

**Dear Editor**

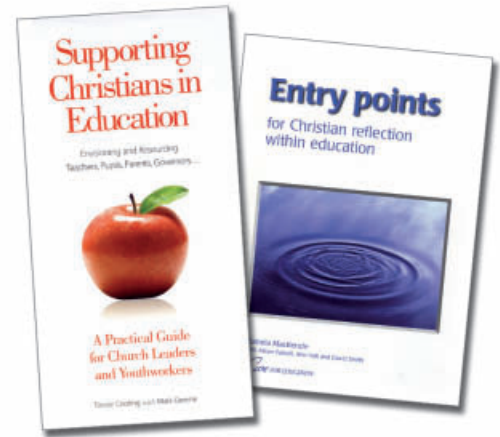
I have just finished reading an excellent booklet entitled *Supporting Christians in Education* (2008, LICC). It is written by Trevor Cooling (Transforming Lives) with Mark Greene (London Institute for Contemporary Christianity).

In particular, the following points made me think deeply:

- 'Research in the Anglican Diocese of Exeter revealed that many of its teachers and governors struggled to say what is distinctive about a church school when it comes to the core business of teaching and learning. They can describe how it is distinctive in its assemblies, in its contacts with the church, in the quality of its pastoral care, but not in relation to what happens hour by hour in the classroom. If that is the case in church schools, how much more challenging might it be in non-church schools?'
- 'How then can Christians be distinctive by being faithful to biblical revelation in the way they teach and learn?'
- 'There's a curriculum to teach or learn, so the diligent teacher or student simply gets on with the job in hand, forgetting that all sorts of ideas might be conveyed in the process.'
- 'Every subject is suffused with underlying beliefs about persons, society and what it means to flourish as a human being. The result is that all teaching and learning has the potential to shape the orientation of people's lives. It tells a 'story' about what's important and what isn't. A Christian in education needs to identify, interrogate and where necessary, transform this 'story' so that, as far as is possible, it is inspired by Christian ideas.'

A committed Christian, I have been a school teacher for nearly 30 years. For the last 13 years, I have been teaching Design Technology [mainly Graphic Products] at a mixed, multi-cultural, community comprehensive school in North West London. Relatively late in my career, Trevor Cooling and Mark Greene have invited me to answer a very specific question: 'What does it mean to be a Christian Design Technology teacher?'

In the list of resources at the end of their booklet, Cooling and Greene point readers towards the Association of Christian Teachers (ACT) and The Independent Schools Christian Alliance



(TISCA). They also make reference to *Entry points for Christian reflection within education* (1997, Christian Action Research for Education) by Pamela MacKenzie with Alison Farnell, Ann Holt and David Smith. This resource includes a most helpful chapter on Design Technology and, in general terms, starts to answer my question about being a distinctively Christian Design Technology teacher. *Entry Points* is now freely available online at: [www.calvin.edu/kuyers/files/books/entryPoints.pdf](http://www.calvin.edu/kuyers/files/books/entryPoints.pdf)

I would like to invite Design Technology teachers who are reading this letter to respond to my question: 'What does it mean to be a Christian Design Technology teacher?' Perhaps someone out there would be brave enough to write an article for *ACT Now* on this subject.

Gerry Edwardson

**Dear Editor**

I have just finished reading the Autumn 2008 issue of *ACT Now* and a couple of things struck me so I thought I'd write and let you know.

The first was your comment on page 5 that 'Editors can only work with what has been submitted, not with what has been promised.' I know I've never promised ACT an article so I'm safe on that score, but it reminded me of how often 'little jobs' or 'extra jobs' get left undone in my life, and the knock-on effect that may have on what someone else is trying to achieve.

The second was the article entitled 'The Lost Message of Jesus' by Steve Chalke, Rupert Kaye and Alan Mann. Despite the furore surrounding the book, I have never actually got round to reading it. The *ACT Now* article offered a totally different perspective to anything else I have read about the book and made me think that I really ought to get around to reading it!

*Perhaps someone out there would be brave enough to write an article for ACT Now on this subject*

Finally, I would be extremely interested in reading an article on the fundamental philosophy that underpins the International Baccalaureate (IB) and a Christian response to it by a Christian educationalist. I wonder if there is an *ACT Now* reader out there who might be willing and able to write such a piece. I am a strong IB supporter. I think the programme, the academic standards, etc, are wonderful. But I am left feeling very uneasy because the whole thing seems to project a very strong humanist worldview. As I say, I would love to know what others think and feel about the IB.

Thank you very much.

Lydia Morey

### Dear Editor

After reading 'The secret' by Monica Dart and 'Getting out and about' by Barbara Todd in the Autumn 2008 edition of *ACT Now* I felt prompted to share my reflections on the importance of helping young people to appreciate the environment.

I began my teaching career in the 1960s at a village primary school on the Lincolnshire fens. Many of the children I taught had parents who were farm labourers; some were from farm-owning families; and others had parents whose livelihood was largely dependent on agriculture. It is no exaggeration to say that every girl and boy understood the seasonal patterns in nature. Our school harvest festival service was the highlight of each year.

In stark contrast, when I moved to an inner-city primary school serving a council housing estate in Nottingham in the 1970s, I found that the children had little appreciation of the seasons and were ignorant about where their food came from. Children had to be told that milk came from cows, eggs came from hens and potatoes grew underground. Invariably harvest festivals were a celebration of Commonwealth ties and international trade as we used coloured wool to map labels from tinned pears, tinned pineapples and tinned peaches to a map of the world so old that it still showed a third of the world coloured British Empire pink.

One of the things that struck me when I moved from a rural school to one in an urban setting was the fact that in the former the children's writing was full of nature. The stories and poems they wrote were invariably about wild birds and farm animals. Children knew what a spider's web looked like when it was covered in dew or frost; they knew that one night of heavy rain could destroy a crop and leave a family penniless for the coming year; they saw beauty in the furrows of a freshly ploughed field or a neatly laid hedge. Tractors featured in many of their tales as well, as I recall. Unsurprisingly, stories and poems

## Did God really make each little flower that opens and each little bird that sings?

written by the children I taught in Nottingham tended to be about people rather than animals, and cars rather than tractors.

Then, in the late 70s something wonderful happened. Environmental education was introduced to our curriculum and every class experienced a half-termly coach trip to the countryside to visit farms, stately homes, woodlands and coastal habitats. The children were confronted with wide horizons and open skies; they breathed deep the sweet country air and saw wild creatures running, flying and swimming free; they began to understand where food came from and by what means it was grown, prepared and delivered to their plate or lunchbox.

Then, after singing *All things bright and beautiful* one day in a school assembly, the children in my class began to ask if the words of the song were true. They wondered whether God 'invented' trees and purple-headed mountains. Did God really make each little flower that opens and each little bird that sings? Did He make their glowing colours and their tiny wings? Did God create, and does He still care for, every living thing? And does he care for every person, no matter who they are or what they do? As you can imagine, we had some lovely discussions! I was able to tell them about Jesus and the promises in the Bible on these and other life-affirming topics.

Even the penultimate verse of *All things bright and beautiful* – often omitted from hymn books these days – had meaning for my pupils: 'The tall trees in the greenwood, The meadows where we play, The rushes by the water, To gather every day.' My class might not have gathered rushes by the water every day, but they had played in meadows and had seen, stroked and attempted to climb some very tall trees!

Isla Reid

Subject: Christmas night

*ACT Now* issue: Autumn 2008

Item responded to: Monica Dart's play

Dear Editor

I am writing to say that I used Monica Dart's fine 'Christmas night' play (*ACT Now*, Autumn 2008) in school and received very positive feedback from staff, children and parents alike. The children enjoyed making masks and costumes, and then dressing up as animals. The adults enjoyed hearing the Nativity story afresh. I appreciated the fact that almost every child in my class had lines to learn because the play included so many speaking parts. Thank you Monica!

Terri Walker