

fathers give of their time and energy to voluntarily serve in the school? These men and women have very busy lives and there's no payment for this work. To the world it makes no sense! *But thinking covenantally it makes perfect sense.* These board members and Ladies Aid members, the school secretary and the librarian, the kindergarten helpers and janitors, committee members and others—all serve and sacrifice and give of themselves because they understand their responsibility to the body of Christ *which they love.* What a testimony of unselfishness these parents give to us and our children! What a powerful witness in our “me-centered” world of today!

It was talk show star Oprah Winfrey who said that the main problem in the world today is low self-esteem. Oprah, you could not be more wrong. The problem today is *TOO MUCH* esteem for self and *TOO LITTLE* esteem for each other (and for Christ). “It’s not all about me.” I wonder how many problems in home, church, and school would be solved if we could understand (and practice) that truth.

We need each other!

We need each other! In all the debate between supporters of Christian schools and those who advocate home schooling, this to me is the crux of the issue: *we need each other!* We need each other’s talents and abilities. We need each other’s hard work and sweat in the common everyday tasks. Thinking covenantally, we realize that *together* we stand—or fall.

We need each other—to strengthen and encourage one another in the Lord. We need each other—to share the load, to bear the burden. We need each other—to rejoice in the Lord together! And in the Christian school we have a wonderful opportunity to show to each other and our children what it means to be a body—a body of believers, united, standing as one, covenantally strong in the Lord.

Covenant Christian. What a beautiful name we have for our school here in Lynden, Washington! But may it be to us more than just a name on a sign. May it also be a way of thinking...and a way of living.

A Brief History of Christian Education (1)

Rev. Nathan Langerak

“For I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the LORD, to do justice and judgment; that the LORD may bring upon Abraham that which he hath spoken of him” (Gen. 18:19).

“Whether you promise and intend to see these children, when come to years of discretion...instructed and brought up in the aforesaid doctrine, or help or cause them to be instructed therein, to the utmost of your power?”¹

“The consistories shall see to it that there are good Christian schools in which the parents have their children instructed according to the demands of the covenant.”²

Introduction

Over the entrance of the Winchester cathedral school in England this terse hexameter greeted the arriving students: “*Aut disce, Aut discede; Manet sors tertia caedi.* Learn or depart. A third alternative is to be flogged.”³

Perhaps many a teacher would like to put this verse over the door of his classroom to spur on the lazy student. Yet, apart from bringing a smile to our faces at the thought of those hapless students who endured the rigors of the Winchester headmaster, this little saying is instructive for the history of Christian education. It shows that even in medieval England there was education in schools and that

1 The third question to the parents in the *Form for the Administration of Baptism*, in *The Confessions and the Church Order of the Protestant Reformed Churches* (Grandville, MI: Protestant Reformed Churches in America), 260.

2 Church Order of the Protestant Reformed Churches, Art. 21, in *Ibid*, 387.

3 Will Durant, *The Story of Civilization*, vol. 4 (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1950), 915.

education of the children in schools is a Christian practice. This verse also demonstrates that Christian education has a history, and in that history education has developed. Winchester school was attached to the cathedral, and monks and priests instructed the students exclusively in Latin. How different from today's Christian education. How different, too, was the discipline. Since when has there been the actual administration of corporal discipline in the schools?

Education—Christian education—has a history. It is this history, briefly, that is the interest of this article.

Schools: A Reformed Interest

As the Christian tradition was deeply interested in the education of the children of the church, so the Reformed faith has a profound interest in the establishment and maintenance of Christian schools. This interest in schools is evident from the fact that Article 21 of the Church Order of Dordt (1618–19), which mandates that consistories see to the Christian schools, was adopted by the Reformed churches already in 1586.⁴

The Protestant Reformed Churches (PRC) also have a deep commitment to Reformed, Christian education. At every meeting of classis each consistory is asked, “Are the poor and the Christian schools cared for?”⁵ The maintenance of the Christian schools is placed on an equal footing with the care of the poor. That question must be answered frankly and honestly by every consistory. If the consistory has and cares for the Christian schools they answer, yes. If the consistory does not have and maintain the Christian schools they must answer, no. But answer they must. At the yearly visitation of all the churches of a classis, the church visitors ask every consistory about the schools: “Does the consistory see to it that the parents send their children to the Christian schools?”⁶ This question is itself drawn from the mandate of Article 44 of the Church Order that the church visitors “take heed whether the minister and the consistory...properly promote as much as lies in them, through word and deed, the up-building of the

4 Idzerd Van Dellen and Martin Monsma, *The Church Order Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1941), 93.

5 Van Dellen and Monsma, *Commentary*, 180.

6 The Christian Reformed Church in 1922 drew up the two questions (see Van Dellen and Monsma, *Commentary*, Appendix 7, 367). In slightly modified form, the Protestant Reformed Churches still uses them today.

congregation, in particular the youth”⁷ Apart from the preaching nothing is more conducive to the, “up-building of the congregation, in particular the youth,” as solid, Reformed education.

According to her official documents and by her commitment to Article 21 of the Church Order the Protestant Reformed Churches manifest a profound interest in the establishment and maintenance of the Christian schools, an interest that is both Reformed and Christian. Believing parents must establish and maintain those schools, and ministers and consistories must vigorously promote them by word and deed.

We frankly admit, however, that our view of the schools as institutions formed by parents, established on the basis of God's covenant, and promoted and supported by consistories is of recent origin. For the recent origin of this idea we are neither ashamed nor apologetic. This view of the schools has a history and is a development of antecedent views of the schools in church history.

It is also a view of the schools that was born of struggle and controversy. The schools, it seems, are almost always embroiled in some controversy. This has been true in the PRC. This was true in the Christian Reformed Church (CRC) before that. It was true in the Reformed churches of the Netherlands after the Synod of 1618–19. It was true of the Reformation itself.

Origins of Reformed Education in the Netherlands

The Reformed view of schools was first clearly stated in the Netherlands in the late 1800s or early 1900s. The Dutch speak of the time period when this view of the schools was being forged in the fires of controversy as the *schoolstrijd*, the school controversy.⁸

The struggle occurred in the Netherlands after the French Revolution and with the secularization of the Dutch state schools under the occupation of Napoleon Bonaparte. Until that time the Dutch churches took it for granted that the schools were run either by the state or the church, that is, that they were either

7 Church Order, Art. 44, in *Confessions and Church Order*, 394. The original reading of Article 44 specifically mentioned that the concern of the church visitors must be for both church and school at a time when the churches in a large part ran the schools. This was changed in 1914 taking into account that the schools were being governed by parental societies over which the church did not have immediate authority (Van Dellen and Monsma, *Commentary*, 193).

8 Harm Bouwman, *Gereformeerde Kerkrecht*, vol. 1, (Kampen: Kok, 1928), 212. All translations from this book are mine.

public or parochial schools. In each kind of school the Dutch state church (*Her-
vormde Kerk*) wielded considerable power. The revolution of the Dutch govern-
ment under French occupation changed that by outlawing certain dogmatic re-
ligious instruction in the state schools and closely monitoring it in the parochial
schools.⁹ When the royal House of Orange regained control of the Netherlands
after the Congress of Vienna, these changes were made permanent and the Re-
formed churches were forced to examine its view of the schools.

H. Bouwman writes about this history:

Initially the fight was only for the Christian school, that is, the school
with the Bible, but through force of circumstances the question of the
independent, free school comes up...With the development of the con-
troversy it was necessary that the Christian schools be established and
maintained by associations...The rule ought to be that the school comes
from the parents. According to the ordinance of God's covenant the
full task of rearing children rests first of all with the parents...It follows
from this that the school must stand on the self-same foundation as the
Christian home, that is to say, on the basis of the covenant.¹⁰

This controversy led the Dutch Reformed people to see that parents are re-
sponsible to form schools and not the church or the state and that those schools
must stand on the same basis as the Christian homes that form them, namely, the
covenant of God. The Dutch not only saw that the responsibility for rearing the
covenantal children rests first with the parents and, therefore, that parents must
form associations to start schools, but also that there is a proper relationship that
must exist between the churches, homes, and schools. Bouwman writes, "There
must be cooperation between the school and home, between parents and teach-
ers." Although there was a range of opinion on the precise nature of the relation-
ship between the school and the church, all agreed that there must be some rela-
tionship. The church and the school were not viewed as separated compartments,
or spheres, of life, but related. In Bouwman's opinion, "On the church rests the

9 I am dependent for this history on the article by H. Bouwman, "Scholen," in his large
church order commentary, *Gereformeerde Kerkrecht*. For a brief account of the history, see
Gerrit J. tenZythoff, *Sources of Secession* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing,
1987), 1-9. For the impact of the French occupation on the Dutch schools, see *Sources
of Secession*, 25-31, also R. P. Swierenga, *Family Quarrels*, 8-11, in which Van Raalte in a
private letter cites this as one of the reasons his group left the Netherlands.

10 Bouwman, *Gereformeerde Kerkrecht*, 214.

calling to urge parents to establish and maintain Christian schools." The consis-
tories also exercise oversight by making sure that the schools teach the truth. The
schools that the consistory was called to promote were schools in which the truth
of the Reformed faith was taught. Always there must exist between school and
consistory a living relationship characterized by "mutual goodwill and trust."¹¹

Reformed Education in the United States

At about the same time as this struggle was going on in the Netherlands, there
was a similar struggle taking place in the United States in the CRC. The CRC
separated from the Reformed Church of America (RCA) in 1857 over a num-
ber of issues including lodge membership and hymn-singing in the churches.¹²
Although the schools were not specifically mentioned among the reasons for
separation, the issue was present from the beginning and quickly came to the
foreground in the CRC itself.¹³ This is not surprising since the schools were one
of the reasons the Seceders of 1834 had immigrated to the United States in the
first place.¹⁴

11 Ibid.

12 John Kromminga, *The Christian Reformed Church: A Study in Orthodoxy* (Grand
Rapids: Baker Books, 1949), 32-35.

13 By 1849, barely two years after they had arrived in the United States, the immigrants
to Holland had a Dutch and an English school, and the village of Zeeland had a Dutch
school. The English school in Holland was a public school and Kromminga relates that,
"Van Raalte complained one time of a lack of interest by his companions in the instruction
given in the public school," (Kromminga, 27). The immigrants were no doubt devoted to
their own school despite what their leader thought.

14 The reference to the *Seceders* is to the secession from the Dutch state church in 1834
by a group of Reformed preachers and their congregations. For the role that the school
issue played in their coming to the United States see *Sources of Secession*, 25; David Kloos-
terman, "Reformed Education," *The Outlook* 56, no. 9 (October 2006): 9-12, in which he
quotes T. Monsma, (*The Educational Ideals of 1834 in the Michigan Colony*), who says,
"Among the complaints lodged by the Seceders against the state church and government
of the Netherlands was the fact that Seceders were not allowed to establish their own
schools," and that two leading ministers of the *Afscheiding*, Brummelkamp and VanRaalte,
stated that "they also wanted freedom to establish Christian schools." Kloosterman also
quotes Henry Beets, (*The Christian Reformed Church*), who states that Brummelkamp and
VanRaalte, in a letter to the Reformed Church of America, stated the desire of the Seced-
ers, "to enjoy the great privilege of having their children taught in Christian schools," a
privilege that they lacked, "since in the public schools a general moral instruction is given
which may offend neither Jew nor Romanist, while free schools are barred."

By 1870, the CRC said that the Christian primary school is “the nursery of the church.” In 1873, “they obliged Consistories to establish free Christian schools,” by, “strongly recommending schools to the congregations and insisting that the congregations take steps to bring such schools into being.” In 1892, they advocated the establishment of Christian school societies. In 1898 the General Synod of the CRC declared that “Christian education according to Reformed principles is the incontrovertible duty of Reformed Christians,” and warned, “all ministers and elders to work for the cause of Christian education in every place where such is at all possible.”¹⁵

Having stated that Christian education is “the incontrovertible duty of Reformed Christians,” the CRC gave four grounds for its landmark 1898 decision:

1. God’s Word demands that our children be trained in the fear and admonition of the Lord.
2. The promise of the parents at the time of baptism.
3. There may be no separation between civic, social, or religious life, education, and training.
4. The honor of our King demands it, since all power is given him in heaven and earth, also in the realm of education and all other knowledge.¹⁶

It was under these convictions that in 1914 the CRC changed the venerable reading of Article 21 in the Church Order to reflect her developed view of the Christian schools. Article 21 originally read: “Everywhere Consistories shall see to it, that there are good schoolmasters who shall not only instruct the children in reading, writing, languages and the liberal arts, but likewise in godliness and in the Catechism.” The article now reads: “The Consistories shall see to it that there are good Christian Schools in which the parents have their children instructed according to the demands of the covenant.”¹⁷

The original article, reflecting the situation then current in the Netherlands in which many of the schools were not run by the church, was specifically interested in the schools from the viewpoint of the teachers in those schools and provided for “good schoolmasters.” The present day reading—while taking nothing away

15 Robert P. Swierenga, *Dutch Chicago: A History of Hollanders in the Windy City*, (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2002), 356; also found in Richard R. Ridder and Leonard Hofman, *Manual of Christian Reformed Church Government* (Grand Rapids: CRC Publications, 1994), 358.

16 Sweirenga, *Dutch Chicago*, 356.

17 Van Dellen and Monsma, *Commentary*, 92.

from the original concern for “good schoolmasters,” for instruction in “the liberal arts, . . . godliness, and in the Catechism,” and that this be “everywhere”—makes the consistories’ present concern also for the schools themselves, that is, that they exist, are good and Christian, and are used by the parents of the churches.

We must be thankful for this truth of the schools as the Reformed churches have stated it. It is a development which God has given particularly to the Reformed churches as he also gave them the truth of the covenant upon which this view is based.

Schools: A Christian Institution

I am interested in tracing briefly the history of this view of Christian education.

When I use the word *education*, I define education in distinction from strictly vocational training in some skill, and mean the training of the mind in the liberal arts.

Such education is as old as the world. H. Bouwman says, “The first schools originated as much from the parents of Israel as from the Greeks and the Romans.”¹⁸ Will Durant speaks of the “splendid school system of the Roman Empire.”¹⁹ I might add other civilizations as well. The ancient Sumerian civilization was renowned for its system of schools. This observation is simply the recognition that education in schools is an institution shared in common with church and world.

Our interest is Christian education. Christian education, too, is as old as the world. Adam and Eve must necessarily have taught Cain and Abel the right worship of God. Abel obeyed. Cain rejected this instruction.

And in this brief study of Christian education, we are interested in the institution of the school. The school is the institution established by parents, with trained and hired teachers, the purpose of which is to educate the children of the covenant in all the subjects that are necessary for them to take their place in the church and world, and which instruction is dominated by the truth of God’s covenant, kingdom, and church under the authority of the Scriptures and the Reformed creeds.

This distinctly Christian education has a history. As the covenant develops and unfolds in history, so the schools progress and develop along with the develop-

18 Bouwman, *Gereformeerde Kerkrecht*, 212.

19 Durant, *Story*, 4:913.

ment of the covenant of God. It is no coincidence that with the blossoming of the doctrine of the covenant in Reformed churches the view of the schools developed.²⁰

Still more, we are not merely interested in this history for history's sake, but in order to see that the view of Christian education that developed in Reformed churches and that led to the development of Article 21 of the Church Order of Dordt was latent in the earlier forms that the schools took, and that the principles upon which Reformed education rests were sometimes expressly stated by great Christian educators long before the Synod of Dordt and its church order.

In this study, we, too, must remember the warning of a recent historian regarding the study of history: "historical narratives told with a confessional viewpoint lurking in the background are very likely to bend the story to fit irrelevant preconceptions."²¹ Although that statement reeks of the view that only the theologically and confessionally detached—unbelievers—can write honest history, its warning is apropos. Therefore, I candidly declare my confessional viewpoint. My confessional viewpoint is Christian, Reformed, and Protestant Reformed according to the three forms of unity. In this brief history of Christian education, then, I am interested in the education that goes on in the Protestant Reformed Christian grade schools and high schools.

I choose a very deliberate line of history. I firmly believe that such a line exists. There is a deliberate line of history to the covenant. There must also be for the schools that are dependent upon the covenant. The line of history of Christian education is not through Athens and Rome, but through Jerusalem. Thus in the Old Testament I am concerned with the Hebrews and Israel. In the New Testament I follow the new dispensational church as she developed from the Old Testament church of Israel. In the medieval period I am concerned with the Roman Catholic Church and its education, which is also our history. For all the monstrous errors that finally came to a head in the Reformation, God's people were found there, and there, too, are found the antecedents for the history of

20 This was a fact that was totally ignored in three books on the history of Christian education in which the Reformed churches in the United States, Netherlands, and elsewhere are not so much as mentioned, but the Baptist's Sunday school movement—a Johnny-come-lately to Christian education—was treated as the main antecedent to Christian education in America.

21 Diarmaid MacCulloch, *The Reformation: A History* (New York: Viking Penguin, 2004), xxiii.

Christian education. The Reformation freed the church—and education—from the shackles of Roman Catholic false doctrine so I leave behind the Roman Catholic Church and focus on the reformers, the Reformed Churches, and then the Protestant Reformed Churches, to which God has committed the truth of his covenant freed from the errors of conditionality and closely tied with and governed by the truth of sovereign grace. That is our history. That is also the line of Christian education that we are interested in tracing.

Children and Youth Literature

Brenda Dykstra

Big Dog...Little Dog, by P. D. Eastman. Random House, 1960. Recommended ages: 2-6 years.

Say hello to big dog Fred and his little dog friend Ted as they discover what opposites are on their adventures together. A wintertime skiing trip brings them to a hotel where they just can't sleep because of their beds! How can they possibly make do? Will their friend the bird arrive and bring assistance?

Response: This is a classic and a must-view or must-acquire. The author of *Go Dog, Go!* and *Are You My Mother?* uses the same fun style of writing and illustrations to share the concept of opposites. This is a great book to have on the shelf for any elementary teacher or parent and great gift idea for newer parents. And best of all, no issues are present.