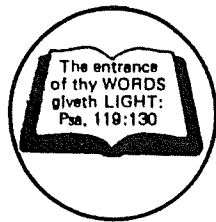


# *Perspectives*

*in Covenant Education*



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**STATEMENT OF PURPOSE:**

*Perspectives in Covenant Education* is a journal regulated and published quarterly, in November, February, May, and August by the Protestant Reformed Teachers' Institute. The purpose of this magazine, in most general terms, is to advance the cause of distinctively Christian education as it is conceived in the Protestant Reformed community. More specifically, the magazine is intended to serve as an encouragement and an inducement toward individual scholarship, and a medium for the development of distinctive principles and methods of teaching. The journal is meant to be a vehicle of communication: a vehicle of communication, not only within the profession, but within the Protestant Reformed community and within the Christian community in general.

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*Check Teachers' Convention  
Go back to old times*

# SPECIAL FOCUS

*When for one reason or another a particular school comes to mind, one is likely to see in his mind's eye an image of the school building. Or he may think of the teachers — for good reason, since it is indeed the teachers that make a school. Perchance he might even think of the principal. But how many of us think of the school's Board members? Members of the Board take care of the school's finances; they hire the teachers; they see to it that the building and grounds are properly maintained; they make bus routes and try, sometimes in vain, to keep one step ahead of old vehicles. But who notices? Once a year the Board members conduct a meeting of the School Society. They're noticed then — and probably criticized for not being able to keep tuition down. Once a year a Board member or two takes a small part in the graduation ceremony. A moment of visibility. Oh, and often their picture will appear in the school yearbook. Apart from that, their work is behind the scenes. Few people even know who all the Board members are. And only their wives know about all the hours which go into the work. Fitting it is, therefore, that we make them, somehow, the object of our "special focus" in the Perspectives.*

*We decided to do that in two ways. First, we asked Mr. Jon Huiskens, who has himself served on a school Board, to write a short article about his father, who was a Board member for a whole lot longer — in our school in Edgerton, Minnesota. Second, we asked Mr. Edward VanEgdom, who has served many years on the Board in our school in Doon, Iowa, to reflect on his own work in the cause of Protestant Reformed Education. So, we have for you this time a tribute to a Board member (Mr. Henry Huiskens), and reflections by a Board member (Mr. Van Egdom). The picture below is of Henry and his late wife Wilhelmina.*

# Recollections of a Father's Service

Jon Huiskens

My first reaction to the request to write this piece about my father's long-term service as a school board member was that there was really nothing much to say other than "Yes, he did, and he did so well." I knew that he served often as a school board member, many times simultaneously while in the consistory. But, what his thoughts were about serving, what his problems were in serving, I really didn't know. You see, he never complained about all the hours he put in, and he never brought school board business home to the dinner table. He kept all that in confidence, as he did his consistory work.

But, having lived in the same community as he, and having taught in the same school as I was trained and of which he served as school board member, I knew that I could reconstruct, at least, the environment in which he served and, in that way, give you some idea of what it was like for him to serve on the school board of the Free Christian School of Edgerton, Minnesota.



First, you ought to know that we lived in a small community (Lake Wobegon South). And, to be separate in this kind of a community was to be the subject of ridicule. He lived with a lot of that — ridicule. Why start this small, two-room school when there is a plenty-good-enough local Christian school with separate grades and teachers for each grade? Why do you insist on providing inferior education to your children, because inferior it just had to be? Why did you give this school such a dumb name, the Free Christian School — no tuition there? And, then, there was the ridicule of a more personal nature, often coming from his family or from those who knew him well — your children are never going to amount to much if you send them to that little school.

Secondly, he had to live with a lot of strife. Some of his years in the school board were during the 1953 split. For a time, both groups continued to send their children to the same school and men from both groups were in the school board, both trying to maintain or gain control. The culmination of all this was two separate graduation ceremonies — one for us and one for them.

Thirdly, the school always had to live with limited resources. This was true for financial resources, but it was also true for personnel. It was always a struggle to stay alive. Teachers were often secured at the last moment (I signed there in the last week of August, fully intending to finish college, until I learned that if I didn't teach, there would be no school that year). That's still true today. When Joanne and I visited the school again this past summer, the difference between the resources of our local Michigan schools and this school were immediately apparent. I know that finances were always a nagging problem. And I know that many times he had to dig a little deeper to keep the school afloat. One thing, in this regard, that stands out in my mind: He could never understand why some churches turned them down when they asked for a collection to be taken for them. That hurt him then and to this day.

You might conclude from this that he dreaded every minute of his service. Not so. We never heard him complain. He always willingly served. The cause was right; the need was clear. There simply was no question about what he must do. ■■■

“... forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord.”  
I Corinthians 15:58b

# The Workings of a School Board

Edward VanEgdom

“For verily I say unto you, if ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, remove hence to yonder place; and it shall remove; and nothing shall be impossible unto you” (Matt. 17:20).

Have you ever lain in the lazy Springtime sun in a lovely spot and looked up to the mountain and said to yourself, “How silly, that I should say, ‘remove,’ and it removes”? A big mountain it was when we first gathered as a society, then also as a school board, with the mandate to establish our own school in Doon. Our own school!? Yes!

I have been asked to put on paper some of the joys, toils, sweat, labor, tears, and above all, the pleasures of a parent, society member, and past school board member.

No, I shall not weary you with all the detailed, chronological proceedings of organizing a school society, looking for a good constitution, canvassing for society members, and electing school board members. Nor will I go into detail about our looking for sites suitable for a school, securing Protestant Reformed teachers, getting a janitor, and last but not least, coming up with the dollars. Oh, yes, and then there’s the setting up of a course of study; and there are the state requirements, the state laws, etc. Not having your own school surely does relieve one of many duties!

We soon learned that we had to adopt some very practical rules, or we would never catch up. Rule number 1: “School board members will serve lunch at board meetings by rotation, and only one item of food may be brought.” (Did you ever bale hay all day, drive twenty-five miles, and get only one small sandwich at 9 o’clock, without having had supper?) No time to waste!

I had the job of going to the city council to get a building permit. Can you imagine entering the council meeting, which averaged about one visitor per year, and, as an almost unknown person in Doon, applying for a permit to build an elementary school? And that’s in the small city of Doon, which already had three elementary schools! With a snicker they asked only one question: “Are you serious?”

The very decision to start to build as soon as the frost was out of

the ground, in order to be able to start our school in September, 1967, so unnerved one of our elderly brothers on the board, that he could not take the pressure. He so informed us by letter, and requested we accept his resignation. He declared that this, in his opinion, could not be done in the time allotted. He always afterwards however met us with a big grin, and with the expression that the Lord surely had been good to us. (He has just recently gone to his eternal reward.)

It appears as if I am saying that it is next to impossible to start your own school. Not so! I do have to admit, however, that it is a task in which one would not want to be involved every year.

Yes, the building is now up! School begins. But did we really have a school, or just a building? We surely wondered as the day drew near. It most assuredly put one face to face with the awesome responsibility to instruct covenant children in harmony with God's Word — and that, “when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up.” That has always been our calling and duty. Now, it extends also to the day school, when in times past we pastured those children out to others.

It finally and fully causes one to realize that to entrust the responsibility to instruct to others is not only shirking one's duty, but really, this is impossible. It always remains the duty of covenant parents, and of no one else, to instruct their covenant seed.

This surely implies that to bring your children to the school house door, and to turn about and run away with a sigh of relief is not a fulfillment of our calling. We, too, must be involved in the classroom, and also very concerned as to what takes place there. We hire the best teachers, and we give them our support. They labor, you know, for the welfare of our covenant children. They labor for the parents, and this to the praise and glory of Him who is our Creator and the Author of our salvation.

That big mountain has surely been removed at a spot on the north edge of the little city of Doon. It yet stands as a giant though, as a fountain of youth.

How do you think Grandpa feels when little Sarah says, "I'm five now and am going to our school next year"?

I'll never forget when one of our elderly ministers said to us at one of our early meetings, "Your children are the only things you can take to heaven."

God hath commanded thy strength. Strengthen, O God, that which  
Thou hast wrought for us. ■■■

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## FEATURE

*When was the last time you paused to examine your family life style? When you did, were you pleased with what you saw? And if not, did you wonder how things ever got where they are now? More often than not, being practical-minded people, we make allowances for those activities in our lives which appear to be practical necessities, and then fall into a pattern of living which provides room for the "needs" of the family. Perceived needs, for example, may dictate that father be at work during the evening hours when his children are at home. Mother may be busy with housework in the evening. . . because family finances require that she be employed during the day in order to make budgetary ends meet. Teenage children hold down after-school, part-time jobs to help pay for tuition. . . or to earn money to buy wheels. And if it isn't an after-school job, it's often an after-school or early-evening sport. A pattern of family life then develops out of the circumstances in the lives of family members. It may be that a particular dimension of family life gets short shrift in the process, but that just has to happen, sometimes, when family members do what they have to do — doesn't it?*

*In a "Reformed Conference on the Christian Family," held last fall in South Holland, Illinois, Rev. Slopsema argued persuasively that that isn't the case — i.e., he argued that we may not simply settle for any pattern of family life which emerges as a consequence of pursuing what is "good" for the family, or "good" for individual family members. In fact, Rev. Slopsema approaches this matter from an interesting point of view. His assigned task in the Conference was to address the matter of family worship. In doing that, he was careful to make clear that we must indeed be sensitive to what God requires. Not only that, we also do well to remember that family worship is a part of thankfulness to God for His great work of salvation for sinners. But he says also, in effect, that we may very legitimately look at the question of what is good for the family. Facing that question, we are involved immediately in the matter of setting priorities. What is good for our family? Is it that Dad be busy every night with school and/or church work? Is it a second income? Is it entertainment? Is it athletics? Or is it family devotions. . . regularly, i.e., daily, twice a day even? Rev. Slopsema*

*proceeded to outline for his audience the great benefits of family worship properly and regularly conducted, and concluded with this advice, that, if our family worship has been crowded by all kinds of pressing needs, it is imperative that we give this matter "our immediate attention." The spiritual welfare of our families requires it. We thank Rev. Slopsema for providing us with a manuscript of that worthwhile speech, in order that we might share it with you our readers.*

## The Role of Family Worship

Rev. James Slopsema

In general, family worship is on the decline today in the Christian home.

By family worship we mean the family gathering together in the home to sing God's praises, to come to God in prayer, and to study God's Word. This is often called family devotions. Perhaps a better term is family worship.

All too often our worship of God as families in our homes is not what it ought to be or what it could be. In some homes the family is seldom home together. Father is perhaps working. The older children are busy with school or other activities. Mother may be involved with projects outside the home. Perhaps she has a job outside the home. Meals are seldom eaten together. And the result is that God is seldom worshiped by the family.

In those homes where the family is together, time is often

so limited and matters so rushed that family worship is rushed, abbreviated, or even eliminated. Even when the family finds time to worship, it often finds family worship difficult, frustrating, and unprofitable, so that family worship is not always given the place it ought to have in the home.

We must understand just how serious this decline of family worship is. The spiritual welfare of our homes and families depends on worshiping God together in our homes as families on a daily basis. If we allow our family worship to decline, we can expect to see a spiritual decline also in our homes and families. We must maintain a strong family worship in the home!

### THE NECESSITY OF FAMILY WORSHIP

To appreciate the true

necessity of family worship we need to understand exactly what true worship is.

There are essentially two elements in worship.

The first element is praise. Worship is praise which the thankful Christian renders to God for His great salvation in Jesus Christ. This praise is brought to God in various ways. The thankful child of God praises His God through singing. He praises His God in prayer. In the widest sense he thanks and praises God by a life of service and obedience to God. From that point of view one's whole life is worship.

The second element of worship is seeking God's blessings. The saint who has tasted the blessings of God's salvation is moved to turn to the Lord to seek His great blessings day by day both for himself as well as those whom he loves. This he does through the use of God's Word (both preached and studied) and through prayer.

We can speak of three different levels of worship. There is worship on the individual level, on the family level, and on the congregational level. We are concerned here with worship on the family level, that is, the gathering together of a family in the home to praise God and seek God's blessings through prayer, singing, and the study of God's Word.

Worship, whether on the individual, family, or congregational

level, is necessary. In a certain sense we can say that the worship of God is necessary because God requires it. The Scriptures everywhere call us to worship God. God expects His people to praise Him with thankful hearts and to seek His blessings from day to day.

But the real necessity of worship is an inner necessity. The need to worship is a necessity that arises out of the very work of God's salvation in the hearts of His people. Those who have truly tasted the great salvation of God are overwhelmed with thankfulness so that they cannot help but break forth in praise to the Lord their God. And those who have tasted the great blessings of salvation cannot help but covet God's blessings from day to day. Hence, they turn to God in worship to seek His salvation. To illustrate this truth with an example we may say that because of the way God made the sun, the sun must shine. It can do nothing else. It is the very nature of the sun to shine. In like manner we may say that the born-again Christian must worship God; for it is the very nature of God's work of grace in him to worship.

And this is the emphasis we must have in our worship. If worship is merely a matter of an external command or duty, worship will most certainly flounder. Our worship of God will flourish and

...all be pleasing to God only when it arises from an inner need of the born-again heart.

The same applies to family worship in particular.

It's striking that the Bible doesn't specifically call families to worship in their homes. Nevertheless the Bible is filled with many examples of family worship. Time and again in the Old Testament we read of the patriarchs (Noah, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob) building altars to worship God at important junctures in their lives. This was essentially family worship. In the New Testament consider Cornelius, the Roman Centurian, to whose house Peter came with the gospel of salvation after the vision in Joppa. Cornelius obviously gathered together in worship daily with his whole household.

This worship of God as families in the history of the church has all arisen as a necessary consequence of God's work of salvation. In harmony with the fact that God's covenant is with believers and their seed, God performs His great work of salvation in family lines. God's salvation is not only for believing parents but also for their children. This spontaneously results in family worship. Were God to save only one from this family and perhaps a couple from that family, family worship would not be possible. Then all worship in the home would be individual.

Nor would there be families in church. But God saves families. And therefore families feel the need to worship God not just on the Lord's day in church but also in their home.

If family worship will flourish in our homes, we must emphasize and build on this inner necessity.

#### THE BENEFITS OF FAMILY WORSHIP

Family worship is very beneficial for the family. This needs to be emphasized. We have just seen that family worship must be more than mere duty. Family worship will flourish only when it is properly motivated. We have that motivation when we see that family worship is very beneficial for the family.

Family worship is of great benefit to the family exactly because the family enjoys God's blessings through its worship of God. We have already noted that an essential element of true worship is the seeking of God's blessings in Jesus Christ. To this we may add that when the family seeks God's blessings in worship, it receives these blessings in rich abundance. Family worship is a powerful means of grace for the family. The family that worships God is richly blessed of God. And this, for the family, is the great benefit of its worship.

We ought to note these blessings more specifically.

One great blessing the family realizes from family worship is a higher level of spirituality in the home and family. The level of spirituality in our homes is declining at an alarming rate. There certainly is not the interest in spiritual things there ought to be. Our attention as families is all too often occupied by the television, by worldly music, by sports and recreation, by vacationing and material possessions. Instead of thinking and talking about things spiritual we are all too often preoccupied with the earthly and material. We see this and are perhaps alarmed. How can we turn this around?

The cure for the worldliness creeping into our homes is regular family worship. The family that day-by-day sings God's praises, studies His Word, and comes to God's throne of grace in prayer can't help but grow spiritually. First of all, the time the family spends in worship is time not spent in worldly pursuits. Time spent in prayer is time not spent in front of the television. Time spent in singing God's praises is time not spent filling the soul with the songs of the world. Time spent with God's Word is time not spent reading questionable novels. But secondly, and more importantly, God uses family worship to increase the level of spirituality in the home. For family worship is a means of grace

in the home that God uses to build up the home spiritually.

And this worship of God must be in the home. For the spirituality of our homes we can not rely solely upon the worship of God by the family in church and the worship of God by our children in the Christian school. Important as that worship is, it is not sufficient to establish a spiritual home. Spiritual homes are built on daily worship of God by the family in the home.

A second benefit of family worship in the home is family unity. There is usually a great deal of tension in our homes among the family members. Husband and wife often have tensions in their marriage. Parents often find their children rebellious, especially their teenage children, so that there is open conflict, almost on a daily basis between parents and children. And how the children of the home can fight with each other! Sometimes the turmoil of the home can be very depressing.

This strife and conflict can't survive when the family worships together day-by-day in the home. When the family in worship studies God's Word, the members are taught by God how they are to behave in love towards one another. What a power this is to establish and restore family unity.

In family worship the family has opportunity to pray for unity

in the home. In prayer the family can bring to the throne of God's grace the various conflicts that have arisen in the home and seek His help. And God hears those prayers so that conflicts are resolved and family members are led by the Spirit of God to live in peace. Just the fact that family members come together in worship to remember one another in prayer and thank God for one another is a great power to restore unity in the home.

Another great benefit of family worship is the opportunity it affords parents to provide instruction and training for their children. Parents have the calling to instruct their children in the fear of God. Given to parents is not only the responsibility of providing their children with the knowledge of the truth. Parents must also teach their children how to live that truth in all godliness.

Parents provide this training in part through the Christian school and in catechism. But this instruction of the church and school is by no means sufficient. It is merely supplemental instruction. The most important elements of a child's training is training only his parents can provide in the home. In the home he must learn from his parents how in a very real and practical way he is to live godly in this world. He must learn how to apply the Word of God to his own life that it may be a lamp unto his

feet and a light unto his path. He must learn how to pray and in prayer to find forgiveness at the cross and the strength of Christ to live in God's service. Only parents who have intimate knowledge of their children in the home are qualified to give this training.

And regular family worship is essential to this training. What a golden opportunity to instruct children in godliness when the family gathers around the Scriptures to worship. What better way is there to teach children to pray and to find their salvation in Jesus Christ than by bringing the family to God's throne of grace in prayer? The parents who lead their children to worship God in their homes will be the parents who will be providing proper training for their little ones.

#### THE PRACTICE OF FAMILY WORSHIP

Family worship will be a great power for good in the home only when it is conducted on a regular basis.

The Bible gives us the example of daily worship. There were every day in the temple the morning and evening sacrifices, at which the people of God gathered to worship. The Psalmist speaks of praying at evening, morning, and noon (Ps. 55:17). Daniel prayed three times daily (Dan. 6:10). From James Alexander's work *Thoughts on Family Wor-*

*ship*\* (a book every parent and young person in the home ought to read) we learn that it was the Scottish tradition of years gone by for the family to gather for family worship at the beginning and the end of the day. We would do well to adopt this Scottish practice. With father gone to work and the children to school during the day, family worship is not really feasible three times a day. But twice a day for family worship certainly is possible and should be considered the minimum for worship every day by the family.

The life style we have adopted today makes this rather difficult. We have allowed ourselves to become so busy that we have very little family life together. We are seldom home as families anymore. When the family is home there is such a rush that family worship is often impossible. This is something to which we must give our immediate attention! We must not and may not allow all sorts of activities, many of which are good and wholesome in themselves, to rob us of our family worship! There is nothing more important

and beneficial for the family than its worship. For the sake of family worship we must be willing to sacrifice. It is time we slow down the pace of life and cut out many of the activities that are taking us from the home and denying us family worship. This may even require a cutback on some of the various church and school activities that have multiplied over the years.

We conclude with some practical suggestions for family worship.

The Scriptures should not just be read during family worship but studied and discussed. Let every member of the family that can read have a Bible to follow along. Don't be concerned to finish a chapter a time. Be concerned rather that a certain amount of time is spent to understand, discuss, and apply God's Word to the family.

The prayers uttered in family worship should be family prayers. They should be prayers in which the needs and concerns of the family are brought to the throne of God's grace. God should be thanked specifically for the blessings He has brought to the family. The needs of the individual members of the family should be mentioned in prayer. Prayers should also be made for the various causes of God's kingdom as they touch the home and family. To make these prayers

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\* (This work along with *The Family* by B.M. Palmer is available under one cover for \$14.00 from the Sprinkle Publications, P.O. Box 1094, Harrisonburg, Virginia 22801.)

ally family prayers it is profitable to have the various members of the family discuss together what ought to be mentioned in prayer. There is room also for more than one family member to pray during family worship.

And don't forget in family worship to sing. We tend to neglect this. But singing is an integral part of worship. We ought to sing the songs of Zion when we gather together as families to worship. This perhaps will be the highlight of family worship for children. How children love to sing! How singing enhances the worship of God for our children!

Finally, don't make the

mistake of setting unrealistic goals or having unrealistic expectations. This only stymies our worship. Set a reasonable time for family worship. This will be determined by a number of factors, chiefly by the size and age of your family. And start at a level that you are able to worship. If for lack of family worship in the past you find worship awkward, don't give up but persevere. Do the best you can, knowing that God will bless your efforts. And always be looking for ways to improve so that family worship becomes more and more beneficial to build up your home.



## PARENTS' CORNER

*For this rubric we have a contribution from a Mr. Mark Brooks. Mark lives in Pittsburgh. He attends there a Presbyterian Church, but over the years he has corresponded with several of our ministers in the Protestant Reformed Churches and has come to appreciate our perspective of things — to the point where, as you will see, when he writes of “our churches” and “our schools,” he means the Protestant Reformed Churches and the schools established in various localities by Protestant Reformed parents. Convinced as he was of the necessity of Reformed, Christian education, and finding nothing of the kind available anywhere near his home in Pittsburgh, he chose correctly for home schooling. Not himself having the privilege of sending his children to a school where the instruction given would be in accord with his own convictions, he knows whereof he speaks when he admonishes us who do to praise God for the “tremendous blessing” we have received “from our God’s good hand.”*



# The Necessity of Christian Schools

Mark Brooks

We are currently witnessing on the religious scene a sharp debate between those who are asserting the absolute necessity of Christian schools and those who see no such necessity and who are, in some cases, urging Christian parents to stay in the public school system in order to be "salt." As a denomination which has been vocally opposed to public schools for covenant youth, we face the question, "are we right or wrong in our position on this issue?" It is my deep conviction that Christian schools, particularly those that are fully Reformed in their world-and-life view, are mandated by Scripture. Public education, in my view, is NOT an option which Christian parents can pursue. I base this on the following grounds:

1. Christian education is vital to maintaining the antithesis. The antithesis is expressed for us in very clear terms in II Corinthians 6:17. In this text we are commanded to "come out from among them (pagans) and be ye separate." This admonition is built upon the fundamental principle that there exists a radical cleavage in the human race between those regenerated by the

Holy Spirit and those who are dead through their trespasses and sins. So radical is this cleavage that there can not and must not be fellowship between fallen mankind, which serves the Devil to do his will, and regenerated mankind, which serves Jehovah to do His will. Therefore, the church is called upon in all ages to "dwell in safety alone" (Deut. 33:28). The church is not to be defiled by the godless ways of the world (Jude 23). But this is exactly what happens when covenant youth are sent off to little Babylons for their "education." Whenever covenant youth are sent off to the public schools they learn not the way of Jehovah but the way of the heathen, which is in direct opposition to the law of God for His people (Jer. 10:2). Our children are taught by this not separation from the world but fellowship with the world. And, note well, our children will lose sight of the antithesis and may even begin to despise the antithesis as a yoke instead of seeing it as the gracious blessing it is intended to be. And when our youth begin to lose sight of the antithesis it is inevitable that our churches in future generations will cast aside the antithesis and,

like most of modern Christendom, go "a whoring after the heathen" (Ezekiel 23:30).

2. Christian education is vital because only Christian education understands the fundamental reason for education. Secular education is constantly grasping in the darkness of the fallen mind for the rationale — the reason for being — behind education. The reasons given range anywhere from "to make good citizens" to "prepare the student to earn a living." But note well that such reasoning is in direct opposition to the teaching of Scripture regarding the rationale for education. Scripture teaches us clearly that the primary purpose of education is the moral and spiritual development of the child. Thus in Proverbs 1:7 we are told that "the fear of Jehovah is the beginning (the basic foundation) of knowledge." The God of the Bible must be recognized as the first premise of education. Above and prior to all considerations of human and social needs, God must be recognized, honored, and served in every field in which the human intellect operates. Therefore, to place a child in an educational environment where the true purpose for education is lost sight of is to ruin the child spiritually. The end result of such an "education" will be a child with a head full of a mass of miscellaneous facts in various detailed fields

but a child who will be utterly lacking in a biblical, unified, valid philosophy of what everything in this life is all about. The choice then before every Christian parent is whether the covenant child will be educated with the basic philosophical presupposition that God is all important (Reformed Christian education) or with the basic philosophical presupposition that the God of the Bible is not real and hence a hoax and an irrelevancy. We must never forget the haunting words of Hosea 4:6, "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge." If we do not want to see our children's children destroyed, then we must see to it that our children are provided with an education which has the right purpose in view and the right basis upon which to build. Any other kind of education is what the apostle Paul called "the godless chatter and contradictions of what is falsely called knowledge" (I Timothy 6:20, RSV).

3. Christian education is vital because it is an unbiblical usurpation of authority for the state to educate. It is the responsibility and duty of the parents first and the church secondly to educate our children. It is instructive to note that in the revival which occurred under King Jehoshaphat's reign it was the Levites and priests who were sent throughout the cities of Judah to teach. The princes which went along were

4. Christian education is an act of parental love. Every parent who reads this would do whatever was in his power to cure his child of a fatal disease, especially if the

I would like to close with a personal word. I live in Pittsburgh and do not have the privilege of attending one of our churches. I am forced by circumstances to "home school" my children. Every parent in our churches should praise God for the tremendous blessing he has received from our God's good hand in having at his disposal a Protestant Reformed Christian education. Pray for our schools. Support them and guard them for future generations to come so that we will continue to be faithful to our covenant God in contending for the faith once for all delivered to the saints. ■■■



## **CURRENT ISSUES**

# **Battering Basals**

Brian Dykstra

The teaching of reading has undergone many changes over the years. All of these changes were based on what was the latest in research. These developments have shaped today's basals. (The common basal series is often designed for grades K-6 and includes student texts which contain stories and reading skills lessons, ditto masters to practice the skills, skills tests to evaluate student mastery of the various skills, and review material if the performance on skills tests did not meet the publisher's criteria.) Robert W. Bruinsma, an associate professor of education at The King's College in Edmonton, Alberta, is not at all happy with the present reading fare in elementary school basals. He wrote an article in the October-November issue of the *Christian Educators Journal* called "Basals, Basals Everywhere and All Their Minds Did Shrink."

Before considering Bruinsma's view of basals, perhaps it would be helpful to take a look at the five most popular approaches to

beginning reading instruction. This might permit you to assess the approach of the basal used in your school and provide for a better understanding of Bruinsma's criticism. The descriptions, which are greatly simplified, are taken from *Psycholinguistics and Reading: From Process to Practice* by Constance Weaver.

The phonics approach emphasizes learning letter-sound relationships in order to sound out words. This approach was especially popular during the early part of this century. The sight word method came next. The goal of this method was to give students a stock of basic words (I, and, the) which the student could recognize on sight. This method was widely used until the mid 1960s when phonics made a comeback. The linguistic and language experience approaches have never had as much popularity as those mentioned before. The linguistic approach presents sets of words to students from which spelling-sound relationships can be inferred (Nan can fan

Dan). In the language experience approach the student dictates a story from his own experience. The student can then read his story with an adult and begin to associate the written words with the spoken words. The final beginning reading approach, the eclectic approach, combines elements from the other four methods.

In explaining his negative view of basals Bruinsma writes:

Why do I feel so negative about the use of basals to teach reading in Christian schools? My unhappiness about this state of affairs can be summarized under three main headings: 1) Basals generally demean language and literature (especially at the primary levels); 2) Basals demean the role of the teacher and the child in the teaching/learning process; and 3) The cost of basals steals money away from more worthwhile curriculum expenditures.

As for the demeaning of language Bruinsma points out:

No one teaches children to talk by presenting them with carefully sequenced bits and pieces of English phonology and syntax. It is becoming increasingly clear that learning to read and write is also most easily accomplished when the learning environment presents

language in whole, functional, and meaningful contexts. That means that even the earliest selections children are asked to read should be real language that is comprehensible and important to learners.

Bruinsma then cites an article by American psycholinguist Kenneth Goodman which appeared in a recent issue of *Language Arts*.

— Basals put undue emphasis on isolated aspects of language: letters, letter-sound relationships, words, sentence fragments, or sentences.

— Basals often create artificial language passages or text fragments by controlling vocabulary, building around specific phonic relationships or word-attack skills, and often create artificial texts by applying readability formulas to real texts.

This artificiality of basal texts is further bemoaned when Bruinsma writes, "... the subject matter is often insipid and trivial, which is a shame given the recent explosion of worthwhile *literature* (his emphasis) being written for young children." Bruinsma concludes the first section of his complaint by pointing out that secular publishers are now displaying a bias against religion and family values.

Many manuals prescribe detailed scripts for teacher-pupil interaction in the mistaken belief, I suppose, that teachers are imbeciles who need to be protected from their own ignorance of how best to teach kids. . . . The sad fact is that most reading lessons involve far more underlining, filling in the blanks, circling of answers, and other non-reading related busy-work than reading. Estimates from a number of widely respected studies indicate that in a forty-minute reading lesson the average individual child spends less than five minutes in actual reading.

A quick phone call to the principal of the Christian school which my children attend provided me with the following statistics. It costs roughly \$1,200.00 per class to buy the initial basal readers and support materials and an average of from \$300.00 - \$500.00 per class per year to maintain and purchase non-reusable components of the series. For what it costs to

The article concludes by saying, "The fact is that children do not need a basal series in order to learn to read; only (some) teachers seem to need one in order to 'teach' reading." Bruinsma promises to provide "principled and workable alternatives to the teaching of reading using a basal series" in his next article.

It is doubtful that anybody connected with learning would put the teaching of reading in the category of "frills." Although some school librarians might be watering at the mouth over the opportunity to buy so many books, how many schools would be willing to take a risk in an area of such educational importance? If other schools took the plunge and met success, would that be enough for any of our schools to test the same waters, or are we doing well enough to continue on the same tack? ■■■



## SAVORING SCIENCE

*In our Fall, 1987 issue we introduced Mr. Faber's "Musings" to our readers. You will recall that he has written, and plans to submit for our use in this space, a number of short articles dealing with various aspects of God's creation which move the child of God to marvel at the wisdom and the power of the Creator. Last time he "wondered" at the creation of light. Incidentally, in that article he made mention of various things which, to the human mind, are incomprehensible — like, for example, the fact that the electro-magnetic wave, which is light, travels at the mind-boggling speed of "over one hundred miles per hour!" How's that again? One hundred miles per hour? Mind-boggling? Ah, yes, it appears as if there was an error in transcription. It's true of course that light travels faster than 100 miles per hour; but a 20th century writer who is attempting to illustrate the incomprehensibility of the actual speed of light will hardly do that by setting it at something greater than the leisurely rate of 100 mph. Mr. Faber chuckled over that, on reading the article after it was printed, and sat down to calculate the more exact speed. At 186,281 miles per second, light would travel, in an hour's time, a distance of no less than 670,611,600 miles. Now that's truly astounding.*

*So much for setting the record straight. Now we listen further to the musings of our friend, as he thinks on the work of God in the fourth day of creation week.*

### Musings

John M. Faber

... while I was musing, the fire burned (Ps. 39:3).

I was musing on the work of The Fourth Day wherein God was creating the things He had invented in His mind. Having created light He then created light-bearers. He "made a sun to

rule by day and a moon to rule by night." Oh, yes, "He made the stars also." That last thought sounds like an afterthought. But that five-letter word "stars" evokes untold numbers of twinkling lights. Astronomers say there are millions of them. That I



can easily imagine, for on a clear night I can see thousands of them. I thought it looks like God took those millions of sparklers and flung them out of His hand like a boy might throw aloft a handful of stones. *His hand?* But I thought God is a spirit, not material, so He cannot have hands. But then I thought that He made me in His image, and I have hands wherewith I can hold, embrace, grasp, and manipulate. Much more real is it that God can hold, embrace, grasp, and manipulate. I read in His Word that He holds my soul in life; and the Perfect Man on Good Friday said, "Into Thy Hand I commit My spirit."

Then I thought of the wonderful way that God dispensed of these light-bearers. Where He sent them, there they were fixed! Any decoration I might hang on a wall by a hook can be jarred askew, or fall down. But those heavenly bodies seem to stay there forever. For ever? No. For God says in His Word that in the Last Days all those light-bearers will be shaken so that they will lose their fixed places, and will fall. I remembered that He said that they shall be one mass of molten bodies. I get the picture that those light-bearers which had been created for the benefit of the people on earth were no longer needed at that Last Day, for then the earth would be in something like a

molten mass, and God's people would be safe in His arms.

Recalling my thought I remembered, "The sun shall rule by day and the moon by night." I realized that God was speaking as though He were viewing them from where we stand, for our sun is but one of a million light-bearers in the huge universe. But, of course, on the Fourth Day He did verily have a people in mind. He fixed the sun to be 193 million miles away from our earth so that its light would not be too cold or hot, nor too bright or dim for the beings by which He would populate that earth.

Musing on the "rule by day" I was overwhelmed by the scope of it. Then I realized that the sun's light is life giving — life to germinate the seeds; to bring forth all green herbs and plants; and to heat the oceans for the life of fish, whales, plankton, and seaweeds.

Then I thought of the moon which is a light-bearer because it reflects the light of the sun. It itself is a cold, lifeless place, as the moon walkers have proved. But it also has a "rule" so that it gives moonshine to assist the starshine on a clear night. It also is a Speech of God, as is all of creation. Then I mused, what does the moon say to me? It says that though the sun has sunk in the west, it is still out there! Then I saw that it has a spiritual

## VIEWPOINTS

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speech through it all. It tells me      And He will rise with healing in  
that this world is in the darkness      His wings!  
of sin, but that The Sun of      *Oh God, how great Thou art!*  
Righteousness is still out there!      ■■■



## VIEWPOINTS

*Are you, or have you ever been, a member of a school Mothers' Circle? If so, you've almost certainly worked on a "fund-raiser." Think back — did you ever spend hours (or, better, days) on a project and, after it was all over, wonder whether the end made all of those means worthwhile? I know I've seen bone-tired mothers slump in a chair after an exhausting day's work and lament, "There's just got to be a better way!"*

*What about that? Is there a better way? Might it be that, in spite of all of our good intentions, we are helping nevertheless to perpetuate a financial problem that ought not to exist? Or are projects by Mothers' Circles and Boosters' Clubs legitimate means to raise much-needed funds — means which might even have side-benefits which go beyond the raising of money?*

*If you've ever wondered about this, you'll enjoy reading the views which follow. Mrs. VanEgdom, of Doon, Iowa, knows what it's like to work on fund-raisers. In addition, she has herself taught for a good number of years in our school in Doon, so she knows too what it's like to be on the receiving end of the benefits for which the fund-raisers are held. On reflection, nevertheless, she says "no." Mrs. Karsten knows too, from personal experience and hard work in the Mothers' Circles of two different schools (Hope [G.R.] and Heritage), and has seen and appreciated many benefits of the efforts of support groups. She says "yes."*

*For their viewpoints, read on. And if you'd like to add your own, please feel free to jot down your ideas and send them to the editorial office of Perspectives. We'll be happy to share them with our readers.*

# School Fund-Raisers-NO

Jeanette VanEgdom

The Ways and Means Committee had met. The first meeting of the Ladies' Circle in the fall was the time for the members of the society to vote what projects were to be adopted to work on during this school term. The purpose of the organization was to strive to unite Protestant Reformed women to promote interest in and give moral support to our own school, as well as to arrange for public programs, such as singspirations, etc. Finances will be free-will offerings at each meeting and at public activities we sponsor. The money received will be used for the school, with the advice of the principal and Board approval...all this according to the constitution of one of our Protestant Reformed School Circles, as written originally. But things change, and the fund-raisers began.

Are these necessary? Should there be fund-raisers at all, or just freewill offerings?

At some time in our church history, there were Ladies' Aid sales in the church basement. Women did their work eagerly, getting ready by sewing, doing embroidery work, quilting, and baking. Then came the big night. Some people could only donate a

little, some a lot, and others not at all. Then again, some didn't come because they were too poor to buy, while others, with money, could buy without stopping. This caused hard feelings and coveting. Because of the offense to some, the Ladies' Aid sales were stopped.

I could name a person who, because of lack of time or interest, bought something to donate to the sale. Bringing it to the auction that evening, that individual bought it back for less than she paid for it in the store. Wouldn't it have been better just to donate the money for the item and what they paid at the sale to the school, without having to go through all the hassle? People, however, seem more willing to give if they get something for it in return. Here, it seems, greed would be a sin fallen into. Also, there is the competition of out-doing the neighbor, and the sin of pride, which reveals itself in displaying how much one has brought or bought.

I don't think fund-raisers are necessary. From the viewpoint of the parents, the responsibility of the instruction and bringing up of children is primarily and principally theirs, as they answer "Yes"

to the third baptismal question. Others in the church also have a calling. The "let-the-parents-take-care-of-their-own-kids" attitude must certainly be condemned, but as parents we pledge to bring up our children in the "aforesaid doctrine." Giving for the causes of the kingdom, the Christian School, is giving that comes *first*. Giving for kingdom causes ought to come first, from the cream of the paycheck, not as an after-thought, or only if you think there will be enough for the rest of the month. We, as Christians, must get our priorities straight. We should give freely. We must give as liberally as we receive. We must contribute as we are able (Deut. 16:17), or as the Lord has prospered us (I Cor. 16:2).

We must give with cheerfulness. The Lord loves a cheerful giver. This implies that the giver *wants* to give. The giver has faith, faith in the promise of God that all other things shall be added unto him. He knows that giving, rather than receiving, is blessed. The giver is thankful. He is aware that he has been given everything as a blessing by God's grace. He gives *regularly*, as an example to teach his children the blessedness of giving.

For the Bible believer, tithes and offerings are God's method of financing. Therefore, fund-raisers should not be necessary. Free-

will offerings give all in the church the means to help support the school. These are taken in worship services, singspirations, and so forth. Another reason for not supporting fund-raisers is this: Many wish to solicit the support of the community in our fund-raising activities, such as selling candy or coupon books to friends, or soliciting donated items from area businesses for auctions and bazaars. In this way we show the weakness of not being able to support ourselves. We, as parents and fellow believers, should support our own schools. We should not have to rely on the world to support us.

Auctions and bazaars, types of fund-raisers, are no longer free-will offerings. Soup suppers and singspirations lean more to having freewill offerings to support our school, but some wish to charge so much per plate, often excluding the poorer members this way. They no longer have the important sense of giving from the heart, and whatever they can. They have to buy things for a price to support the school.

Preparing for auctions and other fund-raisers as making crafts for the bazaar, contacting people, even the time spent setting up and cleaning up afterwards, can take away from something more important. The time could be better used for studying catechism with the little ones, supervising

homework, reading aloud, singing God's praises and studying His Word, and preparing for and attending societies. That, too, is fellowship, which some people stress as being the reason for sponsoring various of the fund-raising activities.

Usually, it is not so much a matter of poverty, but of pure carnality, that keeps us from giving; so we really don't need these fund-raisers. Because of our carnality there is so much more satisfaction in spending money for that second car, for that cabin at the lake, for trips and bowling, or even such unnecessary things as candy and cigarettes, as well as a host of other things we might mention. "Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you."

However, if we are in dire need, the churches have a responsibility, through the diaconate, to help their members who cannot

pay their tuition. If the need requires, do not hesitate to appeal to the mercies of Christ for financial aid and spiritual comfort.

It should be the deepest desire of the hearts of covenant parents to see their children instructed in the truth of God's Word. That Word is a priceless treasure for which they will sacrifice all. So, if the parents and church cooperate and give faithfully, there should be no need for fund-raisers.

In our Christian stewardship, we confess, "All that I am I owe to Thee." Let us fulfill our calling and be cheerful and thankful in our giving. If we are not exercising good stewardship, the elders of the church may need to instruct us in our God-given calling. If we do exercise our good stewardship by faithfully giving, we can do away with the fund-raisers.

■□■

## School Fund-Raisers-YES

Karen Karsten

I can vividly recall the scene. Having enrolled my first child in kindergarten, and eager to be involved in school-related activities, I attended the first meeting of the Hope Protestant Reformed Christian School Mothers' Circle in Walker, Michigan. After routine

business, we finally came to the list of "ways and means" for the next year. I was amazed at the number of projects on which we had to vote. But what followed in the election of ways and means completely overwhelmed me. As project after project was passed

Almost unanimously by this group of mothers, I began to wonder how we would ever be able to organize and plan so many activities. I certainly lacked the skills. During that first year I did much observing and asked many questions. By the end of the year, I was quite convinced that the Hope School Mothers' Circle was a very remarkable organization, a vital support group in the functioning of Hope School. That was seven years ago and today I have three children in Heritage Christian School and am an active member of the school's Fundraisers. What I realized seven years ago, I am most convinced of today — our schools *need* supportive fund-raising groups.

But what are the benefits of such groups? The first benefit is obvious — funds for Christian education. The funds from Mothers' Circle projects are often thought to be used for educational frills, nice little extras to make school a bit more pleasant. And some funds are used for that purpose. But when I look over the list of major purchases by the Heritage Fundraisers in the past two years, I find a number of educational essentials such as textbooks, desks, and computers. With the rising costs of educational materials, our school boards have come to rely on the school's fund-raising groups to help carry

this financial load. And it is surely a privilege to shoulder some of this responsibility!

A second important role our fund-raising groups play in our schools is that of providing an excellent means of communication between the faculty and parents. The fund-raising projects themselves get our parents into the school where they can observe firsthand the newest bulletin board display or Johnny's latest art project hanging in the hall. Aside from the fund-raising projects, most of our Mothers' Circles provide the school with a variety of non-profit activities such as room mothers for each teacher, operating the school library, and serving refreshments at various school functions. All of these activities, along with the fund-raising projects themselves, are ideal avenues of communication and interaction between the parents and the staff. This close contact with the daily school life of our children helps us to understand the stresses and joys our children face each day and the challenges and problems our teachers face in educating them. Those of us with busy families must often remind ourselves that what goes on in school is indeed our business. It is so easy to wave good-bye to our children in the morning and let our teachers take over until 3:30. But if our schools are to continue to offer

this very opportunity. Some women are great organizers and masters in financial matters. Others are wonderful craftsmen and creative thinkers. Still others are hard workers and promoters of good humor and high morale. Over the years I have personally learned many practical skills and spiritual truths from working alongside of women who are gifted in each of these areas.

So let's cheerfully encourage and support these groups! Let's be kind and constructive in our criticisms and generous in our willingness to help and give. And let's remember to thank God that He uses us in *many* ways to accomplish the work in His kingdom!



# BULLETIN BOARD

1



Keynote Address — Prof. Hanko



Working Coffee-breaks

## 33rd Annual Teachers' Convention 1987

Agatha Lubbers

More than 60 teachers from schools located in the Grand Rapids area, South Holland, Illinois, and Iowa met at Covenant Christian High for the 33rd annual P.R.T.I. Convention. One teacher came from Lynden, Washington. Teachers from the Loveland and Redlands areas were not in attendance this year.

The Convention began on Thursday morning with Registra-

tion. Mr. Doug DeBoer called the Convention to order. Opening devotions led by Mr. John Kalsbeek preceded the Keynote address by Prof. H. Hanko. He spoke on the topic, "Luther on Education."

After the lecture, a delicious brunch was served in the Hope Church basement. Teachers then reconvened at the high school.

Teachers could choose between



two sectionals. In one sectional the South Holland Staff divided teachers into three groups so they could discuss the topic "Cooperative Efforts in Planning for Bible Teaching." It was agreed at the end of this sectional that the schools and Federation should make efforts to develop a Bible curriculum. Unnecessary overlap between the church and the school ought to be avoided.

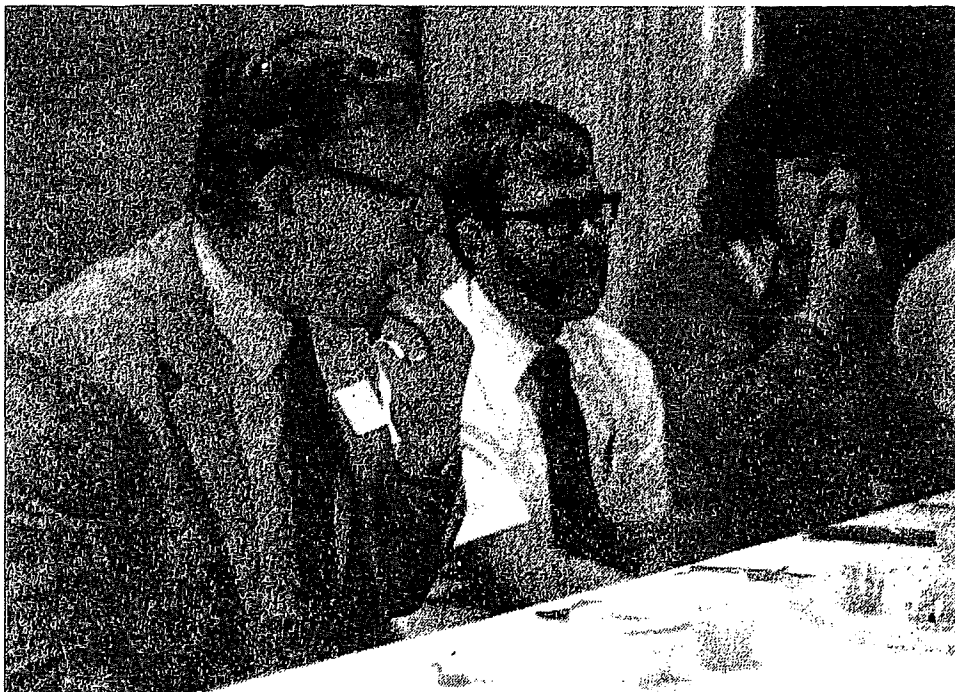
Gary Lanning led the sectional that was entitled, "Idea Session on Uses of the V.C.R. in the Classroom."

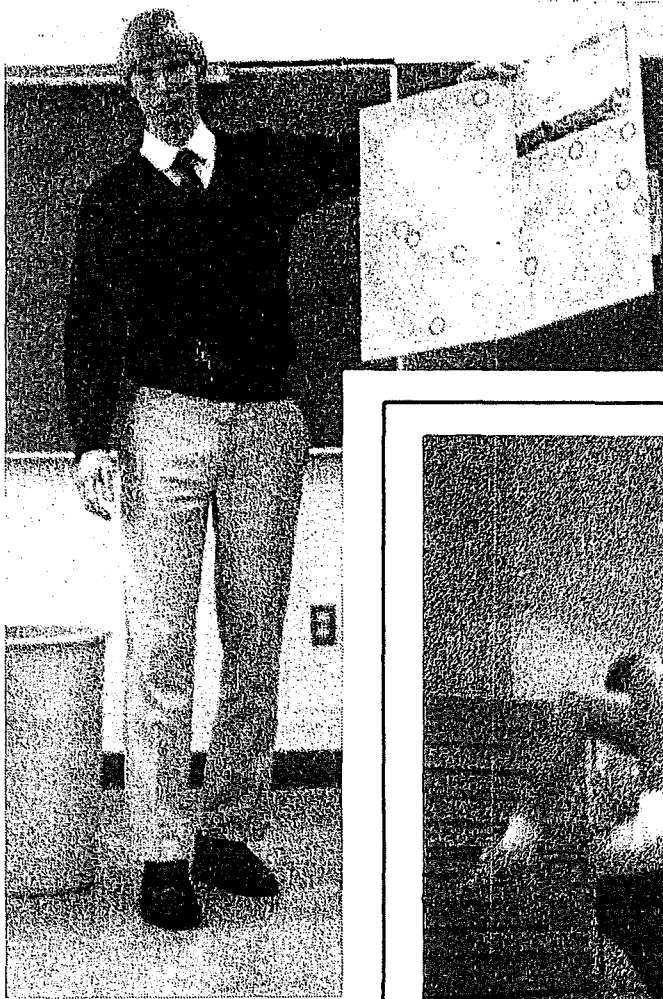
The Institute membership numbers 48 teachers and this year at least 13 more teachers were added to the membership roles so that the Institute membership is now over 60! It is a

pleasure to see new members join the Institute each year. It is particularly gratifying to some of the older teachers to see former students become members with them of this professional organization.

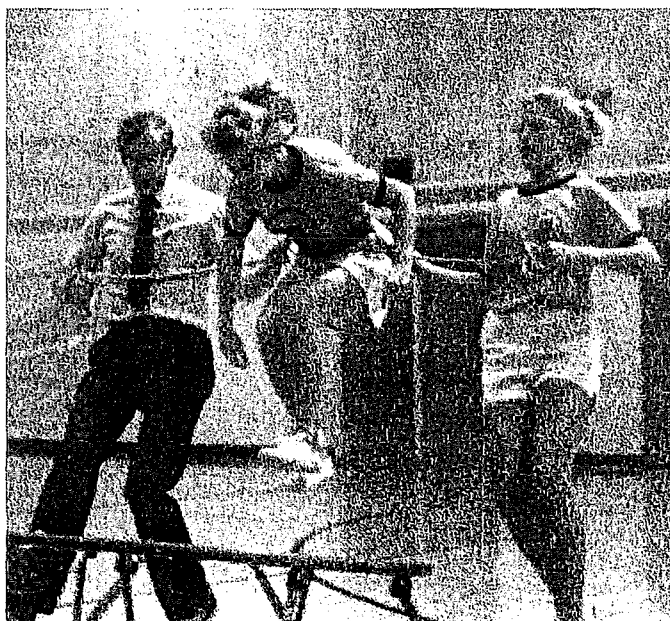
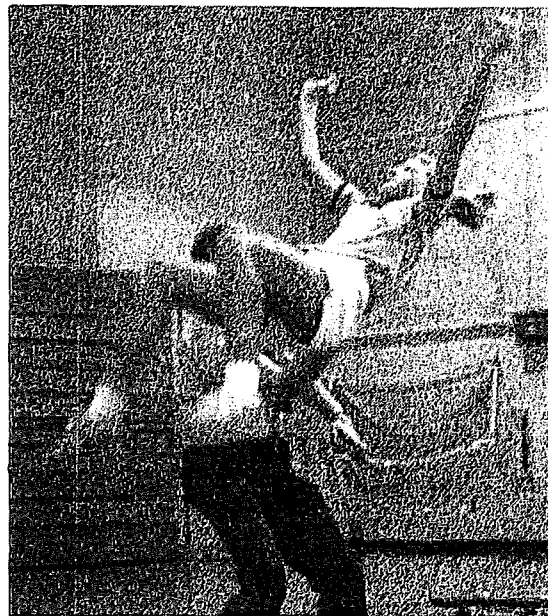
It is during the Convention that the Institute conducts the major business meetings for the year. During the course of the school year the Institute has three other meetings but the major business which includes the election of officers is conducted during the business meetings of the Convention. One of the concerns of the Institute this year was to make a decision concerning traveling funds for teachers who must come great distances to the Convention and who cannot

#### Brunch Time





Brian  
Dykstra  
on  
Classroom  
Games



Fred's  
Flyers  
in the  
Gymnasium



Doug Boone on Reading



Doug DeBoer, chairman

expect much assistance from the boards in their areas.

The afternoon session of Thursday also included three other sectionals. Mr. Fred Hanko conducted a demonstration sectional using students from Hope School. It was called "Fred's Flyers: Tumbling Techniques for all Grades." Mr. Brian Dykstra conducted a sectional called "Games in the Classroom" and Mr. Doug Boone led a sectional called "Reading in the Content Areas."

Thursday evening of each Convention is reserved for the annual banquet. Wives and husbands of conventioners also attend the

banquet. A delicious dinner was served by the Catering Committee of Hope Church. Teachers were free to attend the Reformation Day lecture after the banquet.

When Friday morning, October 30, dawned clear and crisp the teachers reconvened at Covenant at 8:45 for a song service and devotions led by Mr. Jerry Koning.

Sectionals for the early part of the morning included the following:

- A math sectional, led by Mr. Vern Huber;
- Use of Daily Newspapers in the Classroom, led by Mr. and Mrs. Skip Hunter;

— Benefits of All-school Programs, led by Mr. Gerald Kuiper.

After a delicious coffee served by Mrs. Evelyn Langerak and Mrs. Linda Kalsbeek the Convention reconvened in a general meeting for all conventioners. The program featured a Symposium-Forum chaired by Mr. Calvin Kalsbeek on the topic "Academic Competition." Miss Winifred Koole and Miss Agatha Lubbers defended the position that academic competition, properly controlled, was good for our schools and the students. Mr. Doug DeBoer and Mr. Deane Wassink took the position that the results and efforts of such competition are not beneficial to the schools or the students. A lively discussion prevailed after the presentations by the members of the

Symposium, and the topic prompted many questions and comments by members of the audience.

The morning concluded with a session of unfinished business and the new president, Mr. David Harbach, led the convention in closing devotions. The teachers always enjoy the hours of fellowship provided by these conventions and a cordial spirit prevailed throughout the Convention.

The Convention adjourned after the spirited singing of "Now blessed be Jehovah God, the God of Israel. Who only doeth wondrous works in glory that excel. And blessed be his glorious name to all eternity; the whole earth let his glory fill. Amen: So let it be."

The Convention next year will be in South Holland.

■□■



The Old-Timers

## from the TEACHERS' LOUNGE

*In our "Special Focus" we made mention of the fact that Jon Huisken is a former school Board member. More than that, he's also been a teacher, having taught for a year in Edgerton and then for another five in Hope School in Grand Rapids. When he left teaching, back in 1969, he didn't leave the business of education. He's been at Hope College, in Holland, Michigan ever since that time, serving most of those years as Registrar. So, though he's not currently a school teacher, we'll extend to him anyway the double honor, not only of appearing twice in the same issue of Perspectives, but also of speaking from the Teachers' Lounge.*

*Actually, of course, it's more correct to say that Mr. Huisken does us the honor. As one who has for many years had first-hand knowledge of the products of a good number of Christian high schools (including our own), he is well qualified to speak to the strengths and weaknesses of our graduates, and to give good advice to the college-bound students of our junior and senior high schools. We were delighted therefore that he agreed to do that for us, and that in the writing of his article he threw in a little advice for parents and teachers too. We all do well to listen closely to Jon's assessment of how "our students stack up as high school graduates," and to consider very seriously the remedies he proposes for the deficiencies he perceives.*

## An Assessment

Jon J. Huisken

"Education is one of those rare fields in which everyone is an expert. After all, everyone has gone to school. We all know a good teacher when we see one, and we all know, like our parents before us, that our kids aren't getting as good an education as we did.

What's more — nearly everyone knows what ought to be done about it."

From *Focus*, 1987  
a publication of ETS

When asked to give my opinions on the preparation of to-

day's high school graduates for college-level work, the above quotation caught my eye. It pretty much sums up the current debate on the state of American education — from elementary school through graduate school. To say that American education is getting a thorough going-over is probably an understatement — at least it is getting a thorough going-over verbally. Allan Bloom's book, *The Closing of the American Mind*, is a current bestseller and is critical of American education, particularly its loss of moral absolutes in favor of cultural relativism. Earlier reports such as "A Nation at Risk" caused a furor amongst educators. Fact is, the United States has gradually, but surely, slipped in its effectiveness to educate. Countries such as Japan, the Soviet Union, West Germany, and the Scandinavian countries have supplanted us as leader in developing a literate populace. All of this evaluation and discussion should also give us pause to consider our own educational system as well. We often boast of superior education, but have we ever had the courage to test our products? Are we really being as effective as we claim to be?

As background for my assessment of the products of today's high schools, consider some research findings from ETS (Educational Testing Service). Research

at such places as ETS has demonstrated that several things have happened over the last twenty years: 1) 17-year-old students are reading at a slightly higher level than before, but only five percent of this group have developed advanced reading skills and strategies. Most, in fact, read only at a superficial level and rarely get to the deeper meaning of an article or a piece of literature. 2) Results from writing assessments are very disheartening. Few students can write analytically. Only 25% of eleventh graders can write analytic prose adequately. Further, only 22% of eleventh graders can do an adequate job in persuasive writing. Students are generally unable to develop logical arguments and support them with facts. 3) Critical thinking and reasoning skills are not very highly developed. Few are able to write original material. 4) The arts, specifically the visual arts and music, are given short shrift in the budgeting process and therefore most students leave high school with very little aesthetic sense and little idea of the creative process.

Doesn't sound very positive, does it. Well, what about us? How do our students stack up as high school graduates or nearly graduates-to-be? Have we the courage to hear an assessment, unscientific though it may be?

You must bear in mind as you read this that what I have to say is opinion. But let me qualify that. For nearly twenty years now I've sat in the registrar's chair at Hope College. Now, not many people understand what a registrar does; nor do most who have gone to college have much desire ever to see one or deal with one. But, critical to my position is dealing with the academic standing of students. I have the onerous task of telling young people (and some older ones these days) of how they're progressing toward a degree and what burners need to be turned on if they ever do expect to get one. (I also do, by the way, have the joyous task of placing people on the deans' list and of seeing those who had fires lit under them cross the stage at commencement time.) I've seen nearly twenty classes of freshmen enter and progress through the college, including two of my own daughters. My own experience, coupled with discussions with numerous college professors who deal daily with current high school products, will be the matter upon which I draw in this article. You must also remember that what I present are generalizations. So, if it is in your character to rustle up an example or two contrary to what I have to say so that you can in that way avoid consideration of the prob-

lem, I hope you will soon settle down and consider the issue. Now, with all that qualification stuff out of the way, we get to the issue.

My sense is that what the likes of ETS are finding is true, although not as dramatically as what a national sample indicates (we get the better students and therefore the national sample data does not fit our students). I'm speaking now of high school graduates, including my own children, that enter college.

Let's begin with reading. In the first place, most students are not used to a lot of it. I've talked to lots of students, good students according to high school reports, who are totally overwhelmed by their reading assignments. Secondly, many students have difficulty reading at the level required, in regard, now, to both meaning and difficulty. Many students find it difficult to get beyond the obvious points made by an author to the real "meat" of a piece. Subtleties of presentation — satire, irony, etc. — are often missed. The author's philosophy or perspective is often not detected. Vocabulary is oftentimes not very highly developed in these students. (I was tempted, in this regard, when asked to send notice to incoming freshmen that they needed to buy a standard handbook for English writing as well as a

(a dictionary, to include a recommendation that they buy a thesaurus, too, so that instead of saying "he goes" they might be able to use "say" or "said" occasionally.) This says nothing yet of the breadth of reading desired for college-level students which in the minds of most faculty is seriously deficient.

Secondly, there's writing (yes, we'll get to arithmetic). I realize that it takes a lot of time and effort to teach and grade writing, but there's simply not enough required. Professors regularly complain not only about the lack of good mechanical skills but also about the lack of clear thinking (which, by the way, goes back to good reading skills — the two, reading and writing — are most directly related). The ability to reason, the ability to use an advanced vocabulary are skills which, in the judgment of most faculty, are lacking in today's college students.

Then there's arithmetic. In far too many cases, basic arithmetic skills — fractions, decimals, percents, etc. — are lacking. Algebraic equations have been known to cause near hysteria. To say that quantitative skills are lacking in today's students is not an exaggeration.

And, then, what's happened to the good, sound geography courses that used to be taught in the middle grades? Social studies

courses just don't do the job. A case in point was a history professor's question recently about the location of the Persian Gulf. Not many knew where it was. Few could locate Iran let alone Iraq and Afghanistan. Strange, isn't it, that in a world where "global" concerns are the norm, most of our high school graduates don't know the globe very well.

One more item, and that perhaps is the most frustrating one to me. I am concerned by the lack of historical sense and the lack of appreciation of history demonstrated by our own high school graduates. I relate this item particularly to our own high school graduates (and to many young adults, as well) because I am particularly concerned with the well-being of our own community. Christians *must* have a sense of history and of God's hand in it. Christians *must* be alert to current events so that they can read the signs of the times. But, it doesn't seem to be there. That, to me, is a shame. God speaks every day through history, and we ought to perk up our ears a bit so that we have an understanding (not just knowledge of) what's going on in the world today.

This says nothing yet of a student's understanding of the metaphors of nature, God's elegant book. But that could be the topic of another article.



So far, my assessment, except for the instance of history, has taken into account college freshmen from all over the country. But, I want to make one more comment specific to our own high school graduates and that is that not enough of them are continuing their education beyond high school. The percent going on to college is below that of similar Christian high schools and, I would dare say, is below that of many public high schools. Something, I think which ought to concern us.

A pretty negative assessment, don't you think? Let me end, then, on a positive note. Today's students are oftentimes proclaimed to be brighter and smarter than those of any previous generation (this is quite often said by politicians looking for the "youth" vote), and, in a sense, this is true. Certainly they know more about the advancements in science and technology. Certainly they know more about the human body and the human mind. The advancements in medicine and space research are ample testimony of this increased knowledge.

But, I believe the rest of the assessment has to stand as stated. Students today need to read more, write more, compute more, think more.

Any solutions? Several which come readily to mind. The first

involves our homes. Attitudes must change toward education (not only college education but all levels) and its worth. To ignore the necessity (almost) of education or training beyond high school is to have a myopic view of today's society and today's workplace. To believe, further, that higher education is only for preachers and teachers, and therefore no encouragement or help is given to those who want to enter other professions or vocations is to deprive our young people, and eventually you and me, from having Christians in those professions where they are desperately needed — medicine, law, psychiatry, to name just a few. Secondly, the faculties of our schools, along with our school boards, need to assess *what* they are doing and *how* they are doing it. I realize, having been there, that there is tremendous frustration in trying to get students to do more in school when there appears to be so little motivation to learn anything at all. The easiest thing to do is follow the path of least resistance — back off and be content with not doing as much as you know you need to do. But, I hope that our faculties don't do that. Insist on reading; insist on good writing. Take the time to assess your methods of teaching. Is there too much regurgitation of material? Is there time for the development of

analytical and critical thinking skills, and, possibly, for the development of reasoning skills?

Well, what do you make of all this? Chalk it up as an assessment of a middle-aged academic who's lost his enthusiasm for young folks, or probably one who has seen his 25th high school class

reunion come and go and doesn't remember where he was at that age? I hope not. There's too much at stake here. The future of our schools and churches depends upon these young folks now coming through our system. We need, and ought to insist upon, the best. ■■■

Did you find the teacher "old-timers" in "The Good Ol' Days" picture in our Fall issue? Here they are: Top row, 6th, 7th, and 8th from left are John Kalsbeek, Harry Langerak, and Mary Beth Engelsma Lubbers, respectively. The teacher is Miss Jess Dykstra, and the young man standing to her right is now the pastor of our South Holland congregation, Rev. David Engelsma. And front row, 2nd from right, is Gerald Kuiper. How did you do? The picture, incidentally, was taken in Hope School's first year of operation. Hope's enrollment was low in those early days, as is evident from the fact that Miss Dykstra found herself in charge of four grades: 1st, 2nd, 3rd, and 4th. Her four future teachers were all 1st graders at the time, and Rev. Engelsma was one of the "big kids" (a 4th grader).

## NEW RUBRIC

That's right, we're going to try something new. The Spring issue of our magazine will see the debut of "Dear Miss Koole."

You can probably guess already from the title the nature of the rubric. Do any of you parents have a question about education that you'd like to have answered by a seasoned veteran? For that matter, maybe some of our teacher-readers have a vexing problem of some kind, which she would like to see treated in a more or less formal fashion. Whoever you are, whatever your question, here's your chance to hear from a professional. Write "Dear Miss Koole" and you'll see your answer in print in *Perspectives*.

Winifred Koole is a veteran's veteran. When Adams Street School opened for the first time in 1950, Miss Koole stood in front of one of the crowded classrooms. She stayed at Adams for 13 years, then moved to Hope School and has been teaching there ever since. Just a couple of years more, therefore, and she'll be able to chalk up number 40 in the profession.

With that kind of background, she'll be able to speak knowledgeably on a host of different subjects. . . not on everything, of course, since her experience has been limited pretty much to the Intermediate Grades. But at every level she has friends easy to consult. So . . . you can expect an authoritative answer on any topic of interest.

Needless to say, you'll not be able to use this medium for questions to which you need an *immediate* answer. (For those, just pick up the phone and call your school principal.) But for other types of questions, we'd certainly like to hear from you — not so much because we want to be of help to an individual reader, but because we can take for granted that what is of concern to one reader will almost certainly be of concern to a good many others. No problems are unique. This rubric therefore will give us an opportunity to address the kinds of issues which arise out of the trenches, so to speak, not just those which come from the ivory towers. But. . . we need your help.

How can you help? Send your "Dear Miss Koole" questions directly to Miss Koole, at her home address:

2068 Cranbrook Dr. N.E., Grand Rapids, MI 49505.

And remember, please, that a lot of work has to go into the writing, organizing, typesetting, printing, and mailing of each issue. So, try to meet the following deadlines for submitting questions:

Spring issue — March 1; Summer issue — June 1;  
Fall issue — September 1; Winter issue — December 1.

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