

Thanks be to God for the teachers of Truth
Who daily instruct our precious youth,
Who teach them God's Word throughout all of the day
In all that they do and in all that they say.

In the home, in the church, and also the schools
Parents, preachers, and teachers are used as God's tools.
Let us all work together with dedication and love
And we'll all share a joy worth speaking of.

To know that our children are walking in truth
That they heeded instruction from days of their youth.
O what greater joy could there possibly be
Than knowing our children are walking uprightly?

Tell me, what in this life could ever compare
To the gifts and the joy we in fellowship share?
But for all that we have and all that we own
Let the thanks be to God and to God alone.



FEATURES

The first of our two feature articles was written by Russ Dykstra, a senior in the Protestant Reformed Seminary. His plea for "teachers to be teachers" concerns his long-held conviction that the nature of the teaching profession is such that it requires full-time effort on the part of those who are called to it; that teachers therefore ought not to be gainfully employed in any part-time job during the school year; and that schools should see to it that teachers do not have to "moonlight" in order to be able to provide for themselves and their families. The fact that he speaks as one who was himself not only a teacher, but a teacher who had to raise a family on a teacher's salary, makes his arguments all the more compelling. He knows from personal experience the hard work and long hours required in striving for excellence in teaching. He wrote the article, by the way, between 11:00 one night and 5:00 the next morning. It must be that seminary students are not unaccustomed to that

kind of effort, for the late hours had no apparent effect on his lucidity (though we don't know how he fared in New Testament Exegesis the next day). Anyway, we thank him for this thought-provoking essay.

A Plea for Teachers to be. . . Teachers

Russ Dykstra

The work of teaching covenant children is truly a great work. This is evident, first of all, from the point of view of its importance. How many times does not Scripture admonish parents to train up, to nurture, to teach their children — or rather, the children God has given them for a short time? And that awesome responsibility teachers take upon themselves when they agree to stand in the classroom in the place of parents. But teaching is no less a great work considered from the viewpoint of the tremendous difficulty involved in teaching, both intellectually and spiritually. Every Christian teacher knows that his is an impossible work apart from God's grace. And it is that greatness of the work of teaching which prompts me to make this plea that teachers be teachers, that is, that teachers not labor in outside work, especially during the school year, but devote themselves to teaching, the work to which they are convinced God has called them.

The vocation of teacher (and this refers to the Christian school teacher throughout the article) is a special calling. In a sense, of course, any job is a calling from God, to labor in His service. God is sovereign, controlling every part of our existence, and He leads each of us to his own particular calling and place in this life. Each of us confesses with the psalmist, "...in Thy thought my life in all its perfect plan was ordered ere my days began" (*Psalter*, 383 from Psalm 139). In any occupation to which God leads us, and indeed in all our life, the Scriptures teach that we are to labor in God's service, doing "all in the name of the Lord Jesus" (Col. 3:17).

Although all that is true, we nevertheless maintain that teaching is a *special* calling. In fact, the vocation of teaching has much in common with that of preaching. It is not exactly the same, of course, for the minister is called officially by God through the church to stand as the am-

bassador of Christ and to speak His Word authoritatively, and no teacher claims this is true of him. But notice that teachers, like ministers, have lives of service to God which make them servants of God's people. They serve God by directly serving God's people. Notice, too, that teachers are born and not made. A good teacher is really "a natural," and education and training only serve to refine and develop his God-given abilities. On the other hand, no amount of training or schooling can make a non-teacher into an effective teacher; the necessary talents and the desire are gifts of God. Also, we must not overlook the special place which teachers have in the life of the church. Their work is of primary importance in the development of the covenant seed. Think of the influence teachers exert in such areas as the children's spiritual development, their world and life view, and their goals in life. It is no wonder that the Reformed fathers included article 21 in the church order concerning "good Christian Schools." And the article originally required consistory to see to it that there were "good schoolmasters" to instruct the children (adopted 1786, Synod of Den Haag). Good, Reformed teachers are crucial for the church.

Having pointed out all those special aspects of the vocation,

we have not arrived at the heart of the teacher's special calling. The heart of that calling is that the teacher stands in the place of the parents (as was noted in the initial paragraph), and in so doing helps the parents fulfill the direct command of God. Do you see the specialness of teaching, then? God does not command His church to have in its membership carpenters, factory workers, doctors, office workers, or painters (and this is not to denigrate their value). But God *does* command parents to teach their children; and what each parent is unable to do, he asks the teacher to do *as in his place*. The teacher helps the parent "train up a child in the way he should go . . ." (Prov. 22:6). The teacher helps fulfill the command given to Israel recorded in Deuteronomy 6:7 — "And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up." This duty is not removed from the parents — they have the final responsibility. But the teacher agrees to share in it, and in the place of the parent, to bring up these children "in the nurture and admonition of the Lord" (Eph. 6:4).

Thus the work of the teacher is a Divinely enjoined work. Teachers labor with the heritage

of Jehovah, the children of the covenant, the future adult church. This is clearly God's work, i.e., work commanded by Him and for the direct benefit of God's cause and kingdom. That is why teaching is a special calling. And it ought to be obvious to all that such a high calling demands tremendous dedication, hard work, and all the time teachers are able to give.

But there is a complicating factor in the work of teaching today, namely, the evil days in which we live. The explosion in the development of sin not only makes the work of the teacher more important than ever before, it also makes his labors more difficult. I doubt that any experienced teacher would disagree with the statement that it is more difficult to teach today than it was 20 years ago. By "teach" we refer not to the work load, but to developing spiritual character, teaching the proper world and life view, and helping students set proper goals in and through the daily instruction. For the covenant child is exposed to so much more anti-christian influence today, and the most ungodly acts, words, and opinions are brought right into his home via the television. And this situation will not improve, but will almost certainly continue to worsen. We repeat: This makes the work of the teacher increas-

ingly more important and difficult.

The conclusion which may be legitimately drawn from all of the above is that the high calling of the teacher demands diligence, excellence, and much time from the teacher, and that demand is accentuated by the evil days which we face. I submit, therefore, that it is inconsistent with the above for a teacher to work outside of school. This work does not refer to work in the church, e.g., as elder or deacon (which is also clearly *God's* calling). Nor does this refer to coaching, which is itself a form of teaching. Rather this refers to gainful employment one or two (or more?) nights a week or on weekends. I submit, secondly, that it is also inconsistent for a school to ask or allow, as the case may be, one person to hold the two high and difficult callings of full-time mother (is it possible to be a part-time mother?) and full-time teacher. These situations, I maintain, are not consistent with the high calling of the teacher, with the demand of time for preparation and development, or with the difficulty of rearing children in this age.

I wish to pause here to dispel any fears or misconceptions concerning this article. Some readers may be surmising that this is an attack upon teachers; and perhaps even some teachers feel this is a

personal attack upon them. I suppose that the nature of the article makes that thought at least understandable, because there is an implied "If the shoe fits, wear it." But please notice three things in this connection. First of all, this is not a personal attack on anyone. I have deepest respect and Christian love for the teachers in our schools, and I appreciate the instruction they give. They often labor in difficult circumstances and without great parental enthusiasm or support. Secondly, this article, as will become evident, is not addressed solely to teachers, but to administrators, school boards, and parents as well. And finally, the purpose of the article is not to attack teachers, but to promote the welfare of our teachers and our schools.

To illustrate the inconsistency of teachers working other jobs, let us examine the possibility of persons from other professions working second jobs. Consider the field of medicine. Would we not be upset if our doctor was not knowledgeable about the latest medical developments, because he worked a second job? Or consider the ministry. We would certainly be furious if our minister worked a second job. We rightfully expect him to devote himself entirely to his work, to his special calling. Is it different with teachers? Notice that doctors and ministers have this in common:

they must always be growing and developing in their respective "fields."

That common element is found also in teaching. As soon as the teacher stops studying, stops reworking lessons and reformulating ideas, he becomes stale. The teaching becomes lifeless, a mere repetition of old lessons. This can continue for a while, and, if one has been given a good intellect, for quite a long while. We may be able to fool the students (though not as well or as long as we think); we can perhaps cover up enough to impress a visitor from the school board, and, to a lesser degree, the observing principal. But there are two whom we cannot fool at all. We cannot fool ourselves; every teacher knows when his work is less than it ought to be. And we cannot fool God. God calls us as teachers to excellence; He demands wholehearted service. Therefore each teacher ought to be dedicating himself to education as much as possible, not to education *and* another occupation.

In spite of all that has been pointed out, some might argue that working a second job is beneficial for the teacher because it gives him a diversion, some time for relaxation. The other job perhaps provides more physical and less mental work, and is, therefore, good for the teacher. There is an element of truth to

that argument. I confess that one autumn during my teaching days in Iowa I worked for a farmer on Saturdays. I found the work relaxing, and I thoroughly enjoyed the diversion from the mental strain of teaching. But I soon realized that the work was stealing precious study time from me. I concluded that it was wrong, and had to stop. Work, or any other activity used for diversion, must be extremely flexible, so that the teacher is able to neglect it for months, if need be, when he is too busy with school work. Any regularly scheduled second job will take away from the teacher's time needed for development, if not for daily preparation.

Others may argue that the second job is necessary for financial reasons. In other words, teachers are simply not paid enough; they must work to "make ends meet." Now in many instances (though not in all) I find this difficult to believe for two reasons. The first cause of doubt is found in my own experience at "making ends meet." In the four years of my teaching I was paid well under the salary guidelines set by the Federation of Protestant Reformed Schools, and we lived comfortably. We were not rich or getting rich, but that was not our goal anyway. The second cause for doubt is that many of our teachers with

large families have not resorted to working second jobs (except in the summer, though some have driven school buses, certainly a less than ideal activity for a teacher). I realize that these same families did not have an easy road financially; too many of our teachers have struggled and continue to do so today. The fact remains, however, that many have not taken on extra work during the school year.

That brings me to my second point concerning teachers' salaries. I believe that as teachers we ought to be willing to sacrifice for the privilege of teaching the children of God's covenant. Teaching is not merely something *we* decided to do; it is *God's calling* for us. And teaching is a privilege. Not because it is an easy 9-to-3, five-day-a-week, nine-month job; to the contrary, the work is so demanding that few parents desire to trade vocations with the teacher. But it is a privilege because teachers are directly serving God and the cause of His kingdom, and are working with the heritage of Jehovah. Next to the eternal reward that God has in store for the faithful teacher, the sacrifices he makes are small indeed.

Finally in this regard, teachers who moonlight for the sake of money run the risk of contradicting their teaching with their walk of life. As teachers we decry

the materialism we see in students at an early age and we strenuously oppose this wrong attitude. If we are busy after school making extra money, are not our actions speaking louder than our words?

But, where it is true that teachers are not paid enough to meet their needs, there is only one thing to say — Shame on us parents! We have the responsibility before God as Christian employers to provide for the needs of our teachers. It is as simple as that. Now, I can almost hear the groan from the throats of hundreds of parents who are already paying thousands of dollars in tuition. But my answer to that groan is twofold. In the first place, why shouldn't we pay teachers enough? We are willing to pay a high price for so many other things. Think of what we will pay a good doctor to care for our children (yes, we grumble, but we pay). Why not so with teachers, in whose hands we place the nurturing of our covenant children for seven hours a day? In the second place, we must be willing to sacrifice too (although the word "sacrifice" really is not appropriate when we consider the fact that all that we have is not ours, but God's, and a relatively small part of our money goes to the church and school). We must be sure that the financial squeeze is not the result of our over-extending ourselves in the pursuit

of earthly goods or pleasures. But I am confident that when all the believers seek first the kingdom of God, the money will be there, if not from each individual family, then from the whole of the church. We must strive to pay our teachers as much as we can.

And certainly this is desirable. As parents, do we want mediocre teachers who are ill prepared, using old materials year after year, grading papers and tests weeks after students hand them in? Then we need only to remunerate our teachers insufficiently, and we will have many on our staffs (though not all!) just like that. But if, in accordance with God's command, we want the best available training for our children, i.e., dedicated teachers, who are well informed, well prepared, and diligently fulfilling their calling, then we must pay them enough, being sure that we more than meet each teacher's needs. And then we must insist that our teachers be teachers.

It is that challenge with which this article concludes. The challenge, to teachers, but also to our school boards, parents, and all who support covenant Christian education, is that our teachers be entirely devoted to their God-given calling to teach, without the need or the desire for outside work. Let us strive for this. Certainly we all desire our

consuming, dedicated study and restudy of our material in the light of God's Word. The work is admittedly difficult, but the way of faithfulness to God's calling and admonitions will also result in His richest blessing upon our teachers and our covenant schools.

Our second feature article comes from what was a chapel speech delivered by Cal Kalsbeek at Covenant Christian High School about a year ago. A couple of friends of Perspectives suggested that we ask him for his manuscript. They did that because the speech had dealt, in an effective way, with some of the things which constitute real temptations for young people in the church of Christ today, and which therefore are of vital concern to our parents (many of whom, we trust, are becoming Perspectives readers). What Mr. Kalsbeek did was to challenge the students to ask themselves what it really was on which their minds and spirits were feeding. We print his speech in the hope that it will serve a dual purpose, namely, to be informative in itself, and also to demonstrate something of what our schools try to accomplish with respect to instruction in values. Here it is:

Crumbs? or Sawdust?

Cal Kalsbeek

The title I've chosen for my chapel speech this morning is "Crumbs? or Sawdust?" Let me first explain what I mean by those terms. You may have heard the story about the farmer who was talking one day to a visiting neighbor about a prize horse that they were looking at in his pasture. The farmer had many good things to say about how well the horse worked in the field, but he had one major complaint: the horse ate too much. The farmer went on to explain how he was correcting the horse's appetite problem by supplementing the horse's daily diet with sawdust. It seems that each day the farmer would add more sawdust and at the same time give him less grain. He bragged about how well his new feeding program was working, and how the horse