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Mr. Calvin Kalsbeek, principal of the Adams Street Protestant Reformed Christian School, Grand Rapids, Michigan, writes about "The Nature of God's Revelation in History." This essay is one of those included in the recently published History Manual produced by a history workshop funded by the Federation of Protestant Reformed Christian School Societies. This teachers' manual for Ancient World History is prepared for the classroom teacher and contains teaching units, objectives, interpretive essays, extensive bibliographies, and valuable charts. It can help you teach all phases of Ancient and Sacred History more effectively.

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Rev. David Engelsma, pastor of the Protestant Reformed Church of South Holland, Illinois, was the key-note speaker at the Teachers' Convention, October, 1977, sponsored by the P.R.T.I. This key-note address is published in this issue of the journal because we believe it received only a very limited exposure and will be appreciated by the readers of *Perspectives*.

Mrs. Antoinette Quenga deserves a hearty thank-you for having prepared the original manuscript from a tape-recording of this speech.

BASIC CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

Agatha Lubbers

Parents, are your children receiving a basic education?

Teachers, how can you help your students master what is basic?

Questions such as these are being asked currently by educators and theorists who are proposing panaceas for the

dilemma in education. The solution most often advocated in educational literature during 1977 has been a rather sporadic movement denominated by the phrase "back to the basics".

Enormous problems do exist in the monolith called U.S. education. Students destroy their schools. Students refuse to study and to be taught in the schools that have been created for that purpose. Between ten and twenty per cent of the students who graduate from high schools are reported to be functionally illiterate.

Time, November 14, 1977, reports that "the school's problems are compounded by broken homes, two-income families with no one to mind the children and—not least—less reverence for the written word." This means simply that students in the schools come from homes which are the root of the problem. The school in today's society cannot, therefore, correct the problem but is simply a reflection of the total problem in today's society.

We need not be smug and begin to extol our own successes in the schools that have been created in our Reformed Christian communities. Is the indictment of Harvard's David Riesman also evident in our schools? Listen to Riesman; "... public schools cater to teenagers' desire to be entertained. Consequently, homework and requirements have gone down, grades have gone up. Watered-down curriculums fail to challenge. The only places in schools today where people are really encouraged to perform up to capacity are in sports and the band."

I freely admit that the situation in our suburban schools and the Christian schools is not like that which prevails in the large city schools, but our affluent age makes decided demands upon our way of life. This is particularly true in the high schools. Frequently our jobs and other after-school activities take precedence over concerted study and faithful homework.

Basic Christian education makes demands upon a student in every area of his life. He must behave like a Christian in every thing that he does and this includes his activities in the school. The school not only expects behavior and attitudes which are good and according to the Scriptures, but the school is an instrument whereby the student is prepared for a life of good works here and now in the world. The goal of basic Christian education is holiness. The Christian student must consecrate himself and the entirety of his life to God in thankfulness.

The sad situation in the secular schools of the U.S. is that

they are schools without and against God and His word. The message of the vanity of all earthly life apart from God is unmistakably confirmed in the activities and results of the public school. Rev. D. Engelsma writes as follows in *Reformed Education*, p. 80-81.

... the message (of Ecclesiastes) is the vanity of all earthly life, absolutely all earthly life—kingship, farming, learning, book-making, even drunkenness—apart from fearing Jehovah and keeping His commandments.

Much as we applaud the desire of the proponents who want to see the schools get back to the basics, this will not improve or alter the errant schools of our country. Where the fear of God does not exist, there can be no hope of real improvement and no scholarship in the fear of God. God is not in all their thoughts.

The goal of Christian education is God-centered, and basic Christian education implies "true piety in organic relation with thorough knowledge and genuine culture." (H. Bavinck)

When believers presented their seed for Christian baptism, they committed themselves to the pious and religious education of their children. This means that parents and their children seek first the kingdom. Believers and their seed who are instructed in the schools are called to "... live in all righteousness, under our only King ... Jesus Christ; and manfully fight against and overcome sin, the devil and his whole dominion..."

Within the context of that kind of basic Christian education our youth must be taught to read and write. They must not be part of the 10-20% who are illiterate and unknowledgeable in the basics when they graduate from high school.

Your child must not feel as if he has been cheated when he graduates from high school.

Raymond English describes such a cheated young man in the *University Bookman*, Winter, 1978, "Back to Basics: A Chance for Educational Reform?". English writes as follows:

A young man of our acquaintance is in a highly nervous state. He entered university as a freshman this fall, and was informed (along with the other freshpersons) by the dean of students that statistics showed that one-third of the freshperson class would have flunked by Christmas, and that only a quarter of them would remain after the first year of study.

This is a mathematical prediction calculated to produce anxiety and adrenaline. However, its impact seemed enhanced when our young friend reviewed his senior year at high school. In the first

semester his schedule of study was: 1 period Art, 1 period Sociology, 1 period lunch, 1 period Mass Media, 2 periods Study Hall. In his second and final semester his program—a valediction (i.e. leave-taking) to old alma parent with a vengeance—was: 1 period Art, 1 period American History, 1 period lunch, 1 period Gym, 2 periods Study Hall.”

I can certainly understand the anxiety of our young senior friend when he surveys his last two semesters in high school and anticipates the rigors of academic scholarship in college. His preparation in the basics such as mathematics, English, speech, etc. have been woefully deficient.

The moral of the story is clear. Schools in America have descended to the slough of mediocrity.

As early as 1956 there was a group of citizens who believed that schools of the U.S. had become too much laboratories of socialization and too little centers of learning. They invented the term and founded an organization called the Council for Basic Education. Today this organization has a membership of over 5,000 (Cf. A. Graham Down, *The National Elementary Principal*, October, 1977, “Why Basic Education?”)

A. Graham Down writes as follows:

Basic education means more to the Council than simply the three R's. It means that all students except the severely retarded, should receive competent instruction in all the fundamental disciplines. Basic education means that before students graduate from high school they should at least be able to read at an eighth-grade level, write with grace and accuracy, possess computational skills, have historical knowledge, have some acquaintance with a foreign language and its culture, some knowledge and understanding of science, and an appreciation of the role of the arts in the history of man and contemporary life.”

How does your child and the school which your child attends score on this back-to-basics report card?

Are there deficiencies and gaps in your child's education?

Is the cause related to your home or the school which your child attends?

It's a Christian school, I presume. It most probably is a Reformed Christian School hiring Reformed Christian teachers.

Have the liberalizing influences and the affluence of our times caused your school and your child to be affected by plummeting performances in the neighborhood public schools? Have the evils of society and the tendency toward mediocrity

influenced your child and your expectations of his performance?

The desire on the part of some schools to return to the basics is heartening. The restoration of homework assignments, the generation of enthusiasm for quality and achievement are a healthy reaction against the wasteful trends of other years. Is this enough?

The most important need today, as I see it, is challenge. Every child in the Christian community must be challenged to reach the highest competence of which he or she is capable. Challenge to use one's talents to the best of his ability is the key to effective education.

The effective teacher and the effective school challenges the student. The effective teacher is enthusiastic, conscientious and is competent in his work. The effective teacher demands high standards and encourages discipline for God's sake.

According to Mark Van Doren the one intolerable thing in education is the absence of intellectual design.

According to the Scriptures the one intolerable thing in Christian education is aimless, Godless behavior.

When the goal for basic Christian education is the standard for performance and instruction, then that which is basic will be taught. The pious and religious education of the children of believers gives the teacher the proper incentive to teach. The student will have the incentive to learn and to study. The parent will have the incentive to support the instruction in the school.

"Wisdom is the principal thing;
therefore get wisdom:
and with all thy getting
get understanding." Proverbs 4:7.

The Multi-grade Classroom

John Kalsbeek, Jr.

Picture in your minds five year old kindergartners and nine or ten year old fourth graders in the same room with the same