culture realizes itself. (Eliot, 1939/1948/1967, p. 184).

One of the distinct roles of Christian writing is to keep educating and challenging the audience as the main focus. Providing thought-provoking pieces, faithfully critiquing culture, while also mirroring it in ways that help the reader to discern the difference between simply acknowledging our faith beliefs (in our heads) and then leaning into them in our lifestyle (in practice) is crucial to a Christian education. Culture, in many ways, is a mirror into soul examination. This is one reason writing is such a noble call.

For me, when I write, I have a conversation with God. I recall His

goodness to me, explore what I can next do to serve Him, and realise that it is in reading His words (with thankfulness to the discovery of Gutenberg's press in 1440), I can be transformed. I also have experienced the truth that God's Word, when written, lasts for future generations. Writing is serious because writing lives on. It is a gift of grace. It is also a large influencer within culture.

The power of writing and the written word are blessings to me. Many of my mentors were mentors by pen. I read their innermost thoughts and became wiser. We need more Christian writers. Once again, I refer to Eliot:

It would be a pity if we overlooked the possibilities of education as a means of acquiring *wisdom*; if we belittled the acquisition of *knowledge* for the satisfaction of curiosity, without any further motive than the desire to know; and if we lost our respect for *learning*. (Eliot, 1939/1948/1967, p. 175)

Eliot knew politics could reduce education, rather than enlarge it. I believe that Christian journals, such as *CTJ*, serve a vital role in presenting other ways of seeing and being to the world of many educators. *CTJ* offers a platform where writers can go into the world and bless it with sound insights.

### **Philosophical musings**

During Covid-19, a pandemic of loss in many ways, we have not been able to fellowship with each other or interact as humans in person. While technology makes it possible to “connect” as an act of interaction, it visually removes the subtle body language or compassion of tone that occurs within the rhythm of face-to-face conversation. Even though we may have a zoom meeting and “see” the other as a screen shot, the other we see also has the choice to remove his/her presence with a click of the camera icon on the zoom screen. When face-to-face, one must navigate the deep or uncomfortable aspects of human

engagement in the moment and as real time unfolds. It is possible, in absence of human interaction, to remove the life skill learning of many social skills and essential character traits such as empathy, how to reason through argument and differing opinions, morality, ethical, and social considerations, commitment, and common but essential social manners. I am not overlooking the positive effects of technology, but I think we can be so enamored by its presence that we refuse to see what is not being said, and what losses may become evident.

This absence of personal presence does not just emerge as an emotional loss, but also a philosophical one. I mused in a recent article in the *ICCTE Journal*, on the scaffolding of technology from theory to practice in education and its philosophical presence. Every act has at its core a foundational philosophy. The question not being asked is how this loss affects one's ability to become fully human. The act of becoming fully human infers our growth as one that involves heart, mind, body, and soul so that our essence and lifestyle can align with purposes of peace, truth, compassion, shalom, and grace evident in the character of Christ. As humans, we will not fully arrive at mastery of these traits, but to have them as a compass is essential in both living and in writing. This is part of creating a space in the craft of writing which invites room for disequilibrium where a Christian viewpoint may make an entrance. I define disequilibrium in the task of writing as that of "pondering aloud" by pen the places where differing viewpoints, or points left unsaid, are brought to the surface so that the reader may be provoked to consider them and the possible outcomes of doing so.

I do not know the future of *CTJ* in such a time as this. But I know that God does.

What is the calling of Christian writers in our next decade? To keep a focus that people are

images of Christ, or, by default, of whatever people choose to replace Him. We serve God or the traits of pride, money, hedonism, and self-indulgence. We all serve something, and it becomes our master, and in turn, what masters us reforms or deforms our humanity. A Christian calling compels us to assist humans in becoming fully human, not digitally enhanced, and we must keep the character of Christ flourishing. Simple to say. Hard to achieve. But it is written. We have the power of the Word, and we also can continue to pass our thoughts on in our offerings to *CTJ*.

That challenge will usher in a new disequilibrium moment, and *CTJ* will attract writers more than capable of meeting it. *CTJ* fills this need when articles discuss deep areas of concern, such as human rights and relationships. It does so again when it addresses areas that spark improvement in pedagogy for the cause of deeper learning or inquiry. In tandem, *CTJ* provides "prods" from which to consider what has been given and what has been taken away when new social issues rise to the fore of the written educational landscape.

I wish to say thank you, *CTJ*, for all you have done and all you have yet to do in providing a venue for voice in Christian thought within our culture and educational realm. May you continue to be ambassadors who persist in creating positive disequilibrium wherever you are "planted", in any way that you can. The world needs you, and you have



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*Christina considers working in many areas of education to be an honor, joy, and privilege as part of the quest to bring the biblical virtues of wonder, truth, justice, and reconciliation into the Higher Educational landscape.*

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***CTJ* has continued to thrive and provide a wonderful service to teachers and professors across the landscape of education.**

certainly blessed me. You keep faith conversations going.

May *CTJ* thrive and lean into the next 30 years with the same vision and purpose from which it was founded. There is no such word as retirement from the work God has called you to serve and develop. Wherever we are, we must lean into our appointed times, and continue to build the community and cause for Christian education.

I, in my determined time, and thanks to technology, my non-geographical boundary, look forward to serving God, being part of His plan, and reading and learning from others who also treasure the power of the word.

Write on, *CTJ*.

Virtual pen down.

#### Reference

Eliot, T. S. (1939/1948/1967). *Christianity and culture*. Harcourt, Brace and Company.



Celebrating  
**30**  
Years of CTJ

Harry Burggraaf 1992 – 2009  
Jeanette Fernando 1992 – 1994  
Martin Hanscamp 1992 -1994  
Douglas Peck 1992 -2000  
Annette Stone 1992 -1997  
Andrew White admin – 1992 – 1997



## Alan Long

Editor 1992-1993: Mount Evelyn Christian School, VIC

**What were some of the hopes/concerns in Christian education at time you served CTJ which the journal helped discuss/invite for readers?** In those days there really was a lot of excitement about distinctively Christian education in Australia. The CPCS (later CEN) movement was only about 20 years old and much of the pioneering zeal remained—we were building on a good foundation. There was still a lot of adventurousness in our hearts and minds, we felt less restrained by external forces than I feel Christian schools today experience.

**Do you recall any moving memories or funny stories during your time with the journal?** One debate I completely lost related to the name of the journal. I was keen that it be called “Qoheleth” which means The Teacher (as in the book of Ecclesiastes). I thought that while the meaning wasn’t immediately obvious, it would stimulate thought and questions, while also nicely linking our profession to the Scriptures. None of the other editorial committee members shared any of my enthusiasm, so instead we settled on what I still consider a very proper, if somewhat boring, name for the journal.

A fond memory I have was the chance to meet with Harro Van Brummelen to discuss his book *Walking with God in the classroom*. Now it is a classic. Then it was just hot off the press. He remains one of my “heroes”.

## Andrew White

Publication Administrator, 1992-1997

### What are your first memories of the journal?

Back in 1992, *CTJ* was commenced as part of a strategy to help teachers realise that the transformation of curriculum and classroom necessarily involved their own transformation as teachers. *Nurture* had emerged as a readable magazine primarily for school parents. We needed a journal style publication written by teachers and for teachers. A focus of *CTJ* was sharing great examples of distinctively Christian curriculum and classroom practice. The first meeting was held at Alan Long's place and examined the proposal for the journal, developed ideas for the first edition and confirmed the membership of the committee. It was a lively meeting!

### What are your hopes for the journal now and in the future?

I still receive the journal and enjoy reading the articles that help me stay informed about the live issues and aware of the developments in Christian education thinking and practice. I hope it would keep walking the fine line between remaining readable and engaging and being unsettling and challenging.

Maria Varlet 1999-2000

Michelle Dempsey (1999)

1996

1997

1998

1999

2000

Caren Wyngaard 1998

Rob Burford 1998-1999

Rod McNeil 1998-1999

Lyn Fishwick 2000

Narelle Sketcher 2000

Brian Cox 2000 – 2017

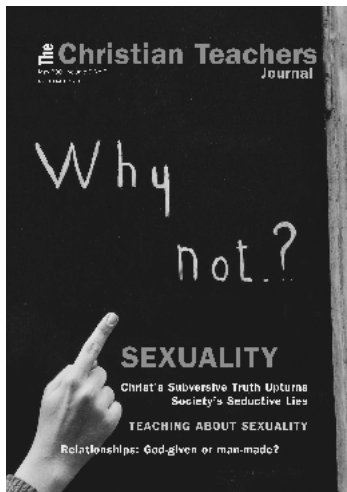


## Maria Varlet (nee Russo)

Editorial Committee 1999 to 2006

### What hopes do you now have for the journal and current generation of readers into the future as we celebrate the publication's 30th year?

I think it is both a challenging and an exciting time to be in education. The education landscape is shifting, there is a willingness to re-think the status quo and an appetite for innovation. I believe that it is important for Christian educators to continue to challenge "traditional" practices and ways of thinking and to interrogate these against biblical principles and the vision for Christian education. I have a strong belief that, within the education landscape, Christian education should be leading the way in best practice. The journal is most certainly a vehicle that can encourage and support this.



Geoff Wilson 2001 -2005

Irene Daniels 2001-2005

Amanda Kelshaw 2001-2005

2001

2002

2003

2004

2005

Editor  
Suzanne Mitchell  
2001 - 2012

## Brian Cox

Editorial Committee 2000-2017

**What were some of the hopes/concerns in Christian education at the time you served CTJ which the journal helped discuss/invite for readers?** Many of our concerns then, which are still true now, relate to how Christian Schools need to continue to earnestly seek to clarify their meaning and purpose. The constant challenge for each of us is to keep our focus upon: the pre-eminent Christ; our calling to equip young people to engage redemptively with grace and conviction; and an ongoing practice of holistic education.

**What hopes do you have for the journal and current generation of readers?** I think CTJ is an essential component of Biblical Christian Education in Australia and beyond. For me, it's the number one resource that effectively expands readers' thinking and practices in authentic ways.

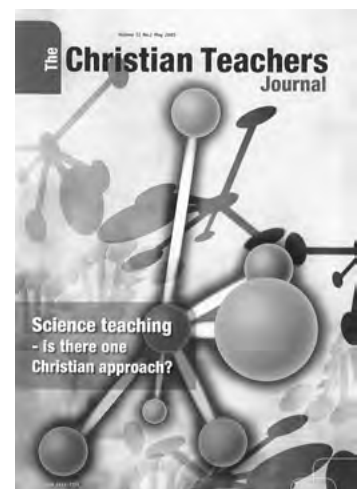
I still love it in print form so it can be found in teachers lounges, reception areas—places where people can access quality reading for 10-15 minutes.

## Narelle Sketcher

Editorial Committee 2006-2015; Principal Mount Evelyn Christian School, VIC

**What were some of the hopes/concerns in Christian education at time you served CTJ which the journal helped discuss/invite for readers?** Whilst MECS has always had a strong engagement with NICE, there was certainly the question amongst other schools that if you weren't doing NICE studies, what were you doing to reflect on the task of Christian education? Christian teachers needed to be challenged about teaching Christianly .... CTJ filled that gap, and still does! It gave us opportunity to bring the best voices to teachers so that they might think differently. It enabled us to "add value" to our national and state conferences by bringing relevant articles to further develop conference themes and ideas. We were passionate about this giving our CEN schools a national profile and voice that we could be proud of; our schools were part of something bigger and more robust.

**What hopes do you now have for the journal and current generation of readers?** My deep hope is that the CTJ continues to offer a voice and ear to Christian educators. By sharing our stories, our best practice, our transformed thinking, and our unique formation as Christian educators within CEN schools, we are continuing to set a vision that is compelling and life-changing, done best in a community of practitioners around Australia and beyond. Exciting stuff! Subscriptions should be compulsory in our schools, and leaders need to be doing a better job in making sure each edition is used and celebrated within the life of their school community.







**Susan Turnbull 2006-2012**  
**Narelle Sketcher 2006-2016**  
**Chris Parker 2006-2021**

## Tim White

**Editorial team 2011 to present: Mountains Christian School, NSW**

**Do you recall any moving memories or funny stories during your time with the journal?** The loss of key figures that has blessed and shaped CEN have led to testimonial type articles. It was great to see Stuart Fowler's enduring guidance reiterated, valued, and celebrated. I am tempted to feel despondent at the loss of figures like Harry Burggraaf and Martin Hanscamp, but the journal (along with other key publications) reminds us of challenging concepts and visions they left imprinted on the movement in and through *CTJ*.

**What hopes do you now have for the journal and current generation of readers?** I really appreciate reading articles from like-minded Christian educators to which I can say "Amen" or marvel at being blessed with deeper perspectives than I have considered. At the same time, *CTJ* has always been a means of transformation and challenge. May we stay humble enough to work with the Holy Spirit in growing and continuing to be shaped into Christlikeness. Hopefully *CTJ* will continue to inspire the process of transformation in the hearts and lives of all readers.

2006 2007 2008 2009 2010 2011

## Judy Linossier

**Editorial Committee 2011 to present:**  
**Chairo Christian School Head of Campus, VIC**

**What motivated your involvement in the *CTJ* editorial team?** I was at a Developing Leaders Conference about 12 years ago and Suzanne Mitchell, *CTJ* editor at the time, said they needed additional team members. I thought this might be another way I could contribute to Christian education, so I joined the team.

**What hopes do you now have for the journal and current generation of readers?** My hope is the Journal will continue to be seen as a resource that equips educators to teach more Christianly and that helps them to think through the issues we are currently facing in Christian education, through a Christian worldview perspective.

**Stephen Chatelier 2010- 2012**  
**Fiona Partridge 2010 to present**  
**Tim White 2010 to present**  
**Judy Linossier 2015 to present**





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**Allan Long**  
 20th anniversary edition  
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## David Lepileo

**Editorial Committee 2013-2015: Waverley Christian College, Head of Campus, VIC**

**How important do you think CTJ has been (and hopefully continues to be) for Christian educators?** The obvious answer is that it is very important! However, when you think more deeply about the journals' impact and its readership, I believe that the journal provides an insurmountable influence on the shared understanding and practice of Christian educators. It helps align our vision for Christian education across the country and beyond, as well as project the vision we have, to train and equip the next generation of believers through education.

**What hopes do you now have for the journal and current generation of readers?** Thirty years is a wonderful accomplishment, and my hope is that the journal continues to grow, influence, and inspire Christian educators wherever they may serve. My hope for the current and younger generation of Christian educators is that they will take up the challenge of Christian Education, build on the last thirty years of knowledge and dream about where it could go and how it can influence. As Peter of Blois, a French poet and theologian of the European reformations once said (1212), "We are like dwarfs standing on the shoulders of giants; thanks to them, we see farther than they."

2012

2013

2014

2015

2016

2017

Editor  
**Chris Parker**  
 2013 – 2021

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**David Lepileo 2013-2015**  
**Jacqui Stok 2013-2019**  
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## Chris Parker

**Editorial Committee and Editor 2013-2021, Wycliffe Christian School, NSW**

**What were some of the hopes/concerns in Christian education at time you served CTJ which the journal helped discuss/invite for readers?** During the later years of my time serving, what stands out in my memory is a wrestling between an emphasis on whether perspective or pedagogy has the most impact on achieving the goal of authentic Christian education. Is the Christian teacher better to explore underpinning worldviews of the curriculum or craft learning that form the learner through experiences? My interview as editor with Professor David Smith in Nov 2020, Vol 28 stands out as part of this dance in Christian education.

**Do you recall any moving memories or funny stories during your time with the journal?** Well, if you promise not to tell anyone, there is an edition that is numbered wrong. The National Library of Australia contacted me to let me know. That's neither moving or funny, I just thought I would take the opportunity for a confession.



## Jill Ireland

Editorial Committee 2018 to present: NICE Senior Lecturer, NSW

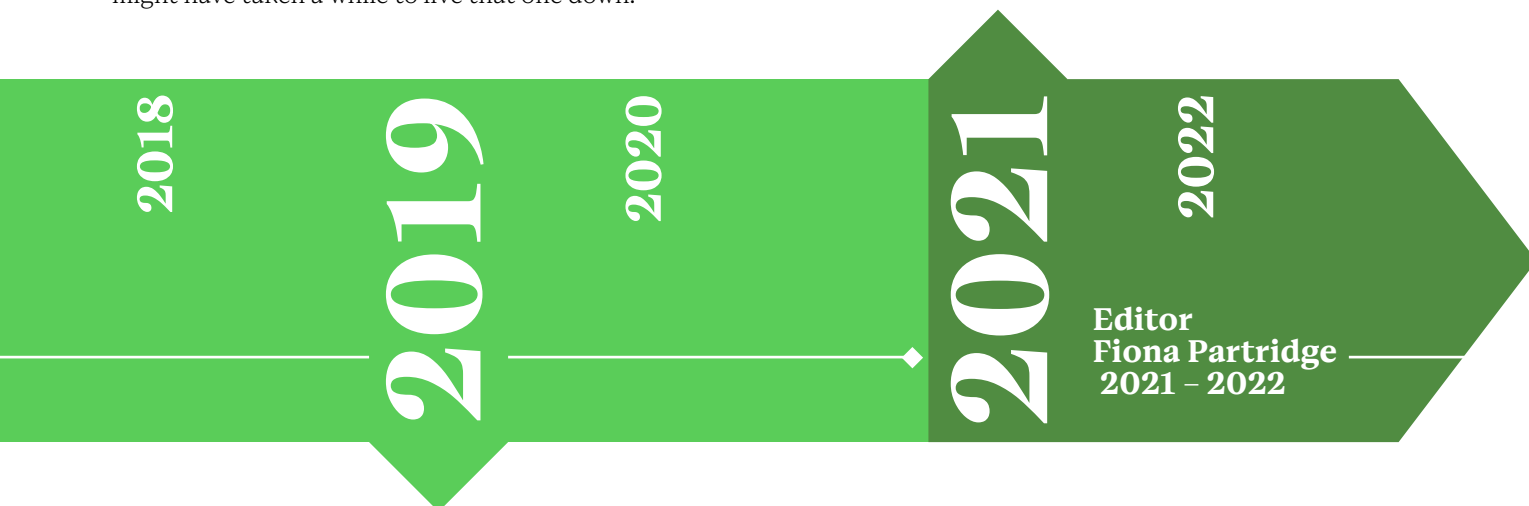
**What motivated your involvement in the CTJ editorial team?** I was motivated to join because Chris Parker asked if any NICE lecturers could help. I had been pleased to see our past students at the National Institute writing up their research for *CTJ*, and sharing the insights they had gained from their research projects with other Christian educators, some of whom were in turn inspired to do some sustained study from a Christian worldview perspective.

**Do you recall any moving memories or funny stories during your time with the journal?** I rapidly proved my usefulness to *CTJ*'s editorial team when I contacted Chris to say I had spotted a significant error. As editor, he said it would be too late to make any changes, as the issue was just going to press. However he changed his mind when I pointed out that "illicit" dramatically changed the sense of a phrase in which "elicit" was what was intended. It might have taken a while to live that one down.



Julia Verdouw 2021 to present

Doug Allison 2021 to present



Dee Little 2019

Jill Ireland 2019 to present



## Doug Allison

Editorial Committee 2021 to present: St Andrews Christian College, VIC

**What motivated your involvement in the CTJ editorial team?** I have enjoyed reading *CTJ* for many years. With the busyness of teaching and all that sits around it, I have been challenged through its pages to lift my eyes to why we do this, for whom and stimulated in thinking about how to do it more faithfully. In recognizing its role I was drawn to contribute in this space.

**What were some of the hopes/concerns in Christian education at the time you served CTJ which the journal helped discuss/invite for readers?** My hope centres around recognising Christian education as a discipling process. In the midst of many powerful cultural stories my desire is for students to be supported in seeing the Biblical narrative, as lived out in their school context, to be the vantage point from which to interpret all other stories. That they see their education to be the equipping as agents of the Kingdom and their chosen career as a participation in God's story in response to and in relationship with Jesus. I see *CTJ* to be a vehicle for this in terms of its stimulating articles for its readership but also as a means for educators to wrestle deeply as they serve others through their contributions.



# MESSAGES AND REFLECTIONS

FROM SOME LONGSTANDING CEN LEADERS AND MEMBERS

**I HAD THE PRIVILEGE** of contributing an article to the first edition of *CTJ* thirty years ago in which I commented that parents and teachers had a shared responsibility “to both protect our children and prepare our children to serve God in the world”. *Nurture* magazine from earlier days to the present has inspired parents to do this; it was our prayer that *CTJ* would do the same for teachers. And so, it has for thirty years.

I know lots of Christian educators for whom *CTJ* has been a rich resource for their learning, teaching, and leading. The journal has been a constant reminder to me and many that the focus of faithful, Christian education will always be the “heads, hearts, and hands” of young people, not bums! (i.e., bums on seats ... enrolments!) nor buildings! And of course it goes without saying that such an education will seek to give to the Lord Jesus Christ His rightful place at the very centre of every aspect of the life of the school. That indeed has been the marvellous vision of *CTJ* from day one.

May *CTJ* continue to inspire and inform Christian educators, young and not so young, as they engage in the demanding and exhilarating adventure of Christian education. And may the fruit of their labours be young people who seek to live their lives, wherever the Lord places them, with gospel integrity. Shalom

George Glanville,  
past CEN principal

**CONGRATULATIONS** to all who have contributed to the longevity and influence of *CTJ* over 30 years. Christian educators remain committed to reflective practice, life-long learning, and imagining and reimagining education from the grounds of God’s Word. Both godly restlessness and contentment are the fruits of such commitments. For Christian educators, faithful teaching and learning results from a deep dialogue between the abiding truths of God’s Word and the rapid cultural changes in which we are embedded. There is work to be done! May *CTJ* continue to make a rich contribution for years to come.

Rev Dr Rod Thompson, NICE Emeritus Principal

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**FOR 30 YEARS** *CTJ* has been an invaluable resource for Christian educators. I have been impressed with the range of contributors and the range of subscribers. *CTJ* has been and continues to be a scholarly yet very accessible journal for teachers who are seeking to have the gospel inform their vision and craft.

As the next generation of champions for Christian education take up the baton in an increasingly complex social and educational context, I pray that *CTJ* continues to be a faithful platform for deep reflection on teaching Christianly and a forum for educators who long to see the Lordship of Christ proclaimed and practiced in education.

Dr Ken Dickens, former CEN CEO and NICE principal

**IN MANY** of the countries of the world where we evidence Christian schools, Christian educators are not only in cultures where Christianity is at the margins, but also have limited opportunities to be trained by Christian institutions. Among the challenges for Christian schools in these contexts is how to foster practice that is consistent with their Christian beliefs. The *Christian Teachers Journal* is one of a few journals around the world where we can learn from Christians, many of whom are themselves teachers in Christian schools. While many articles invite reflection, there are also plenty of ideas that can be implemented, or assist schools and teachers in the development of practices that align well with the biblical story.

It is my hope that readers of the *Christian Teachers Journal* would understand the potentiality of the gospel for themselves and for Christian schooling. Throughout Scripture God invites people to be Holy across every aspect of life, and a blessing to others. It is my hope that the Holy Spirit empowers those of us involved in Christian schooling to act with wisdom, discernment, and the love of Christ and write about how, for example, our pedagogy, our curriculum, our advertising, our celebrations, our co-curricular events, our policies, our assessments, can be reimagined biblically.

Dr Chris Prior

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**I WAS PRETTY DAUNTED** when I joined the editorial committee, led by Harry Burggraaf. The promise though, of Liesje Wilson’s (De Jonge) famous Dutch Apple Cake and great conversations with other Christian educators was a wonderful thing to be a part of. The journal has been the starter of many conversations both within Australian Christian schools and internationally and has become a thought provoking time capsule of the innovations, changes and developments in Christian education across the world. I am grateful to have been a part of this adventure and excited for what the next 30 years holds for this gem.

Michelle Dempsey, CEN CEO

# Remembering TWO GIANTS in *CTJ*'s history



## Harry Burggraaf (1944-2013)

Harry worked at Donvale Christian College (Vic). With an ability to understand and discern the myriad of philosophical, theological, and educational issues

and then cogently to re-articulate them within the transformational vision, Harry gained wide respect and multiple invitations across the Christian school movement to help question and shape practice. Harry tirelessly served on the *CTJ* editorial committee from its first inception in 1992 until 2009. We are very grateful for the influence Harry had in developing the journal in its early years, and shaping the lives of so many through Christian education.



## Martin Hanscamp (1960-2020)

Martin also served on the *CTJ* editorial committee in its early years. Martin was a regular contributor and an avid reader of *CTJ*, always keen to hold rich discussions in the practice of Christian education. Martin was a perceptive critic of culture, reminding school communities to keep God's hope central in all things.

In recognition of these two great Christian educators, the following is reprinted with permission. This material, influenced greatly by Martin and Harry, originally appeared in Mount Evelyn Christian School's publication, *Transformational Education: A Framework for Christian Teaching* (MECS, 2014).

## transformational education OVERVIEW

The following acrostic of *transformational* captures our core understandings of Christian teaching and learning:

**T**ransformative Christian Education – At the heart of Christian education is responsive discipleship for the transformation of the whole of life.

**R**ich Learning – Learning in the Christian school is broad, deep, expansive, varied, reflective, playful and engaging, catering for the varied needs and interests of each student.

**A**dventurous Methodologies – To facilitate rich learning teachers and students make discerning use of a wide range of methods with which to explore and appreciate God's world and Word.

**N**urturing Diversity – Students have different needs and interests, strengths and weaknesses, abilities and disabilities, so education is shaped to allow everyone to experience the rich joy of learning well.

**S**cripturally Infused – The Scriptures of the Old and New Testament are central to our understanding of life and the educational task and they inform every aspect of the Christian school.

**F**ormation – head, heart, hand – Education is for the formation of the whole person: intellectual, emotional, physical, spiritual and for the development of character and the learning of wisdom.

**O**verarching Story – The Biblical narrative of redemption and the coming of God's Kingdom is the story that informs and shapes every aspect of the life of the school.

**R**elational Community – Effective learning happens best in a community where there are relationships of trust and mutual service, where people exercise their particular calling before God.

**M**eaningful Structures – Structures such as student groupings, classes, spatial settings and buildings should be flexible to serve the needs of learning and the learner and to promote the core understandings we have about education.

**A**ctive Learning – Learning is a dynamic activity involving curiosity, imagination, exploration, inquiry, experiential activities and employing a wide repertoire of engaging strategies.

**T**eachers in Teams – Working in teams for mutual support, encouragement, growth and accountability reflects the nature of the body of Christ and enhances the learning task.

**I**ntegral Approach – The integral approach recognises that the 'whole' of life, including learning, is held together by God's story. A 'slice of life' or 'chunk' of creation is explored from a range of perspectives within a Biblical framework of understanding.

**O**riented for Students – Teaching and learning is 'Christ-centred' and 'student oriented', where teacher and student each operate in their respective office and calling.

**N**ew Horizons – We embrace the future, changes and innovations with confidence and hope, as Christ is the Lord of history; we make use of new educational insights and technologies with Biblical discernment.

**A**cademic Faithfulness – Teachers work faithfully to be the best they can be at the craft of teaching, within their gifts and abilities. Students work faithfully to be the best learners they can be, according to their gifting. Each works to the glory of God.

**L**earning for Understanding, Appreciation & Responsible Action – Learning is more than mastering information and skills. Learning is for understanding, appreciation and responsive action.



JILL IRELAND

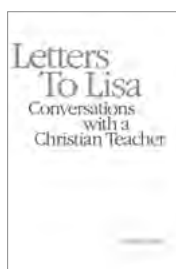
During the 30 years since *The Christian Teachers Journal* was established, many significant books have been reviewed and recommended. “My Top Shelf” has long been a section of the journal that I turn to as soon as a new issue arrives. It is intriguing to see which books have been highly influential in the lives of educators whom I know and respect. Reading the “My Top Shelf” section has often prompted me to buy or borrow the featured books.

Some books have reappeared over the years, serving in pivotal ways in the thinking of *CTJ* readers. Christian educators should recognise our deep debt of gratitude to these authors for sharing the insights they have wrung out of life. The top 12 are listed, but there is only room here to revisit reviews of the three most frequently chosen, and mull over what has made them so valuable over the years.

# My Top Shelf

*A Christian educator recommends their top shelf books for an area of Christian education.*

1



## ***Letters to Lisa: Conversations with a Christian Teacher***

by John Van Dyk (1997)

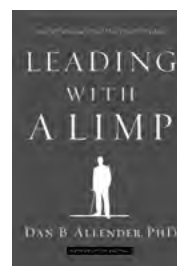
Reviewed by Andrew Jones (2018). *CTJ*, 26(4), 27.

This is one of the first books I point people to who are new to Christian education or who are Christian teachers in a state school.

I would have appreciated this book when I was a beginning teacher in a disadvantaged school, as it would have been most helpful knowing that there are many answers to the questions I had.

It is conversational at first glance and seems simplistic, yet it grapples with the current issues of today. If you don't have a mentor who can answer your questions, read this book as a good start.

2



## ***Leading With a Limp: Take Full Advantage of Your Most Powerful Weakness***

by Dan B. Allender (1997/2011)

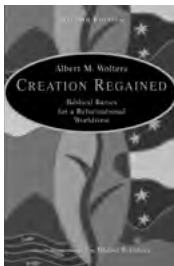
Reviewed by Karen Hooper (2019). *CTJ*, 27(2), 16.

In this book Dan Allender boldly contends that our shortcomings and failures do not disqualify us from leadership, but can actually equip an individual in ways that are powerful, significant, and highly effective. This happens when the individual leads from a place of surrender, fully reliant on God. Allender calls out the falsehoods of our cultural story that accuse and condemn our failures as signposts of our inadequacy. The text argues that the most effective leaders don't rise to power in spite of their weakness; they lead with power because of their weakness. An encouraging read for all leaders.





3



***Creation Regained: Biblical Basics for a Reformational Worldview***

by Albert M. Wolters (1985/2005)

Reviewed by Fiona Partridge (2018). *CTJ*, 26(1), 12.

This was the first text I remember reading deeply (and taking copious notes as I read) that explained what a reformed understanding of life was about. Reading this text caused a profound paradigm shift in my worldview. In particular, I recall it was exciting to no longer feel I had to be bound by a sacred/secular view of curriculum--and of life! I came to see, and be inspired by, the idea that everything found its place in the biblical narrative of creation, fall, redemption, and restoration.

4

***Living at the Crossroads: An Introduction to Christian Worldview. Baker Academic*** by Michael W. Goheen and Craig G. Bartholemew (2008/2011).

5

***The Drama of Scripture: Finding Our Place in the Biblical Story*** by Craig Bartholemew and Michael Goheen (2004/2014).

6

***Christians as Teachers: What Might it Look Like?*** by Geoff Beech (2015).

7

***Teaching Redemptively: Bringing Grace and Truth into Your Classroom*** by Donovan L. Graham (2003/2009).

8

***The Book That Made Your World: How the Bible Created the Soul of Western Civilization*** by Vishal Mangalwadi (2012).

9

***No Icing on the Cake: Christian Foundations for Education in Australasia*** by Jack Mechielsen (1982/2014).

10

***Facing Leviathan: Leadership, Influence and Creating in a Cultural Storm*** by Mark Sayers (2014).

11

***On Christian Teaching: Practicing Faith in the Classroom*** by David I. Smith (2018).

12

***Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview, and Cultural Formation*** by James K. A. Smith (2009).



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