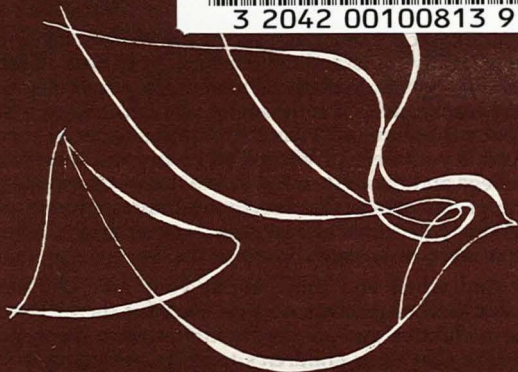


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# Back to God Hour

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**CREATIVE  
TEACHING**

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DENOMINATIONAL BROADCAST  
OF THE REFORMED CHURCHES  
OF AUSTRALIA

## CREATIVE TEACHING

*In thy light do we see light.*

Psalm 36:9

Look back. Look back across the years and tell me how many outstanding teachers you had. Grade school—what about those years? Do you remember any teacher who stands out? And high school; what about those years? Was there anyone special then? And if you were privileged to go beyond these into college and the university—were there any outstanding professors on that level who impressed you and whom you think about even now and say, "Now that man, or woman, inspired me"?

And when you think about your own children, what kind of teachers do you want for them? If you have children and are deeply interested in them, you realize that your children's teachers are going to be some of the most important people in your children's lives. After all, you cannot raise your children alone, for you can teach them and influence them just so much, and times come when they turn aside from your teaching and listen more quickly to others. Your children's teachers are going to mold them and are going to affect the way they turn out. That's why I ask you, What kind of teachers do you want for them?

Or it's possible that you are still a student, and you have your opinions about what makes a good teacher. Possibly you have a choice in your school—you can choose which subjects you will take in your junior and senior year, and you can choose your teachers, too. What kind of teacher do you look for? If you are in college or the university, you know that there are certain teachers who stand out; everyone flocks to their classes because they have something special to give. You make those professors your first choice, don't you, when you set up your schedule?

There is no question about it: Teachers are among the most influential people in our society. And their influence is special because it occurs not only as they communicate many skills and facts to our young people, but it occurs, too, as they form attitudes and

establish viewpoints in their students. Sometimes subtly, sometimes not so subtly, teachers determine values within our society. And it is for reasons such as these that each of us is very interested in our children's teachers. And that's why I asked "What kind of teacher do you want for your children?"

Well, let me answer that question for myself, and you can evaluate my answer; there's a good chance that you would agree with me. What kind of teachers do I want for my children? Why, I want creative teachers for them. Creativity is surely the mark of a good teacher, isn't it? If a teacher is creative and if he or she engenders creativity in students, the teaching that teacher does will be effective and will have long term value for everyone concerned.

I think that Sidney Harris was talking about creativity when he once said:

If we are forced to take our choice, I should prefer to have college students (undergraduates at least) taught by the shallow scholar with zest, rather than by the sound scholar with dryness, dullness, and pomposity.

Children, for instance, do not "naturally" rebel against mathematics; they rebel against the terrible way it has been taught in the past. Much as a teacher may wince at the thought, he is also an entertainer—for unless he can hold his audience, he cannot really instruct or edify them.

Writing about creativity in her book *Teaching Language Arts Creatively*, Mimi Brodsky Chenfeld says:

People hate emptiness. They cover empty paper and canvas with words and colors. They pour sounds into empty air. They build shape to fill empty spaces. They design movement to occupy empty time. People want to leave more of themselves on earth than their bones.... Their need for self-expression reflects the belief of all people. "The universe resounds with the joyful cry—I am!"

Ms. Chenfeld is right: There is a strong element of

creativity in most people, and parents' delight to see it developed in their children. Children delight, too, as they feel their creativity encouraged and expanded by a teacher who is truly creative and earnestly promotes creativity in her students.

And that is why I answer the question What kind of teacher do I want for my children? by saying—"I want a creative teacher; please, if there is a choice, may I have such a teacher for my child?"

Creativity—creative teaching—all of us would agree that this is what we need in our schools. But the question remains, How do we get it? I am sure those of us who are teachers want also to be creative. For there is so much more enjoyment in teaching when the classroom is truly a place where children are challenged to express their best and where the teacher feels fully in touch with the children as they develop. To be sure, we all recognize that a school has the responsibility to communicate a certain specific body of knowledge and promote certain basic skills, but we also recognize that if this is accomplished in a formal, uninteresting, and cold manner, the results of the educational activity will be less than they should be. And that's why we are focusing our attention on creativity. How can we get creativity? What condition or conditions must be present before creativity can flourish?

Well, in her book Ms. Chenfeld gives the strong impression that creativity depends on faith. She begins the preface of her book with this sentence: "Let us begin with beliefs." I can certainly agree with her regarding this. Beliefs, convictions, certainties—these must lie at the foundation of a teacher's soul if he or she is to do something that is occasionally splendid. Cynicism, agnosticism, doubt—these are gloomy and depressing states of mind, and one whose soul is shrouded in them is incapable of inspiring others. A teacher whose viewpoints arise from such a grim complex of negative ideas and emotions will be unable to help students very much. Such a teacher might be able to equip students with certain basic formal skills, but could do little else.

But if belief, faith, is the key to creativity, there is

reason to expect little by way of creativity these days as far as general education is concerned, for the age we live in is not really an age of faith. Writing about this age already several years ago, in 1958, the literary critic Edmund Fuller commented on the fact that people believe too little, and then he described the fruit of the absence of faith by saying:

When awe and wonder depart from our awareness, depression sets in, and after its blanket has lain smotheringly upon us for a while, despair may ensue, or the quest for kicks may begin. The loss of wonder, of awe, of the sense of the sublime, is a condition leading to the death of the soul. There is no more withering state than that which takes all things for granted, whether with respect to human beings or the rest of the natural order. The blasé attitude means spiritual, emotional, intellectual and creative death. . . .

And also, in spite of her insistence that creativity in education is dependent on faith, Ms. Chenfeld herself illustrates what Mr. Fuller has said about our age being faithless rather than faithful. For her own faith is somewhat different from what one would expect it to be.

Faith, I have always thought, was somehow related to how one thought about God, and about man in relation to God, and about the world as God's creation. Isn't that what you generally think of when you think of faith? Yet when Ms. Chenfeld describes her faith, it seems to be restricted merely to her convictions about humankind. These are her beliefs:

*I believe that the desire for self-expression is basic to human existence. I believe the persistence of the creative urge for self-expression of human beings is nothing less than awesome. I believe that the creative expression of human beings is a universal language that links people together and is the heritage of all.*

Now, I like those statements in many ways, but if one wants to talk about faith and creativity, it seems to me that they simply do not go far enough. What is

said here never gets off the human plain, off the human level. This is a faith that is focused on man and on his nature, and it is an exalted description of the importance of human self-expression and a conviction that such expression is necessary if people are to be linked together. This is fine, so far as it goes. But it is not really a description of faith, is it? It is a statement of conviction that has been born from and supported by long contact with students. It is worthy conviction. But it is not faith. Faith is the human capacity to leap beyond and over what we see and hear and feel to God Himself. Some might say that it is not a truly human capacity anymore; it is a God-given ability. Whatever the case, the object of faith, in the usual sense, is not man, but God.

This is a biblical definition of faith:

Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. By faith we understand that the world was created by the word of God, so that what is seen was made out of things which do not appear (Hebrews 11:1,3).

This description of faith, found in the New Testament book of Hebrews is especially interesting to us as we talk about creativity, for it describes faith in terms of what can be known about the Creator God and about His creation. So it seems to me that if we are going to talk about the importance of faith for creative teaching, it is very important that we talk about faith in the usual sense, rather than in the sense that Ms. Chenfeld employs.

Indeed there are many of us these days who are beginning to feel more and more strongly that what we need in education is creativity and that the creativity that will truly lift the quality of education is a creativity totally conditioned by faith—in the true sense of the word *faith*. Such education will most certainly provide light; it will dispel ignorance and illumine the great facts we can know about God, about man, and about the universe.

When one becomes more and more acquainted with the Bible, it becomes increasingly obvious that

the biblical message has profound implications for good education. For the moment, let me just cite words that are found in the thirty-sixth psalm in the Old Testament, which is a hymn of praise to the Lord. It says: "For with thee is the fountain of life; in thy light do we see light." Here is a profound announcement that our own ability to comprehend truth and knowledge is entirely dependent upon God's great revelation of Himself—"in thy light do we see light." The strong impression is given here of human beings stumbling in darkness and ignorance so long as they are cut off from God. But as soon as they turn to God, they are put in touch with marvelous facts that enable them to make useful observations about themselves and their world.

Perhaps we have missed the significant importance of the biblical message for education because we have mistakenly assumed that the religion of the Bible involves only what we do in church. It is true, isn't it, that when we think about the Bible, we tend to think about church services, Sunday School classes, congregational singing, and prayers. To be sure, the Christian faith which flows from the Bible involves all of these matters but the religion of the Bible is far, far more comprehensive. I have referred to one of the psalms—well, the psalms continuously indicate that the religion of the Bible involved the entire creation. There are not only certain special psalms that are about creation, but God's great work of creation and the creation itself is the background of everything that is said in the psalms about religion. The Christian faith is not a religion of world flight, but it is a religion that sends believers into the world with a passion for understanding themselves and their world.

If we agree that creative teaching is enormously desirable and if we agree that creativity in teaching is related to faith, as Ms. Chenfeld in her book on creative teaching has pointed out, we should examine the way biblical faith can influence teaching and make it very creative indeed. When we do this, it seems to me that what we see is that the whole matter of teaching is placed in the broadest framework

imaginable by the biblical revelation. Let me explain what I mean.

Biblical faith takes everything about humanity and everything about our world and relates it to God Himself. According to the Bible, the material universe which we study has not come into existence because of the properties of material itself, but it has come into existence because of God—His love, His power; in fact, because of God's creativity. This great revelation which we are invited to believe makes every true fact totally significant; in truth, this revelation surrounds every fact with a sacred aura. The world is not an accident nor has the human drama been caused by the chancy collision of innumerable subatomic particles; everything we meet is an expression of the power and the will of the Lord.

The biblical revelation also calls us to view both teacher and student in a uniquely significant light. The human being who is involved in education is, according to the Bible, not merely the pinnacle of a capricious evolution, but both the student and the teacher are image bearers of God Himself. This is a most important element of the biblical revelation: *God created man in His own image*. It is impressive that educators are reminding one another these days that man is essentially creative, and it is their duty to stimulate creativity within human beings, but it is important to go beyond this simple recognition and understand that the reason that human beings are creative is that they are image bearers of the Creator.

In addition to the fact that biblical revelation enables a teacher to see the world as God's creation and himself and his students as image bearers of the Creator, biblical revelation provides the educational process with certainties that are useful points of reference as creativity is developed. An exercise of creativity which does not take into account the truth found in the Bible about ourselves, about God, and about our world is really not an exercise in creativity at all. It is too random, too pointless. If I may say so, such creativity is too often expressed these days in paintings that exhibit and contribute to chaos and in

literature that debases and depraves. The unalterable truth which the Bible reveals and establishes provides norms and standards for human creativity, and when the Bible is allowed to operate meaningfully within the school, it enables the students to develop their creativity to the utmost.

Yes, it is true that faith is essential if creativity is to be present in the teaching situation, but there are many of us who are convinced that a faith that rejects the great truths which are revealed in the Bible about God and man and this world is not sufficiently useful to allow true creativity to develop. Such a faith is necessarily focused on man only, and such faith disappoints because it is not really faith at all. What is needed for true creativity in teaching is faith in the God who has been revealed in the Bible and in the Lord Jesus Christ in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

By now you may feel you are listening to someone who has lost complete touch with reality. You may feel that it is simply impractical to talk about relating such a faith to education these days. The fact is that education is not set up to accommodate such faith. In many places it is simply illegal to educate children in the light of the Word of God. Besides, where it might be possible to educate one's children in this way, many educators would consider it improper to do this—they would prefer to talk about creativity without reference to God and His Word. They are satisfied, apparently, with a lesser form of creativity. True. This is the way it is. But this is not the way it has to be.

There are parents who are so convinced that their children will not develop true creativity unless they are taught in the light of the Word of God that they have formed their own schools. They want schools in which teachers who are inspired with biblical faith in the Lord Jesus Christ have the freedom to relate everything they teach to God and His Word. This does not mean that they want something like Sunday Schools for their children, except that they operate every day of the week. Not at all. But they want schools in which teachers and children together con-

fess that they are involved in learning for the sake of Jesus Christ; therefore they may expect the presence of the Holy Spirit of God as they carry on their work. They want to have their children learn the kind of creativity that enables them to "glorify God," as they say. I know that's a strange idea in a way, but that's really what they want—they want their children's learning to glorify God. And that occurs when teacher and student together engage in teaching and learning with hearts full of faith, biblical faith.

Faith can make learning vital, joyfilled, exuberant, and fully useful. Faith can make true creativity possible. Think of it—the teacher stands before her class in the full consciousness that she represents God, the great Creator, as she guides her students into a greater knowledge of God's great world. And she views her children as the image bearers of the Almighty. The potential for good education in circumstances like that is immeasurably great.

Christian day school education...for more and more people such faithfilled teaching and learning is becoming a goal worth striving for with all of their resources. There are Christian schools in which such education is happening right now. And if you want truly creative teaching for your child, you should investigate your community to see if such a school is available near you. If not, there might be a school nearby that you could use—maybe you and some of your friends should form a car pool, or you should buy a van or a bus, anything to get your children into such a school. Or maybe you should see what can be done to start such a school in your community if you do not now have one. Write to the address on this pamphlet if you would like, and you will receive information on how you can make this happen.

Creative teaching—this is priceless; it's the greatest form of teaching going on. And it is best expressed by teachers who know the Lord Jesus Christ—Himself so thoroughly involved in the creation. I hope you will not rest until you have that kind of teacher for your child.

## PRAYER

*Almighty God. Creator of heaven and earth, we exalt your name and marvel at your great work which we see on every side of us. We pray that you will especially qualify those who have the responsibility to teach so that they may know you and may be able to communicate to their students the wonder of what you have made. Develop in many teachers true creativity—the kind that is rooted in true faith in the Word of God. Help parents to build schools in which such teachers can freely express their convictions. And grant that students who benefit from such teaching may learn what it means to see your hand in all things.*

*For Jesus' sake, Amen.*

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The message printed in this pamphlet was heard over the Back to God Hour, which is broadcast every Sunday in co-operation with the Christian Reformed Churches of America, in Queensland, New South Wales, Victoria, Tasmania and Western Australia, and by shortwave throughout the world.

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