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Syd Hielema

Dordt College

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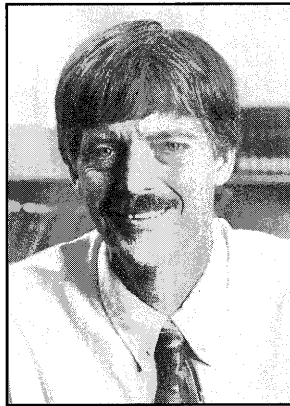
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Improvising Inside The Whole Story



by Syd Hielema

When I was a teenager, we played a game called 20 questions. These were the rules: someone told the ending of a story, and then the group was permitted to ask 20 questions to figure out the whole story. The most famous one goes like this: “a man goes into a restaurant in a seaport town in England and orders a meal of albatross. He takes one bite, and then goes out into the street and shoots himself.

Dr. Syd Hielema is Assistant Professor of Theology at Dordt College. His paper was presented to the B. J. Haan Education Conference held at Dordt College in March 2001.

Why?” This is the full story: the man, with a group of others, had been shipwrecked on a tropical island and captured by a tribe of cannibals. While there, all his companions died, apparently of tropical diseases, though he was never quite sure. His captors fed him strange food that he had never tasted before, and they told him it was albatross meat. Deep down he suspected that he was really eating his former companions. Eventually he was rescued and returned to England. Once there, one bite in the restaurant confirmed his suspicions and he was unable to live with the horror of what he had done.

This game illustrates a profound truth about reality: isolated events make sense only when we know the whole story. The whole story with its setting, characters, plot lines, strange twists and turns, conflicts and resolutions, and so on, holds things together so that they make sense. The same holds true for the events of our lives and for our lives as a whole. If our lives are completely cut off from reality as a whole, our lives do not make sense. When our lives are situated within a larger picture, the whole story, then that larger picture serves to make sense of our lives. Every aspect of our lives is to be placed inside the perspective of the whole story. For example, why do we have children? Fundamentally, we have children because we trust that God is faithful. The story of Scripture helps us to see that the God who made the heavens and the earth and who commanded us to be fruitful and multiply is still the same God today, and the promises recorded in Scripture also apply to us and our children. And though we are broken sinners bringing children into an often terrifying world, we trust that God’s faithfulness is

greater than both our brokenness and the terrors of this world.

In light of this truth, I have two thesis statements to develop. First, if I had to name one fundamental, foundational purpose of Christian education it would be this: to lead each child that we meet to see his or her life squarely within the whole story of God's way with his world. Second, I believe that the entire Christian life can be described as improvising inside the whole story. These two thesis statements leave me with two basic questions to address: (1) How do we live inside the whole story? (2) What's involved in improvising inside that story?

Living inside the whole story

Listen to Paul's words in Ephesians. 1:3-14:

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will—to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves. In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace that he lavished on us with all wisdom and understanding. And 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 will have reached their fulfillment—to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ.

In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will, in order that we, who were the first to hope in Christ, might be for the praise of his glory. And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession—to the praise of his glory.

Through these words, Paul presents a powerful account of the whole story. His language here is very lofty and grand, but an everyday example may serve to bring it down to earth: one of the rules in our home is that everyone is given 90 minutes of "e-time" a day. E-time refers to electronic time, and

this includes watching television, playing electronic games of any kind, communicating via email or surfing the web. This family rule represents a stumbling effort on our part to respect the whole story. According to Ephesians 1, the message of who we are is a message of wonder and grace. We are human beings who were chosen in Christ before the creation, and we are persons destined for the new creation. Already now we have been given every blessing in the heavenly realms, but those blessings are what we might call "now and not yet" blessings, because everything in heaven and earth has not yet been brought under Christ as head. We know our origin and our destination; who we are now and how we live now reflects those realities. My wife and I believe that excessive e-time diminishes who we are as persons, transforming us into passive consumers who become self-absorbed and poor reflectors of the blessings that have been poured out upon us. The Holy Spirit is a deposit of the new creation; when we spend excessive time with the electronic media depositing its materials within us, we quench the Holy Spirit. We try to place the little picture of electronic consumption in our home inside the whole story of God's way with his world.

Living inside the whole story involves six characteristics. First, the whole story really means that: the whole story, *everything*. Describing everything is very difficult to do, but the Christian faith gives us handles for understanding this everything. The Christian doctrine of the Trinity is a moving testimony to a profound, covenantal relation that embraces everything: God the Father created and upholds all reality, he sent his son to redeem it, and will bring all reality together under his son as head. Until that day, the Holy Spirit is the down payment on the way to the new creation, the one who binds us to the Father and Son as adopted children. It's all there in Ephesians 1, and we can't say it any better than Paul did in this doxological exclamation.

Second, the whole story, that everything, has a *plotline* and we are wrapped inside the plot. Often we summarize this plotline as the story of creation-fall-redemption-new creation, a story that describes history from the beginning to the end of time. The entire Bible tells us hundreds of little stories of humanity's covenantal relation with God; in other words, it tells us many little stories from the perspective of the whole story. God made everything

wonderfully good, overflowing with shalom. Through the serpent's invitation and human disobedience the whole universe fell into sin, but God immediately promised redemption. The Old Testament records a very convoluted road on the way to the redeemer, Jesus Christ. God sent his son, who spread everywhere he went the shalom that the world originally had, and earned the death penalty for his efforts. But God raised him from the dead as the first fruit of the new creation, and the ascended Lord has sent the Holy Spirit to prepare his bride, the body of Christ, for the new creation, which will come in its fullness when he returns. We know the whole plotline from beginning to end, and we're tucked in there in the second last chapter, gifted and graced with the down payment of the Holy Spirit as an anticipation of the final chapter, the new creation.

Third, the whole story shapes our understanding of *fundamental questions of meaning*. These questions include the following: What is God like? Who am I? Who is humankind as a whole? Where did this universe come from? Where is it headed? What is right with the universe? What is wrong with the universe? What is the remedy for what's wrong? Why are we here? How do I relate to others? What is knowable and what is unknowable? When we come to know the whole story, wrapped inside the story are answers to such fundamental questions of meaning.

Fourth, we are told the whole story, but *the full story lies beyond our grasp*. Knowing the whole story is not the same as knowing the full story in complete detail. Yes, the mystery of the whole story has been revealed to us in the person of Jesus Christ, as Paul says, but that revelation enables us to see how the whole story hangs together, which is really all that we need to see. Many, many of the details of the full story are not available to us, which is why elsewhere Paul can say that "now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror" (I Cor. 13.12). The writer of Ecclesiastes, who expressed a deep sense of the mystery of life, acknowledged that the Lord has placed eternity in our hearts, but that we cannot fathom what God has done from beginning to end (Eccl. 3.11). We might summarize this point as follows: we experience our own lives, and we are given the broad outlines of the big picture, but in between those two realities there lies a great deal of haze, cloud and mystery. The first time that I flew, we

landed in very heavy fog. Inside the plane we could see very clearly, but that wasn't very reassuring. We had left a definite place, and we knew that there was a definite place to land somewhere below us. But we descended for what seemed like an eternity seeing nothing but grayness around us, and we had no choice but to keep on going. Living inside the whole story of God's way is often like that.

Fifth, we're inside that whole story as *broken sinners in need of redemption*. The most fundamental result of our sin is that we try mightily to live by a different story than THE story. Unfortunately, there are competing accounts of what that whole story is.

*Our lives are wrapped in the
plot of the whole story.*

This competition all started in Genesis 3; every word that the serpent said to Eve can be understood as telling her a different story in order to make sense of her life in a different way. The serpent wove his web of deception by taking one character in the story, the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, and changing the role of that tree in the story. Genesis 1 and 2 tell us the story of a sovereign and loving God who pours out abundant blessing on his newly fashioned world and places this tree in the garden to mark a central condition of covenantal living: trust and obedience. The serpent's opening line, "Did God really say, 'you must not eat from any tree in the garden?'" raises doubts about the truthfulness of the whole story. Eve, however, is not shaken, and she confidently replies, "We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden, but God did say, 'you must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die.'"

But the serpent is even more confident: "you will not surely die, for God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." Through this devastatingly brief interchange, the serpent transfers that same tree from the wondrous story of Genesis 1 and 2 into a very different story. That little phrase "for God knows" transforms God into a nervous dictator who anxiously hopes that his human creatures will not discover that this tree contains the secret

ption that will enable them to become like him. With three little words, the serpent dramatically changes the answer to the deepest question we can ask of a story: who is God? Eve and Adam both bite into that alternative story, and ever since there has been an intense competition between the story of abundant and free grace and the story of fear and anxiety.

The story of these competing stories is best described as the *struggle between true worship of God and idolatry*, and this struggle impacts all that we are and do and say. This struggle is personal, communal, and cultural. That is, every human being must deal with it individually, every local community struggles between true worship and idolatry, and every culture as a whole wrestles with this dynamic in its trends and its ways of organizing itself. Do I buy my 13-year-old son the \$80 sneakers or the \$35 sneakers? Do we worship in the same way we have done for years, or do we allow some strains of contemporary styles in our services? Does the story of freedom of speech in this nation require that we place no limits on campaign funding so that the rich may have total freedom to support their candidates, or do we limit campaign contributions so that the voice of the rich is limited at least a little in a democracy where all are supposedly equal? Buying sneakers, worshiping, reforming campaign finance are all shaped by the whole story that shapes us, either the story of God's way with his world, or the devil's alternative. Spiritual warfare kicks in even—or perhaps especially—at the shoe store.

This competition between the two stories is so deep and so intense that *spiritual warfare* lies at the heart of everything that we do and everything that we are. Paul's description in Ephesians 6 of the armor required by the Christian community as it engages in spiritual warfare begins with having the belt of truth buckled around our waist (Eph. 6:14), which is another way of saying that we are to be wrapped within the true story of God's way with his world, the true story that is centered on Jesus Christ. That story holds on to us and holds us together like a powerful belt as we continue to deal with the oh-so-strong residue of the devil's story that grows only from fear and anxiety.

Sixth, and finally, this struggle lies so deeply within us as persons, communities and Christian institutions that we must speak of the oxymoron of

Christian idolatry. In our stumbling efforts to follow Jesus in the now and the not yet, we easily succumb to worshipping the doctrines of our own denomination, worshipping our way of interpreting the Bible, worshipping the unwritten rules that shape the lives of our Christian communities, and we easily become blind to the ways in which we combine our worship of God with trust in the dollar, nuclear weapons, medical technology, our achievements, and a host of other pseudo-gods. One way to describe this Christian idolatry is by means of this chart:

| <i>God's story</i> | <i>Christian Idolatry</i> |
|--------------------|---------------------------|
| faith | control |
| trust | anxiety/fear |
| love | success |
| hope | optimism |
| joy | happiness |
| obedience | pragmatic utilitarianism* |
| peace | relaxation |
| open to everyone | "our" community |

(* "pragmatic utilitarianism" refers to making decisions on the basis of "what works" and "what makes sense.")

It's easy to distinguish these two realities in two columns, but in the real world the two are intertwined in our own lives and in the lives of our communities. We are the people of the now and the not yet; until Jesus returns, we wrestle against the sin that lingers as we seek to follow him.

One word that clearly illustrates the tension between true worship and idolatry around us is the word "normal," because the story that shapes us defines what normal life looks like. Listen to these stories of normalcy: one college graduate works with mentally handicapped adults and is paid \$8 an hour, a wage so low that she cannot afford to live alone in an apartment. Another college graduate has a position with a software company in Silicon valley, and, after a few years, is worth more than a million dollars. These are normal salary guidelines in our world. A group of friends sit together in a room staring at a flickering screen for two hours, watching a story unfold. Every ten to twelve minutes the story is interrupted for six to eight 30 second stories that encourage them to purchase certain things, and then the main story continues. During these two hours

these friends hardly speak to one another. This is a normal social event in our world. A husband and wife work full time, arriving home in the late afternoon too tired to relate with others and too tired to prepare a proper, nourishing meal. The teenagers in the family are at work or are involved with extra-curricular events at school, and miss meal time. This is normal family life in our world. What is considered to be a normal house size today is twice as large as what was called normal in the 1950's. The word "normal" tells us what fits best into the main story that shapes our lives. In contrast, it's striking that very little about Jesus was considered to be normal. In Mark 3 we find the stunning account of how Jesus' mother Mary and his brothers thought that he was going insane, and they wanted to lock him up (Mark 3:21). In their eyes, Jesus wasn't normal; he didn't fit into the story that shaped their lives and the life of their culture.

In summary, everything in our lives makes sense according to the story that shapes us. Our goal is to be shaped by the whole story of God's way with his world in all that we are and do. Our goal is to help our students to understand their lives inside the whole story of God's way with his world. Inside that story we seek to deal with the effects of the media upon us and our children, recognizing that the spiritual warfare that takes place in our own lives is exacerbated by the media as well.

Improvising inside this story

The first thesis focused on understanding the whole picture and how we see ourselves inside that picture. That discussion didn't get us very far into reflecting upon media across the curriculum. Now we move to a closely related question: how does living inside the whole story shape the way in which we lead our lives? And my thesis is simply this: we are called to follow Jesus by improvising inside the whole story, and such improvisation has dramatic consequences for the role of the media in our schools.

Generally improvisation refers to one of two things: either it refers to a way of performing in the fine arts of music and drama, or it refers to life situations in which we were forced to make a sudden change of plans or, for whatever reason, had to act without planning as well as we had wished. We might say, "I had to improvise when I cooked supper last night because I was out of three ingredients that

I needed." The meanings and connotations that flow from both of these understandings of improvisation are appropriate here. In a nutshell, improvising inside the story means that we know the broad outlines of the whole story of God's way with his world. We know that we are called to follow Jesus in all that we do. The spirit shapes us into the body of Christ. But we are not given a recipe book that clearly lays out for us every step on the way of obedience. Rather, most of the time God gives us the freedom to, as Martin Luther declared, sin boldly. In other words, the way of obedience is very often the way of trial and error, the way of wrestling to discern God's will in various situations, the way of taking the risks

The way of obedience is often the way of trial and error.

of faithful living, doing the best we can in confusing and ambiguous situations. I will proceed by describing: (1) what improvisation looks like from a biblical point of view, (2) what role our schools play in challenging our students to grow into faithful and courageous improvisers, and (3) describing why developing an understanding of media across the curriculum requires us to do such an odd thing as growing improvisers.

A major shift in the plotline of the story from the Old Testament to the New Testament is that the Old contains hundreds of laws that describe the shape of an obedient life, whereas the New contains very few laws. The New Testament is much more concerned about describing what kind of a people we should be and what the kingdom of God looks like.¹ These two categories describe for us our *identity* as children of God and our *vision* for God's purposes. The assumption in the New Testament is this: if we know who we are in Christ and where we're headed in terms of the big picture, we find guidance for the shape of our lives now. The two realities of identity and vision are closely intertwined: our identity is a now-and-not-yet identity. In other words, our identity includes a vision of who we will be when the age of the now and the not yet is completed.

Listen to these New Testament verses that describe our identity: "It is for freedom that Christ

has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery...The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control" (Gal. 5.1, 22f.). "You are fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone...you are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his spirit" (Eph. 2.19-22). "As God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience. Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity" (Col. 3.12-14). "You, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood...You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light" (I Peter 2.5, 9).

As we put on this identity in the now and the not yet, this identity must be complemented with a vision of the new creation when this tension will be resolved (read Rev. 21.1-5). We are called NOW to become the kind of people that are at home in such a new creation; therefore, we are not at home in the story of our culture. We are called to live as signposts of the new creation. Writing to a church that was filled with what we can call "Christian idolatries," Paul writes memorable words in I Corinthians 13 that pull together our identity and our vision. We are not shaped by our tongues, our knowledge, our giving, or our prophecy. At the heart of what defines us is love. But this love is more than our identity; it is also our vision. "When perfection comes, the imperfect disappears," writes Paul. "Now we see but a poor reflection in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known. And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love" (I Cor. 13.10, 12f.). Love is at the core of our identity now, and one day that love of God will fill the entire new creation.

Receiving our identity and a vision of the kingdom of God is like receiving an incomplete musical score, and then being told to put on the discipline of

this score and improvise the parts that are missing, making sure that your improvisation fits with the parts that you are given. Or, to put it another way, we are like actors in a play whose drama began in Genesis 1 and ends with the return of Jesus and the new creation. And we are told, "here is the script. You know the characters and the plotline; you know what happened before you came on stage and you know the ending. Improvise your parts in the drama so that what you do is consistent with everything I have revealed to you about this drama." As Paul says, "whatever you do, whether in word or in deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him" (Col. 3.17).

When we read the New Testament, we see how this improvisation works: sometimes it was acceptable to eat meat offered to idols (I Cor. 8: 1-8) and sometimes it was not acceptable (Acts 15:29, I Cor. 8: 9-13, Rev. 2:20). In some ways it was right for women to exercise leadership in the church (Acts 18: 26, Rom. 16:1) and in some ways it was not right (I Cor. 14:34, I Tim. 2:12). Christians did not need to be circumcised (Acts 15: 28, Gal. 5:6), but sometimes it was better for them to do it anyway (Acts 16:3). Christians need to get together regularly for worship (Heb. 10:25), but how they are to worship is not spelled out. Pray continually, we are commanded (I Thess. 5:17), but there are hundreds of different ways to pray. Some Christians celebrate special days and some do not, and Paul gives them this very ambiguous advice: "each one should be fully convinced in his own mind" (Rom. 14.5).

At first this ambiguity sounds surprising: is the Christian life truly shaped by so much freedom? But then we remember that we improvise like this all the time. How do we draw the line between setting rules for our children and giving them the responsibility to make right choices? What steps do we take to keep our marriages growing? When do we confront someone about a problem, and when do we decide to tolerate it silently? How do we spend our money, and what do we really need? All of us are improvising inside a story all the time. The question is, of the three fundamental stories available to us—the whole story of God's way with his world, the story of Christian idolatry, and the story of our culture—which story is disciplining/discipling us so that we base our improvisation upon it? Teaching media across the curriculum can only be taught

as a means of improvising inside a story, but it makes a tremendous difference which one of these three stories we choose to work with.

| | <i>God's story</i> | <i>Christian idolatry</i> | <i>Western culture's idolatry</i> |
|--|--|--|---|
| I D E N T I T Y | “As God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience. Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity” (Col. 3.12-14). | Our identity is defined by our traditions, our institutions, our denominations, and the “unspoken code” that guides all of these: children must attend Christian schools, worship twice on Sundays, and keep family struggles secret; be a good person; financial success is a good thing; when people mess up it’s their own fault. We try to combine the gospel with the culture’s idolatries. | I am what I look like; I am what I own; I am what I accomplish; I have to make it on my own; it’s true if it’s true for me; if it feels right I will do it; no one can hold me accountable; he who dies with the most toys wins; second place is for the first loser. |
| V I S I O N | “Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth...I saw the Holy City, the New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband....There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.” (Rev. 21.1-5) | A strong, safe and “pure” community that keeps out the unwanted and helps us be both successful in our culture and strong supporters of our Christian institutions. As Tom Sine says, we become good at explaining why Jesus couldn’t have really meant what he said. ² | Personal happiness can be achieved in the short term through money, self-fulfillment, and relationships. Because relationships do not last, these go through many transitions in one’s lifetime. |
| I M P R O V | “Let us keep in step with the Spirit.” (Gal. 5.25) Spirit-led transformation is central. Rooted in tradition, anticipates eternity | We must learn the correct answers and the correct behaviors that will help us to fit into the identity and vision summarized above. Communal <i>conformity</i> is central. Rooted in traditionalism, anticipates the next generation | Do your own thing without harming anyone else. Personal <i>performance</i> is central; I will conform when conformity helps me meet my personal goals. Rooted in myself, anticipates my own future |

Let me expand on this chart describing what transformational improvisation looks like by making a number of contrasting statements.

Because our greatest struggle is against Christian idolatries, I’ll limit the contrast to these two categories.

| <i>Story of God Improvisation</i> | <i>Christian Idolatry Improvisation</i> |
|---|---|
| oriented towards eternity and its values | oriented towards our view of success |
| requires living “outside of the box” | requires fitting into the box |
| requires a creativity characterized by courage, confidence, rebellion, risk-taking, and trial and error | requires a conformity characterized by compliance, playing it safe, and correctness |
| set free, because the kingdom has been established open to everyone | anxious, because history always seems to be on a downward spiral, and it’s up to us to reverse the trend. |

The book of Acts gives us the best Biblical picture of this whole-story improvisation in action because it is the only narrative writing in Scripture that matches where we are on the plotline of redemption history: between Pentecost and Jesus’ return. After the Spirit is poured out on Pentecost, Peter realizes that what has occurred is a fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy, and so he declares, “this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel, in the last days I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams, even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days and they will prophesy” (Acts 2.16-18). Visions and dreams characterize a Spirit-led creativity that allows a new-creation community to imagine possibilities outside of the old-order creation box. After Peter received a vision in which he was commanded to eat unclean animals, he quickly understood that he was to minister to the Gentile Cornelius, thereby breaking a taboo so strong that we can hardly imagine its power (Acts 10). When the Greek-speaking widows in the early church were not being adequately cared for, the church order was revised to create an office for those who would minister to them (Acts 6:1-7). When Stephen dared to suggest that in the context of the whole story of God’s way with his world the temple was not all important, his audience became so enraged that they dragged him outside the city and stoned him to death. It was not a practical move on Stephen’s part, but he was oriented to the perspective of eternity, and his orientation was rewarded with a vision of the glory of God and Jesus standing at the right hand of God (Acts 6:8 - 8:1). The book of Acts is filled with numerous references to the whole story of what God was doing, and we find a community immersed in that story and creatively

improvising the way of obedience guided by the leading of the Holy Spirit.

We are here this week to reflect upon media across the curriculum. We are here as a community that has been made new in Christ, and that anticipates the day when all things will be made new, when our identity and our vision will be one and the same (cf. I John 3:1-3). We are here as participants in a culture in which the media is the most powerful means of inculcating the story of our culture so that our culture’s story too easily shapes and distorts our vision and our identity. We are here because we do not want to be shaped by our culture’s story, and we do not want to put our heads into the sand and pretend that if we ignore our culture’s idolatrous stories, they just might go away. We wish to develop a school that works with media across the curriculum because we say “yes” to who we are in Christ and to his vision of the new creation.

The intersection of identity and vision in the Christian school as it situates itself within the whole story of God’s way with his world requires us to see our schools as spirit-shaped guerilla-warfare training grounds in which we prepare our students for spiritual warfare by challenging them to become creative rebels. Yes, there is a significant place in teaching for challenging students to learn the correct answers to questions and problems, but there is an equally large place for challenging them to learn by trial and error, to take risks, to master the skill of creative problem-solving in which many different possible solutions are developed and examined and in which we are forced to make educated guesses concerning which options are stronger and which options are weaker. We have the delightful paradox of teaching students to obey God and respect authority, while also modeling and teaching for our students first a spirit-led rebellion against the principalities and

powers of our age in very concrete and specific ways, and second, a humbly gentle spirit-led rebellion against the Christian idolatries that creep into our communities, our schools, and our own lives.

The Bible records for us only one account of the childhood of Jesus. He was twelve years old, and had accompanied his parents on the annual pilgrimage to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover. On the way home, Mary and Joseph realized that Jesus was not part of their traveling party, and they rushed back and spent three anxious days in Jerusalem searching for him. Finally, they found him in the temple courts talking with the teachers there. When Mary and Joseph questioned Jesus about his disappearance, he calmly replied, "Why were you searching for me? Didn't you know that I had to be in my father's house?" (Luke 2:49). Jesus knew his identity, he had a vision for his father's purposes, and he improvised accordingly, even though his improvisation at that time made no sense whatsoever to his parents.

Peter began his sermon in Acts 2 by quoting these words from Joel: "In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams" (Acts 2:17). Peter is also talking about our students here. Wouldn't it be a delight if our students would improvise in ways that shocked us? In the first two BJ Haan conferences on the media, we focused especially on discerning the spirits in the media,

becoming more aware of their power and the impact they have upon us and our children. Often the media worry us, but God is sovereign; though we live in the now and the not yet, we do have a Christ-centered identity and vision, and we are set free to engage in spirit-led creative improvisation, also in our schools. And here's the wonder of this grace: the media are not simply powerful cultural forces to be warned against. They also provide kingdom tools for equipping us to follow Jesus today. It's our hope and prayer that this conference will inspire each of our schools to grow in that area, so that by working with media across the curriculum our students' identities as kingdom improvisers will be supported and strengthened.

END NOTES

1. This shift from the Old Testament to the New Testament is not a shift in purpose. Rather, the Old Testament laws collectively point to the identity of the people of God and the shape of God's rule. The New Testament achieves these same purposes through a different means.
2. Sine quotes John Alexander, who writes, "Christians spend a lot of time and energy explaining why Jesus couldn't have meant what he said. This is understandable; Jesus was an extremist and we are all moderates." *Mustard Seed vs. McWorld, Reinventing Life and Faith for the Future* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999), p. 172, quoting Alexander, "Why we must ignore Jesus," in *The Other Side* (October 1977), p. 8.