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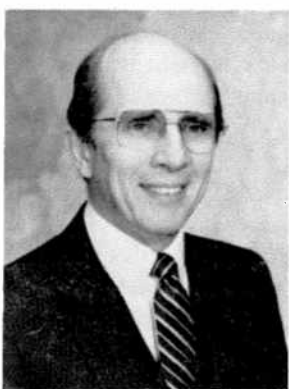
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Creativity and Christian Education

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The subject of creativity has been of interest since ancient times. The Greek philosophers dealt quite extensively with creativity. Plato, for example, equated creativity with divine inspiration and suggested that the creative person is "out of his mind" during the creative process. Aristotle, on the other hand, rejected such supernatural involvement and insisted that creativity occurred spontaneously or by chance.

Until recently, however, the interest in creativity has been quite detached and the subject of creativity has been dealt with rather abstractly. But since 1950—in the United States, at least—potential competition with other countries has spurred the attempts to improve knowledge, to conquer the unknown, and to create new ideas and new things. This in-

creased interest, according to Calvin W. Taylor, has opened many avenues of research and has produced a flood of articles and books on the subject of creativity.¹

In reviewing the literature on the topic of creativity, I note with interest that frequent reference is made to the importance of education. In *Creativity: Progress and Potential*, for example, there is a chapter by E. Paul Torrance, titled "Education and Creativity."² Torrance indicates that education is legitimately interested in creativity because it is concerned with fully functioning persons, mental health, educational achievement, vocational success, and the general well-being of society. If Torrance is right—and I believe he is—then especially Christian education and Christian educators should be interested and involved in

creativity. I wish to demonstrate that in this paper.

Creator

As Christian educators when we think of creativity we think first of God the Creator. According to Genesis 1, in the beginning God engaged in creative activity. In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. The focus is on God the Creator, not on the creative activity of humanity.

The work of creating was a free act of the triune God. Creation was initiated by the Father, through the agency of the Son, and the ordering, life-giving activity of the Holy Spirit. God created partly out of nothing and partly out of existing material.

In the Bible we read that God saw everything that He had created, "and it was very good" (Genesis 1:31). That which God made was "good" because it fulfilled the purpose for which it was made, namely, His praise and glory. When we consider the creative work of God—the light and dark; the water and land; the vegetation; the sun, moon, and stars; the animals on the land and the fish in the sea; the angels; the man and the woman—we see that it was good. It was not a confusing chaos, but an ordered cosmos. It was one grand unity, existing in an exciting diversity. It was a marvelous picture, unmarred by sin. Thus the creation was something in which God delighted.

Creatures

The result of the Creator's activity is called the "creation." God, the Creator, is the source, the preserver, and the governor of the creation. All things in God's creation are "creatures." They are called creatures because they are the results of his creative activity and dependent upon Him for their continued creaturely existence.

But there is one of God's creatures that stands out above all the rest. That one is a human being, created "in the image of God" (Genesis 1:27). Created in the image of God. What does

that imply?

"In the image of God" does not imply that the human person does as a creature what God did or does as the divine Creator. It does not imply that as God thinks, so the person thinks; as God speaks, so the person speaks; or as God works, so the person works. Nor does it imply that as God created, so the person creates.

To take the position that "in the image of God" means the creatures doing what the Creator did, blurs the distinction between the Creator and the creature—turning the human into a little god and God into nothing more than a big human being. Such a teaching contradicts the Bible which makes clear that God may not be compared to anything which is creaturely. In Job 37:14-18, for example, we read:

Listen to this, Job;

stop and consider God's wonders.

Do you know how God controls the clouds
and makes his lightning flash?

Do you know how the clouds hang poised,
those wonders of him who is perfect in
knowledge?

You who swelter in your clothes

when the land lies hushed under the south
wind,

can you join him in spreading out the skies,
hard as a mirror of cast bronze?

Job's response is clear: "I am unworthy—how can I reply to you? I put my hand over my mouth" (Job 40:4).

The essence of the human being "in the image of God" is found in the concept of "representation." "In the image of God" means that the human being—in distinction from other creatures—is God's representative in the creation:

The idea of representation refers to man in the concreteness and visibility of his earthly life; to man, who was created in God's image and likeness and who is called to represent and portray this image here on earth.... This concept deals with man as he actually is, the non-autonomous and non-

independent creature, unable to rely on himself alone; man, who can find and possess his riches and his glory precisely only in his dependence on and in his communion with God.³

But what is the human being to do as God's image-bearer? What is he or she to do as God's representative? To answer that question we move on to consider creativity.

Creativity

There is something we should acknowledge about God's good creation, i.e., it was not to remain as it was in the beginning. True, in the beginning the creation was beautiful and unmarred by sin. But as a flower it was to grow, first the bud and then the full bloom; and as a

the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground. (Genesis 1:28)

and

The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it. (Genesis 2:15)

The cultural mandate means that the man and woman, as cultural agents, were placed in the creation with the responsibility to develop God's creation. They were to bring that flower to full bloom; they were to discover, uncover, and display that glorious treasure.

In *The Creativity Question* Albert Rothenberg and Carl Hausman describe

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treasure it was to be discovered, uncovered, and displayed for all to see. Thus, as God gave creation a beginning, so He would give it a history in which the creation would develop full-grown unto the praise of its Creator.

To that end God made a covenant with His creation promising that, if the creation was obedient, He would bless the creation. At the same time, God determined to realize this covenant through His human representatives. So God made the male and female in His image and He gave to them, as His representatives, what has come to be called the cultural mandate:

Be fruitful and increase in number; fill

creative activity in terms of "newness" and "value."⁴ That which creative activity produces is new in that it is of increased complexity; and it is valuable, a thing of worth and usefulness, in that it marks an advancement or improvement on that which has preceded it. Accepting the truth of this description, we can say that when God presented the man and woman the cultural mandate, He was calling upon His image-bearing creatures to work creatively with His creation.

When God made the man and woman in His image, He made them capable of being His representatives, of working creatively with His creation. When God told them to "rule over" the creation, to "work it and care for it," He

was commanding them to develop His creation, to work creatively with the stuff of His creation—bringing out of the creation that which was “new” and of “value.”

What we have observed up to this point means at least four things concerning creativity.

First, all of God’s human creatures—by virtue of their creation in the image of God—are capable of creativity. Creative ability is not something reserved for a select few. It is something which is possessed by and is to be developed in all of us—especially in our students. H.R. Rookmaaker recognized this:

Creativity is Nothing Special. ...when we speak about creativity, we do not mean only art. Creativity is part of everyone’s work, wherever the best solution to a task is sought in love and freedom. This applies both to our contribution to social relationship and to our specific work in engineering, in science, in theology—wherever things have to be made or problems solved.⁵

Second, creativity is good. In the past some have been inclined to view creativity as something bad, frivolous, and wasteful. Not so. Creativity is good because it is commanded by God and, therefore, it is to be encouraged by us—especially by us as teachers in working with our students.

Third, creativity involves work. God commands us to work creatively with the creation. It is sometimes suggested that one must wait for creativity, that creativity just happens. There is no doubt that there can be and are moments of creative inspiration; but, as the inventor Thomas A. Edison observed, creativity is far more “perspiration” than “inspiration.” David Perkins makes the same point in his article in *Educational Leadership*, when he states that creativity “depends on working at the edge...of one’s competence.”⁶

Fourth, creativity finds its fulfillment in praise to God. Too many creative people work hard to bring praise to themselves. The Bible instructs us that we are to live creatively in the

service and praise of our God. Edith Schaeffer says it well when she observes that our creativity “should reflect something of the artistry, the beauty and order of the One” whom we represent and in whose image we have been made.⁷

This fourth item—that creativity finds its fulfillment in praise to God—leads us to observe that creativity is kingdom activity.

Kingdom Activity

When God created the world He brought into existence His kingdom. God is the originator of the creation, preserves the creation, and governs the creation. The creation belongs to God, is governed by the Word or law of God, and exists to serve God. In other words, the creation is the Kingdom of God. That is why H. Evan Runner writes, “Everything in heaven and on earth is subject to Him; for He is the Creator. His ordinances rule the heavenly bodies (Ps. 119:89-91); the earth also is His possession (Ps. 2).”⁸ And that is what Abraham Kuyper was talking about when he said that there is not “one square inch of creation concerning which He does not say, ‘It is mine.’”

Man and woman, the image-bearing creatures of God, were made to be citizens of the kingdom; they were to serve the kingdom; and they were qualified for that service by virtue of being created in the image of God. And how were the man and woman to serve the kingdom? By working creatively, as God’s representatives in discovering, uncovering, and displaying the wonders of the created order. All of which means that creativity is kingdom activity and, because creativity is kingdom activity, it is subject to the law of God, the King of the kingdom.

In a recent work, titled *Responsible Technology*, the authors observe that

As image bearers of God, human beings are responsible before God for their activities. They are accountable for the way they exercise their creativity: what they do with their lives, what and how they shape, mold, and form.

God has established a law by which men and women are expected to live.⁹

It is important to emphasize this because we are living today with Plato's notion of creativity. As I noted earlier, Plato believed that poets performed their craft by the inspiration of some divine power and, therefore, poets were to be elevated above others. They were not subject to the laws and rules of mere mortals. They were a law to themselves. What they did was right because they did it.

We still tend to think that creative ability marks someone as special. A creative person is a law unto himself or herself and is not subject to the regulations which must be observed by others. This is not so, of course. Creative activity is kingdom activity, i.e., activity which is for the King and subject to His will, His law.

At first the man and woman did perform their creative work in obedience to the Word of God. In light of the Word they sought to understand the creation. According to the Word they endeavored to work creatively with the creation. In that way the man and woman served the King and advanced the cause of the kingdom.

But then Satan entered the picture and—by trying to wipe out the Creator/creature distinction—tempted the man and woman to sin, to disobey the law and the Word of God. They fell. After the fall into sin they were still creatures of God, they retained the image of God, and they continued to work creatively in the creation. But now there were two kinds of creativity. There was obedient creativity, but there was also disobedient creativity.

Because of sin there was that creativity which disobeys the Word of God and seeks to advance the kingdom of this world for the praise of humans. Think of Jabel, the father of those who dwell in tents and have cattle; Jubal, the father of all those who play the lyre and the pipe; and Tubal, the forger of all instruments of bronze and iron. All of these persons worked creatively. In fact, they outdistanced the children of God on this score. But they did their work to advance self and the kingdom of this world. That's why Lamech arrogantly sings in Genesis

4:23, 24:

Adah and Zillah, listen to me;
wives of Lamech, hear my words.
I have killed a man for wounding me,
a young man for injuring me.
If Cain is avenged seven times,
Then Lamech seventy-seven times.

There was also that creativity which obeys the Word of God and seeks to advance the kingdom of God for His praise. Such creativity was made possible, however, only through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ—promised by God already in Genesis 3:15. By the death of His Son, God reclaimed the creation as His kingdom and redeemed His elect sons and daughters as citizens of that kingdom. As restored image-bearers, the redeemed are to represent God. They are made responsible for His creation-kingdom. They are called to serve creatively in the kingdom, to obey the King's law, and to advance His kingdom.

We must be aware that to this very day there remain two kinds of creativity. The mere fact that someone is creative does not make that person worthy of praise. The mere fact that something is the product of creativity does not mean it is worthy of approval. Judged in the light of God's Word, some creativity is for a good purpose, e.g., cures for disease. But some creativity is for an evil purpose, e.g., art or literature designed for pornographic purposes. After the fall, therefore, the fact that a person has created an object or story does not make it good. There is obedient creativity, but there is also disobedient creativity. And obedient creativity—made possible by the redemptive work of Jesus Christ—is that which is in harmony with the Word of God, advances the kingdom of God, and seeks the praise of the Creator.

Christian Education

Because the redemptive work of Christ has significance for the kingdom community today, it obviously has tremendous significance for Christian education.

Usually when asked concerning the purpose of Christian education, we respond by saying that it is to prepare young people for service in the kingdom of God. In light of what has been written up to this point we could just as well say that it is the purpose of Christian education to nurture the creative abilities of our young people and thus to prepare them for creative service and activity in the kingdom.

The first thing to observe in this connection is that creativity can be nurtured; it can even be taught. As Sidney J. Parnes and Arnold Meadow observe:

The study of creativity is far too immature to make certain exactly what happens in a person who studies and practices the principles of creative thinking. We feel that it is a combination of attitude and ability developments. But our recent research does seem to warrant the postulate that the gap between an individual's innate creative talent and his lesser actual creative output can be narrowed by deliberate education in creative thinking.¹⁰

Some have suggested that creativity should be taught as a new subject skill. Others advise modification of the school curriculum so that we may draw upon the creative potential in all the subject matter we treat. I am inclined, along with George F. Kneller, to prefer the latter course.

First, we know as yet too little about creativity to teach it effectively on its own.... Second, and more important, creativity is not an isolated process but a component of many kinds of activity...if a person is to make full use of his talents, he should learn to think creatively in a range of situations and on a variety of subjects.¹¹

Kneller proceeds to indicate how creativity can be nurtured and taught. He states that our educational programs should encourage

originality, appreciation of the new, inventiveness, curiosity and inquiry, self-direction, sense perception. At the same time, Kneller issues a significant warning:

Although in the past education has neglected creativity, it would be folly to go to the opposite extreme and extol it to the detriment of mental discipline and mastery of subject matter. ...for successful creation demands both material for the imagination to work on and techniques for transforming that material into realized form.¹²

Exactly how to nurture and educate for creativity is a complicated matter, which cannot be adequately described or dealt with in an article such as this. One is reminded of the complicated nature of this matter when studying the work of persons such as E. Paul Torrance, an educational psychologist quoted above, and J.P. Guilford, author of the well-known book *The Nature of Human Intelligence* (New York: McGraw-Hill, Inc., 1967).

I do wish, however, to note briefly some guidelines to be observed in our Christian schools in order that we may promote the God-given potential in the lives of our students.

On the one hand, we must begin by acknowledging that formal education does tend to hinder creativity:

The negative attitude toward creativity begins with our system of education and never ends. When I was a little boy in school a long time ago I used to get rapped on the knuckles with a ruler for writing with my left hand. The early lesson here: don't be different.

Today our educational institutions are still dedicated to standardization and regularity.¹⁴

It's true that there is "too little imagination and creativity in educational institutions."¹⁵ Therefore, we must work hard in our Christian schools to remove, first, the attitude which is

bothered or threatened by creative and inquisitive children; second, the idea that learning can take place only in the tightly structured classroom; third, the approach to learning which allows little alternative thought or inquiry; and fourth, the notion that creativity is limited to music, literature, drama, and art—having nothing to do with other subjects or other aspects of life and learning.

On the other hand, we must introduce and encourage those things which promote creativity. As Donald W. MacKinnon states:

It is our task as psychologists and educators either through our insights or through the use of validated predictors to discover talent when it is still potential and to provide that kind of social climate and intellectual environment which will facilitate its development and expression.¹⁶

First, instead of being bothered or threatened by creative children, we must encourage them. Keith F. Kennett, who describes creativity in terms of “divergent thinking” as opposed to

Second, instead of structuring the classroom so tightly that creativity is choked off we must seek to create a climate which includes a sound, healthy, secure climate; incentives for inventiveness; tolerance for diversity with and among students; and adequate cultural resources, such as music, books, art, and field trips to exciting places.

It is important in this regard to avoid extremes. We must not structure the classroom so that creativity is destroyed. Nor must we promote creativity to the extent that we lose control of the classroom. As Torrance indicates, we must promote creativity “while maintaining control.”¹⁸ Admittedly that is not easy. One obvious requirement is that our control or discipline must be both “consistent and predictable.”¹⁹

Third, instead of a narrow approach to learning, we must introduce a spirit of adventure into the classroom. And that should not be difficult for us as Christian educators. Our God, the Creator of the heavens and the earth, is a great God who always guides us by His Word. The creation is vast, filled with rich and exciting diversity. And the children whom we are

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“convergent thinking,” points out that we can do this with classroom experiences involving teaching that ensures the enjoyment of understanding; encouragement of independence, self-reliance, and responsibility; availability of opportunities to initiate inquiry; development of competencies which allow for contrast and avoid forcing children into a mold; and instruction where teachers become “helpers as well as directors.”¹⁷

preparing for service in that creation-kingdom are naturally creative. According to James Alvino:

Creative behaviors begin at birth and increase up to about age 6 or 7. During these crucial years, children are eager to be original and discover on their own. If they are suppressed or ridiculed during this time, the joy of

creative activities is likely to be replaced by apathy or guilt.²⁰

Finally, instead of limiting creativity to certain courses, we must seek to promote creativity in every class for every child, because creativity is an ability given by God to all children to be used in every aspect of their life. Doing so we must recognize, as Robert Alexander states, that the natural behavior of children

...is to create, to allow the unconscious to bring into being shapes, sounds, forms, and colors of flowers, trees, mountains...the fantastic symphony that is life. As children create their imaginations are alive, vibrant, and fully operative...they are seriously and joyously embarking on a journey of exploration and discovery.²¹

Recently I received a letter asking if there is "a course or a section of a course on creativity" in Dordt's curriculum. I answered by indicating that we do not have a particular course on creativity, but that there are sections of certain courses where creativity is extensively nurtured. In responding to this letter I was reminded in a very direct manner that, also on the college level, it is important to encourage creativity not simply by means of one course, but throughout the entire academic program.²²

In the beginning God brought forth the creation as His Kingdom. He made humans in His image, to work creatively in obediently developing the creation. When they fell into sin human beings continued to work creatively, but they did so disobediently. Through the redemptive work of Jesus Christ, God reclaims the creation as His kingdom and calls His redeemed sons and daughters to work creatively for Him in advancing His kingdom. It is the task of Christian education on all levels to reflect that kingdom and academically to prepare young people for kingdom service. Therefore, as Christian educators, we not only may, but we must nurture the creative ability of our students.

NOTES

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⁴Albert Rothenberg and Carl Hausman, "The Creativity Question," in *The Creativity Question*, eds. Albert Rothenberg and Carl Hausman (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1976), p. 6.

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⁶David N. Perkins, "Creativity by Design," *Educational Leadership*, 42 (Sept. 1984), 19.

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⁸H. Evan Runner, *The Bible and the Life of the Christian* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1968), p. 31.

⁹Stephen V. Monsma, Clifford Christians, Eugene R. Dykema, Arie Leegwater, Egbert Schuurman, and Lambert Van Poolen, *Responsible Technology*, ed. Stephen V. Monsma (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1986), p. 38.

¹⁰Sidney J. Parnes and Arnold Meadow, "Development of Individual Creative Talent," in *Scientific Creativity, Its Recognition and Development*, eds. Calvin W. Taylor and Frank Barron (New York, London: John Wiley and Sons, Inc., 1963), p. 320.

¹¹George F. Kneller, *The Art and Science of Creativity* (New York, Chicago, San Francisco, Toronto, London: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1965), pp. 77, 78.

¹²Kneller, p. 88.

¹³E. Paul Torrance, "Education and Creativity" in *The Creativity Question*, eds. Albert Rothenberg and Carl Hausman (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1976), p. 217.

¹⁴Edward A. McCabe, "Creativity," *Vital Speeches*, 51 (July 15, 1985), 630.

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¹⁷Keith F. Kennett, "Creativity: Educational Necessity for Modern Society," *Education*, 105 (Fall 1984), 2-6.

¹⁸Torrance, p. 91.

¹⁹MacKinnon, p. 492.

²⁰James Alvino, "Nurturing Children's Creativity and Critical Thinking Skills," in *The Education Digest*, 49 (May 1984), 48.

²¹Robert Alexander, "What are Children Doing When They Create?" *Language Arts*, 61 (Sept. 1984), 478.

²²Torrance, p. 125.