

CURRENT ISSUES

Ordinarily this rubric is reserved exclusively for Mr. Brian Dykstra — it's not even encumbered by notes from the editor. We hope he'll forgive us for this one exception.

My guess is that "All Children of the Covenant" will strike a responsive chord in many hearts. In the article Mr. Dykstra speaks of the hurt done to a child by his being rejected in one way or another by his classmates. I know that teachers are very sensitive to that sort of thing; and I'm sure there's many a parent who feels the hurt right along with a child who suffers for it. I'm reminded of a letter written some time ago by just such a parent. She carried it to school, on the first day of the year; and parts of it were read to the students in the beginning-of-the-year chapel exercise. I'm reminded too of a short article written by Mr. Fred Hanko, Sr., on the back of a 1982 school note to the parents of students in Hope School. The former addressed itself in large part to students; the latter to teachers and parents. Both provide something of a sequel to Mr. Dykstra's fine article, so we'll include them both in his rubric.

All Children of the Covenant Brian Dykstra

It seems almost every class has one — an outcast. Arden Ruth Post, associate professor of education at Calvin College, touches on one small aspect of the issue in an article in the April '88 issue of *Christian Home and School*. In her article, "Why Wasn't I Invited?" Post speaks of the heartache experienced by a girl who is not included in a class birthday party. She writes:

"A few years ago a sixth grade girl entered my remedial reading session looking dejected and

downcast. All of my attempts to interest her in the lesson failed. I sensed there were more pressing matters to deal with, so I asked, 'Kim, is there something I can help you with?' Immediately, she burst into tears.

"'Jeannie is having a birthday party. She passed out invitations today. There are fourteen girls in the sixth grade; twelve were invited, and two weren't. I wasn't invited. And it happens every year! For the next week all the girls who are going to the party

will talk about the fun they are going to have and what presents to buy. I just hate school the week before a party, and the night of the party I sit home and cry!' ”

Not being invited to a birthday party is just one example of the treatment given an outcast. The problem is far greater than being shut out from after-school social activities. It is not impossible that an outcast could experience rejection every day of the school year.

What about these outcasts? What is it that sets these children apart from the rest? What, if anything, can be done when we as teachers and parents know that a child is being shunned by the others?

First, however, we need to recognize that this is a serious problem. It is not serious in the sense that a large percentage of our children are objects of such treatment. Rather, the problem is serious because we are a covenant people. As a denomination this is the doctrine we claim to have developed. On mission fields this doctrine has been noticed as being distinctive. When we fail to live the covenant, therefore, it brings us shame.

We state that God calls His people from the children of believers. Yet, are there times when shunning is encouraged because a certain child does not measure up to some kind of *social* standard?

Is the doctrine of the covenant being put into practice when we know of this treatment but nothing is done to stop it?

The covenant also emphasizes that we, undeserving sinners, have been sovereignly called by God's grace into the fellowship of His family as one, complete body with Christ as our head and Lord. Each of us needs the other as fellow members of that *one* body. Because God has saved *one, complete* church, either we are all saved, or none of us is saved. Is shunning, then, something insignificant?

God has shown His love for this complete body through His Son. As members of His covenant church we have been commanded to love one another as He has loved us. We are told in I John 4:20-21, "If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen? And this commandment have we from him, That he who loveth God love his brother also." A perfect God has called depraved sinners into His covenant fellowship. Shunning should not be viewed as a childish trifle, since we have been taught of God how to love one another (I Thess. 4:9).

What will happen to the spiritual attitude of the shunned child, not to mention the children

who do the shunning, toward the doctrines of the covenant and communion of the saints? Will these doctrines be seen as being alive, vibrant convictions which arise deep within faithful hearts, or will these doctrines be seen as matters of theological disputes which bear little relevance to day-to-day life?

At best, what will be the emotional scars left on the child who has been shunned by peers for years? At worst, what will be the emotional open wounds which have been left to fester? Would these be the memories we would desire a child to have from attending a Christian school? If such treatment has gone on for a few years, what could assure a youngster that such treatment will not continue tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow until the last syllable of ninth grade? Where would we expect such a child to turn for friends?

What can be so frustrating is that the outcasts are judged by what they cannot control. Perhaps someone is shunned because of looks. The child might be too tall, short, thin, or heavy to suit the tastes of others in the class. Maybe nobody in the class cares to have the outcast on their team because of a lack of athletic ability. The style of clothing is also a standard of measurement these days. What is sometimes discovered is that even a change in

wardrobe is not enough. Besides, what type of true friend would it be that gives friendship on the basis of what one wears? Especially, however, the outcast is vulnerable. There is no need to worry about a loss of social position by picking on the outcast. In fact, it is discovered that picking on the outcast is acceptable and ensures one's position in the group.

Post sums this up in her article.

"Kim was small and shy in a class of preadolescent girls who were developing physically and socially. Besides, Kim was from a poorer family than her classmates, and her clothes didn't stand a chance of competing with the latest styles and fads. I could have told her that these things don't really matter, that character and spiritual maturity are more important than being in style, but in her daily world, clothes, friends, and parties did matter."

There are a few problems in solving this type of trouble. Teachers can see that a child is being shunned; however, the unkind treatment that is given is rarely seen. Students do not feel free to inform the teacher of this treatment because this puts them at risk of experiencing the same thing. The largest obstacle might be that the outcast will find it difficult to trust friendly advances after years of harsh treatment.

Our children need to become

sensitive to how the outcast feels. If they can sense that someone is vulnerable, they should be able to understand how they would feel if they were to be treated as underserving of kind treatment. Were you shunned at some time? Do you now feel guilty about the treatment you or your classmates gave to somebody in your class? Tell your children about it. Stories from your past might make a needed impression and improve a child's school life.

Finally, could you encourage your child to make the first friendly advance? Although there

might be social danger in this, we can assure that this would please our Father in heaven. We would be following the commandment to love our neighbor as ourselves.

A new school year will soon begin. Has your child told you that the way a classmate is treated bothers him? As covenant people what can and should we be willing to do to help? Is this an area in the life of our schools where we can improve? Shouldn't we do everything possible to help the outcast? After all, they are all children of the covenant.

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Note From a Very Concerned Mother

It's the first day of school. The time is 6:30 in the morning. Our home is bursting with excitement: "What shall I wear today?" "Does my hair look alright?" "I can't eat my breakfast, Mom, I'm too nervous!" Such excitement the first day of school can bring!

But wait, here sits a child saying nothing, just sitting there with a rather sad-looking face. "Now, honey," I begin to say, "cheer up. It's a new year with a new teacher and friends. Just wait and see, it won't be so bad."

But, deep down inside, this mother doubts her own words. Her heart aches for this child and others like him.

And then the tears start to flow. "But, Mom. I don't want

to go to school. Can't you send me to another school? The kids think I'm stupid; they call me all kinds of names!"

Well, here we go again — another school year; another unhappy child. Under normal circumstances this would be a situation that a mother would know how to handle. But, you see, it isn't that simple. I have a child with a learning problem, a child who has been called "Stupid," "Idiot," "Dumb," a child who tries so hard and still can't get it right.

Naturally, this mother wants to protect her child from this unkind treatment. But what can she do? She can't walk along with this child step by step, every day. She

can't take him out of school and away from this abuse. It's such a sad situation. It's something that should *not* be happening in our Protestant Reformed schools. Aren't we taught that we must do and say all things that are pleasing in the sight of God? Doesn't the Bible also teach us that we shouldn't do things to others that we wouldn't want done to us? Of course it does. Yet this is hard to do because of our sinful nature. But, let's not use that for an excuse.

God has given us all different talents. Some of us are very smart, some of us have to struggle. We'd better always remember that what we are and what we do, if it's done to the best of our ability, is what God wants us to be and do. And when we tease or call names because someone doesn't have the intelligence or the abilities that we have, aren't we teasing and laughing at God's handiwork? Didn't God create this child exactly the way He wanted him or her to be? Should

we mock the work of God? Of course, we should not.

If you children only knew the hurt and frustration that you cause when you use your mouth in such a manner. This is certainly not something you would expect to hear from children in a Christian school! Your lights should be shining so others can see that you are children of God; that you are different from the world.

May you children remember this in your prayers. This is a situation that should not be; but by the grace of God, it *can* be changed. Let's work on it, shall we, kids? Let's try not to call others names, and let's try to be kind to others. The next time you open your mouth to call someone a name or say something mean, stop and think about what you are doing. Think about how *you* would feel if someone said that to or about you, and think about how *God* wants us to act towards each other.

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"And Be Ye Kind One to Another"

"My son (or daughter) hates school. I can hardly get him to go to school in the morning. He says all the kids are mean to him." By the time I hear such a complaint, it is usually a serious situation. Children are usually reluctant to complain if other children are

cruel to them. They are afraid that such cruelty is due to a failure in themselves. Further, they are afraid that the other children will hear that they have complained and will make it still harder for them.

What can a parent do when his

child faces such a problem? Although rare, there is always the possibility that the child is doing something or has an attitude that irritates others. It is wise to talk to the child and observe his words and actions to see if that is true. More often the problem is simply that the others have discovered that the child is sensitive and can be hurt. Often the child will think that there is something wrong with him. He will put pressure on his parents to buy him special things, like clothes, thinking that it will win him the approval of others. Parents should be careful not to do that kind of thing. It doesn't work. It is more important for parents to be supportive of their children without themselves showing malice.

What can the teacher do about the problem of harassment of other children? If the teacher punishes the guilty students upon the complaint of the parent or the child, the child is likely to suffer more harassment because he has "tattled." It's better if the teacher can observe the child being harassed and then punish the guilty ones. That's hard, though, because children are very careful that they don't do those things in the presence of adults. When they are caught, they usually react very indignantly: "We were just having a little fun. We didn't mean to

hurt him. We say those things (or do them) to others all the time, and they don't mind. He just can't take a little teasing."

The heart of the problem is this: some students seek to enhance their own social status by putting down others. Many other students either participate in this harassment or give their assent by silence. They are afraid to help the victim or be friendly with him themselves for fear of losing their own status.

There are several things that we parents and teachers must do. First, we must beware of our own behavior. We must not criticize others or belittle them before our children. We so often give a bad example to our children in the way that we speak about others. Second, we must observe the behavior of our children to see that they are not responsible for such behavior. Strangely enough, the child that is most cruelly treated by others will often be cruel himself if given the opportunity. Third, we must impress upon our children from the time that they are very young that love of one another is a basic requirement of Christian behavior.

Kindness to one another is the mark of Christians. By acts of love for another we show our love for God as a reflection of the love that He has shown to us. "Herein is love, not that we loved God,

QUESTION:

A Mother-Teacher

The Winter, 1986, issue of *Perspectives in Covenant Education* did feature divergent "Viewpoints" on this subject, but I would like to add my opinion to those of the previous writers.

1. a genuine concern that God obligates a parent himself or herself to give academic instruction to the child — that children are given to parents to be educated, trained, and reared only by themselves and that delegating that responsibility should not be done?
2. the inability to meet the rising cost of tuition?
3. a complaint about the way the child is taught in the

4. the inability of the child to adjust to certain conditions or to the school environment or to fellow students?

I would certainly hope that motives 2, 3, or 4 could be partially if not completely alleviated without resorting to "home schooling."

Secondly, I would have to know about the qualifications of the parent to provide instruction in the academic field. We are to be obedient to the laws of the land unless in direct opposition to the Word of God, and there are laws regarding the education of children by qualified persons.

There is also the emotional makeup of the educator to consider. It takes a disciplined, orderly person to see that the instruction is carried out faithfully. Can the parent find enough time to add this time-consuming job to the other home responsibilities? With few exceptions this instruction has to be given