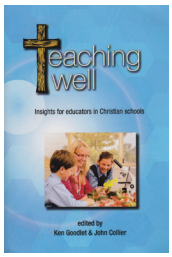
BOOK REVIEWS



Teaching Well: Insights for educators in Christian schools

Ken Goodlet and John Collier (2014) (Editors). Barton, ACT: Barton Books. 486pp
ISBN: 9781921577215

Graeme Perry

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Goodlet and Collier, as editors of the work of 32 authors, have successfully pursued the major purpose for this task, which is to create a reference useful to Christians who teach. Goodlet in explanation asserts, "chapters should be centered on the learner and how learning takes place" so as to meet the needs of "educators , [who] will be looking for hints and strategies for tomorrow's lessons that can be used to inspire their teaching and engage their students" (p. iii).

Provided with a comprehensive response to their invitation to write, the editors have accomplished their goal by strategically: firstly, structuring this work into five parts:

- **Part A** – Forming a Christian mindset: A framework for our thinking
- **Part B** – Engaging Christianly with society: Ways for this thinking to interact with society
- **Part C** – Energising the school environment: How this engagement can invigorate the school in a general way
- **Part D** – Transforming the curriculum: By taking these thoughts into teaching specific disciplines
- **Part E** – Lifelong learning: Engaging this thinking outside the school

Secondly, ensuring chapter length is limited to 10-15 pages. This level of structure facilitates perusal, making themed chapters easily accessible to time poor readers 'snatching time' to read a passage when commuting, on holidays, or seeking only specific content of immediate interest or relevance to proximal teaching.

Each part however, begins with a chapter of foundational concepts allowing subsequent chapters to emerge as frameworks that can be clad with personal perspectives and contextual 'finishes'.

The learner focus of this work is exemplified in the first chapter *Children and Adolescence*, where Grant Maple describes that

> sin affects all that they think, say and do, but not in every respect. So, young people can do natural, moral, and civil good. This is the product of the vestigial image of God that they still carry and the common grace of God at work in the world. What they cannot do is justify themselves before God by these actions. For this they need the work of God in their lives bringing them back into a proper relationship with Him. (p. 19)

Teaching, planned to be part of God's interaction, will be based on a personalised worldview. Constructing or modifying a philosophy of education is supported by discussion of contrasting naturalistic and theistic alternatives by Martin Dowson. Of particular interest is Trevor Cooling's discussion of *Enabling the Bible to control learning*, particularly, the alignment of the self-authorship characteristic of 'constructivist' learning with biblical authority. This perspective can empower Christian educators to use this methodology with understanding. Citing Wright's analogy of Christians being like Shakespearean actors Cooling suggests:

> Christian learning is therefore … the process whereby Christians self-author meanings as they seek 'to write' (i.e. to live out) the last act of the story of God's relationship with humanity through interpreting the biblical text in ways that respect its constraining authority. (p. 60)

Sylvia Collinson implies familiarity with the way Jesus accomplished learning for his followers can inform alignment of current teaching methodologies with success – a non-traditional thinker, profferer of freedom of thought, observer, evaluator, model, earner of respect, sensitive to need, adaptable, mover from known to unknown, instigator of authentic experiences, being open to the serendipitous. Claire Smith draws on Paul's role as teacher to note the "primacy of love", demonstrated in "an awareness of the personal

dimension of teaching' to achieve learning."

Bruce Winter in addressing *Learning for living*, and Paul Burgis in considering the interface with 'secular society' both clarify challenges for our schools today, but also potential responses. Burgis specifically suggests three goals:

1. To present in some depth the range of philosophies within the community
2. To provide opportunities within the school where students can follow Christ
3. To bring prominent and able thinkers and role models into the schools who have engaged meaningfully with society

and develops applicable ways in which these can be accomplished.

More specific is Justine Toh's approach to doing 'Everyday Theology'—an exploration "that identifies the values, attitudes and beliefs that underpin the stuff of our everyday lives … and is also a means of sharing the Christian faith with non-believers in a post-Christian culture that can often be both hostile to and ignorant of the faith" (p. 128). This chapter draws resources from the iWorld, Steve Jobs and J. K. Rowling; considers a tWorld, positive and negative freedom, giftedness and stewardship, also including 'templates' as examples for classroom application.

To this reviewer John Collier appeared to, too quickly, dispatch the question "Can a school be church?", while also introducing a conflict in understanding when asserting that the main focus of schools is "not given to saving the lost." What follows however is a lucid discussion of the issues of establishing a shared community hub, an increasingly practiced attempt to interface unchurched school participants oriented to secular culture, into adaptive weekend worship and developing 'religious' spirituality in an on-campus location. Collier leaves a number of unanswered questions, but by reference to 2 Cor 5:20 and 1Thess 2:8 clearly expresses the potential level of commitment which can articulate students through school and para-church organisations into adult service and church participation.

Following chapters address whole of school issues—chaplaincy, governance, leadership, motivation, special education, service and the community—then school curriculum issues and perspectives on the teaching of specific disciplines. It is in these chapters that the individualised perspectives of authors probably become more evident. Collier states: "we have not sought to conform the various voices to a particular viewpoint, provided they remained robustly evangelical in their outlook" (p. v). After establishing in *A Christian Mind* "that subjects should be conceptualised in reference to the overarching story of Jesus Christ, rather than finding their whole meaning within the closed system of the material world" (p. 71), Ruby Holland argues for applying a philosophy of critical realism to curriculum formation within a post-modern, post Christian era, yet addresses potential weaknesses of this choice. Susan Goodlet with attached passion propounds the significance of *Cultures of Thinking* in the classroom, how it informs Christian teaching and affirmingly illustrates how she has implemented it in primary learning.

An explanation of the reviewer's limited comment on subject-focused chapters is past involvement in mathematics and science teaching. Stronks, reflecting in the foreword on questions that commonly arise in discussions of Christian schooling muses,

> If it is true that we believe, that the Christian school is outstandingly positioned to teach science facts and how these facts are related to each other, how might we do so and at the same time show how these point beyond themselves to metaphysics? … What is the relationship between Science and the Bible? (p. i)

This question of relationship emerges from the secular modernist culture typified by the 'New Atheism' that challenges supernatural reality and asserts the supremacy of human rationality. As a consequence, this conflict of ideas interlinking with the debate on origins, attracts broad attention.

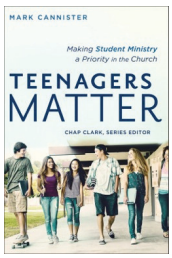
Frank Stootman in *The sciences* chapter, after distinguishing the material and non-material components of the universe, develops awareness of popular views of science, then asserts that the existence of function and purpose, even at a cellular level, requires transcendence from the material to the metaphysical. A discrediting of natural selection as 'the' evolutionary mechanism is mounted based on Pagel's computer simulation evidence and that researcher's assertion of the

need for sudden specific changes (accelerated evolution) that "opens new metaphysical doors beyond naturalism" (p. 344). Stootman claims "Biblically, of course there is no indication of how God created, just that a person with a mind is involved in creating what is new." No reference to a theistic evolutionary approach is clarified and the reader is left to resolve Creation at a personal level. In discussing the nature of knowledge however, Stootman suggests, "Few teach science as an extension of how we can know alongside historical revelation, experienced relationships and integration of knowledge." Illustrations of some teaching strategies for developing an understanding of scientific knowledge are included.

Wondering whether this book will challenge, inform and strengthen your perception of the potential of further development of Christian schools and schooling? Read Colliers *Introduction*, based around Jensen's claims that

> I believe that one of our lacks in the past 50 years has been a failure to out-think the secular world and to demonstrate that the gospel and its implications more than make sense of human experience. … We need our best thinkers to engage with the thought forms of the world around us as part of our evangelism. … an example of this is the field of education. (cited p. 1)

Collier's statement of the mission of Christian schools can re-focus, re-energise and inspire attachment to that 'mission' and motivate a personal search for new conceptual linkages and perceptions from the ideas of these God gifted authors who support—Teaching Well. TEACH



Teenagers Matter: Making Student Ministry a Priority in the Church

Mark Cannister (2013) Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic. 288pp

ISBN 9780801048524

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Mark Cannister, Professor of Christian Ministries at Gordon College, has for decades been actively involved in ministry to teens and at the same time served as chair of the Association of Youth Ministry Educators. He has been in the thick of academic discussion and the field practice of ministry to youth. He has contributed immensely to the leadership development of those who serve youth at the local church level.

Cannister contends that there needs to be an attitudinal shift in the leaders of the church. They need to acknowledge that teenagers matter! And out of this shift will come a clarity of purpose in ministry to youth, a growth of genuine relationships, and above all a transformation that is lasting in the youth themselves.

Youth Ministry tends to die away as leaders burn out. Cannister asserts that when teenagers matter – ministry thrives and this happens because parents, teachers and other significant adults recognize the transformation that is taking place in young lives. Their support and involvement is captured, consequently, load is distributed, leadership stress is reduced, and youth ministry is sustainable.

Cannister reminds the reader that teenagers are involved in identity formation and he uses James Marcia's theory involving Diffusion, Foreclosure, Moratorium and Achievement, to develop his perceptions. He sees these four statuses as overlapping with faith formation and reminds the reader that moratoria and disequilibrium are essential parts of the faith development process and reminds us of the necessity of creating space for moratoria.

Cannister claims that when teenagers matter, ministry thrives because it is well resourced. A church that believes teenagers matter sees all teenagers both inside and outside the church as important. It therefore becomes important to develop different ministries to meet different needs. It is in this area of resourcing that Cannister addresses the disparity in wages between youth pastors and teachers. I believe that this section is irrelevant to the reader outside of North America, as

usually, there is very little difference in wages paid to teachers and those involved in paid ministry in other places.

Although the book is written very much for the North American market there are some sections that are universally helpful. In particular there is a 'health check' that addresses the question, "Are you thriving in ministry?"

One of the areas that create burnout in most people who work with youth, is knowing what to do week to week, and from one event to the next. So often people find this a constant demand or just a daunting ongoing process. Cannister includes a chapter called "Programming is Simple." It soon becomes clear that by simple he means not complicated rather than easy. In this chapter he gives numerous examples from churches across North America. He challenges the reader to focus on process rather than product and to keep people central. It is important that teenagers be integrated at all levels in the local church and that parents be involved in much of the ministry offered to their offspring. He is sure however, that success comes to those who keep things as uncomplicated as possible.

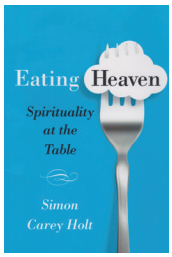
Although this book is written primarily for are youth leaders in the local church many of the principles will spill over into the classroom. I believe teachers who recognize teaching as ministry will find the chapter on transformation particularly useful, and I would recommend the book if only for that chapter. Most Christian teachers care about the spiritual journey of their students and many become involved in their lives outside of the classroom. The "What?" and "How to do that?", is covered well in this book. The suggestions and guidelines offered are filtered opinions, outcomes of analysis by practitioners of acknowledged excellence from different identified studies, and interviews with youth workers sharing accumulated wisdom.

The author wants people who work with youth to become dissatisfied with "good enough" and inspires striving for excellence because—TEENAGERS MATTER. TEACH

Eating Heaven: Spirituality at the Table

Simon Carey Holt (2013). Brunswick East, Victoria: Acorn Press. 159pp

ISBN: 9780987428639



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Eating Heaven, short listed for the 2014 Australian Christian Book of the Year awards, blends both anecdotal and scholarly research to produce a highly readable commentary on eating at "the tables of daily life."

Simon Carey Holt has written this book from perspectives that have been formed from his past careers and life experiences as a trained chef, university lecturer and researcher in urban sociology and spirituality, and most recently, the senior minister at the Collins Street Baptist Church in Melbourne. Holt emphasises that "Eating is a sacred business . . . a spiritual act," and keeps returning to the themes that to eat well, "is not to eat extravagantly, but to do so mindfully, respectfully and justly."

Each chapter of *Eating Heaven* is dedicated to a particular social setting of eating activity, and raises issues surrounding tensions of competing values faced in everyday life. The first introductory chapter attempts to establish the links between eating and spirituality, and "the role that food plays in any society as an expression of culture and a maker of meaning." Holt claims that while eating together is now challenged, nevertheless the family kitchen table is a formative place where individual identity is shaped, and "tastes and prejudices inherited."

From the kitchen table, Holt moves to the backyard, detailing changes that have occurred in Australia's shrinking backyards, but where the barbecue still remains a national Australian icon, and a "quintessential 'emblem

of Australian hospitality.'" While barbecues are considered an informal way of establishing relationships, there are deeper meanings to the barbecue culture that he explores.

Other chapters are dedicated to the increasing café culture emerging in Australia; the conflicting values of "eating, beauty and justice" when dining at the Five-star Table; the creative contribution that a vocation at the "culinary workbench" provides, hand-in-hand with the demands of the long and unsociable work hours intrinsic to the hospitality industry, but which draws diner and cook together.

The two chapters, The Festive Table and The Multicultural Table, share topics of food rituals and feasting surrounding various cultural celebrations and mourning, emphasising both cultural differences and social inclusion, with a "call to a deeper and more transformative multiculturalism."

The final two chapters continue with a strong spiritual focus in describing elements of The Communion Table, and a reiteration of Eating Heaven. Holt views the communion table as "the table of Jesus" and observes that Jesus was a man of "the multiple tables of life," where He shared the 'good news' and called on His believers to follow suit. The last supper, shared by Jesus with His disciples is considered by Holt as the "signature sacrament," and he goes so far as to propose that Jesus may have been crucified because of where and with whom He chose to eat. Holt claims that while the title of his book might be considered by many as an "audacious one," nevertheless, the practice of eating together at the shared table, "is one that grounds us deeply in the 'sustaining earth' while always in reach of the 'highest heaven.'"

Eating Heaven has wide readership appeal: whether as sociologists, social welfare workers, parents socialising their children through conversations and courtesies at the meal table; or others going about their everyday activities of civic mindedness, looking out for the needy within our communities, working towards social and environmental sustainability.

Christian educators, in interpreting and implementing the new Australian Curriculum, more particularly if teaching in learning areas of the Humanities and Social Sciences; the Food and Nutrition component of Health and Physical Education; or Food Technologies in the Technologies learning area, will find this book to be a valuable resource for embedding spiritual values in their teaching for "promoting the intellectual, physical, moral, spiritual and aesthetic development of young Australians" (cited in Wiltshire, 2014, October 17, para. 5), as stipulated in the Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians, the foundation for the current Australian Curriculum. Wiltshire in his recent review of the Australian Curriculum, found little evidence however of spirituality being incorporated in the actual curriculum.

Simon Carey Holt calls us to examine how the everyday and ordinary activity of eating can be used to exercise the gift of hospitality. In so doing, "we celebrate beauty and express solidarity with those who are broken and hungry," while anticipating the heavenly banquet. TEACH

Reference

Wiltshire, K. (2014, October 17). National curriculum review has come up with evidence-based advice. The Australian, Opinion Section.