

Teach the antithesis? Do you wonder to whom Rev. Dykstra was speaking? To teachers of high school students, perhaps? ... or of junior high students who might be old enough to understand what this thing called "anti-thesis" is all about? No, Rev. Dykstra was not talking about teaching a theological concept. He was talking about teaching covenant children and young people how to live. And he intended his remarks as much for the kindergarten teachers in his audience as for the teachers in senior high. For, instruction concerning the antithesis belongs in every Christian classroom. In fact, more than that, Rev. Dykstra even goes so far as to say, in effect, that education which is not antithetical is neither Christ-centered nor biblical.

Could it be, perhaps, that that's overstating the case? I dare say that none of the teachers who heard him speak at the Convention wondered about that. Nor will our readers.

Christian Education and the Antithesis

Rev. Russell Dykstra

Giving this speech is a bit out of the ordinary for me because I am addressing former schoolmates, former colleagues, and [most intimidating of all] former teachers. It is exciting to me partly because I fondly remember the teachers' conventions which I was privileged to attend both as a college student and later as a teacher. The fellowship among men and women committed to covenant instruction was indeed sweet. I recall as well how exciting and profitable these gatherings were for me as a teacher. I hope it will be that for you again this year.

I am also excited because of the topic you have given me. It

strikes two responsive chords in my heart. In the first place you want me to talk about Christian education, and that was my first love. From a very young age I wanted to be a teacher, and, although the Lord has given me a new calling, Christian education is still very dear to my heart. Secondly, my topic joins Christian education and the doctrine of the antithesis — a doctrine that touches the very heart of the Reformed faith which I am called to preach and teach. So I have a vital interest in that aspect of the topic as well. Put those two together and you have something that ought to be of great concern to every Reformed teacher, school

board member, and parent.

This is, sadly, not the case with many today. The antithesis does not seem to be particularly important in Christian education. Few in education care to link the two together. The antithesis and Christian education are, for the most part, totally separated both in theory [colleges] and in practice [the classroom]. Many in Christian education speak about the antithesis only disparagingly. Because most "Reformed" pulpits have also become rather quiet on the same, the antithesis is pretty much buried, lost for the great majority of Christian teachers. Compounding the problem is the fact that many schools have rejected the Bible and the Reformed confessions as the basis of all instruction. All this has resulted in a totally new and un-Reformed direction in Christian education. Rather than instructing children to live in the world but not of it, teachers are training their students to be foot-soldiers for Christ to regain the world for Him. The school has become the headquarters for "redeeming" the creation for the use of the believer, and the Christian schools are overrun by worldly-mindedness, movies, dances, and the like. This is the tragic result of divorcing the antithesis from Christian education. My purpose is to show you that Christian education and the antithesis cannot be separated. If you intend by the grace of God to be faithful Christian teachers, you must not only teach antithetically

in every subject, but you must teach your students to know and love the doctrine of the antithesis.

The Antithesis

The antithesis is essentially God's "No" to everything that is opposed to Him. The word antithesis is made up of two parts — "anti," which is "against," and "thesis," the positive truth. God is the thesis because He is the truth. But God is against everything that is opposed to Him. His very being is that. For God's people, that means we are called to be against those same things, to be separate from and against everything that is opposed to God. In simplest terms, you could say that the antithesis is this: to reject everything that God rejects and to approve everything that God approves. I tell the young catechumens that living the antithesis is to say "Yes" to everything to which God says "Yes," and to say "No" to everything to which God says "No." It is that simple.

The antithesis comes from God Himself. God who is only good, and holy and true, willed that there should be evil — evil that is opposed to Him, evil that rejects Him, evil that hates Him and everything connected to His cause. God's purpose in willing evil is to reveal Himself more clearly as the Good, so that we might see how good God really is, to see that in God is not a trace of evil. He is light, a God in whom is no darkness at all.

God specifically set the an-

tithesis in the life of His people, doing so even before sin was in the world. God planted in the middle of the garden of Eden two trees. God's command required that Adam and Eve daily walk up to one tree and say "Yes," by taking of the fruit of the tree of life and eating in fellowship [life] with God. But it also required them to say "No" to the tree of knowledge of good and evil by refusing to eat its fruit. This was living the antithesis.

But, of course, this became more explicit after the Fall. God in the promise of a Savior (Gen. 3:15) said, "I will put enmity between thee and the woman, between thy seed and her seed..." That is part of the antithesis. God ordained and, throughout history, creates the antithesis. (*I will put enmity...*) He specifically distinguished between two opposing seeds. Notice, too, that the antithesis arises because of the Seed, Jesus Christ. Without Christ there would be no antithesis left in this world, for all would be spiritual children of Satan. Christ is the revelation of God, the thesis, in this polluted, sin-cursed world. His seed are opposed to Satan, and for God.

Thus God forms that antithesis in the very flesh of His people. In that moment of regeneration God puts into that dead, sinful flesh, a life that is from God and seeks God. That life is, therefore, in constant warfare against the evil within us. When Paul says, "The good that I would, I do not;

and the evil that I would not, that I do," he is speaking of the antithesis in his soul. The believer cannot escape the antithesis. The Bible is full of commands that God's people live antithetically. "Be ye holy for I am holy," He commands us. "Have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness but rather reprove them." Recall the passage read this morning (II Cor. 6): "Be ye not unequally yoked...; Ye are the temple of God." So the antithesis exists, and God commands us to live antithetically.

Christian Education

Truly Christian education is synonymous with Reformed education because Reformed education always goes back (is re-formed back) to Christ and to Scripture. And, to this speaker, truly Reformed education is Protestant Reformed.

Christian education is the work of rearing children. It is training them, nurturing them, and teaching them about God and His Word. It is begun and maintained by believing parents who feel the weight of God's command to instruct their children in the fear of the Lord when they get up in the morning, when they sit down at the table, walk by the way, and lie down at night. That command impels them to band together to form societies, elect boards, and hire teachers to instruct their children in the fear of the Lord.

The particular task of Chris-

tian education is to prepare the covenant child to stand in the midst of this world as a Christian. He must be trained to serve God in everything he does, whether that be as a farmer, a father, a wife, a teacher, a carpenter, or whatever station God gives him. To do that, he has to know about the things of this world — the things which this world contains and how to use them. And that proper use, for the Christian, can only be to the glory of God. That is what Christian education strives to do. Such an education demands a Reformed outlook on life — a Reformed world-and-life view — so that children start with the correct viewpoint when they do anything in this life, whether it be on the job, in their entertainment, with their family, or whatever it may be.

Christian education is also explicitly covenantal. It is based on, and flows out of, the covenant God has established with His people. Because that covenant is a bond of friendship, it is a relationship of love, which love in turn requires knowledge of the loved one. A vibrant covenant relationship with God therefore demands that believers *know* God! But since God establishes His covenant with believers and their seed in the line of continued generations, the believer realizes the vital importance of his children *knowing the Lord!* Out of this love for God and His covenant, as well as for the covenant children, arises Christian education.

The Relationship

The relationship between Christian education and the antithesis is that they are inseparable — Christian education is antithetical. This is true especially for two reasons. The first reason is simply that this education is *Christian*, i.e., Christ-centered. To be this, the Bible must be the basis of all instruction — from basic arithmetic, reading, and English grammar, to biology, P.E., and American Literature. All must be taught in the light of Scripture; Christ must be the center. This inevitably makes Christian education antithetical because 1) the Bible teaches the antithesis from Genesis to Revelation, and 2) Christ is the revelation of God — the thesis. The students must see this at the heart of all instruction and learn to say “Yes” to it, and to say “No” to its opposite. Truly Christ-centered, biblical education can only be antithetical.

The second reason that Christian education will be antithetical is that it is covenantal. When God established the covenant He created the antithesis between the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent. From a practical point of view, God does this first of all by choosing and calling His people *out of* the wicked world, unto eternal life. Secondly, when God regenerates His chosen, He makes them to be radically different from the ungodly. His people have life from above, eternal life, and are thus different in the very

core of their being. Thirdly, God makes the elect to be His friends. By His Spirit He sanctifies them and pours His love into their hearts so that they 1) know God's love, and 2) can and do love God. But being a friend of God immediately makes one an enemy of the world, which hates God. The antithesis is an inescapable element of God's covenant.

The believer, as a living member of God's covenant, seeks God and His friendship. He longs for exact knowledge of God (rejecting the lies about his Friend). He desires to live as a friend of God. And is that not an accurate description of the goal of Christian education, namely to train the covenant seed to live in the midst of this world as friends of God? Covenantal education, therefore, will be antithetical.

Therefore your instruction must not be merely different from that of other systems. It cannot be merely different from public education, merely different from the education of Rome, or of the Pentecostals and the Baptists. Nor may your teaching be merely Christian in some general sense of the word, that you pray, mention Christ in some classes, and have chapel at regular intervals.

No, it must be antithetical, so that the instruction given every day is saying "Yes" to what God approves and "No" to what God rejects. Also the material of instruction [books, handouts, etc.], as far as you can choose them, are to be antithetical. Keep in mind

that for every truth about God there is a corresponding (opposing) lie, or, more probably, a corresponding family of lies. Satan is not content to combat the truth with one lie; he spreads as many lies as possible in his endless effort to obscure the truth. Thus it is not difficult to teach antithetically, because the lies have been deliberately spread by Satan and his allies.

Antithesis, not Synthesis

The instruction you give must be antithetical over against all forms of instruction which synthesize. Synthesis, the opposite of antithesis, deliberately brings good and evil together. When the antithesis teaches a sharp opposition, synthesis says that the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent can get along together. Let us briefly note four such synthesizing forms of instruction.

One form of synthesis in education is relativism, the idea that truth is relative, not absolute. Truth is determined by majority opinion, or by the circumstances in which you find yourself. No absolutes mean no unchanging "thesis" set forth by God. You see how that destroys the antithesis.

A second "antithesis destroyer" is the popular idea in the church-world today that Scripture has room for all sorts of differing, even opposing views on a given matter. You can have your interpretation on creation and your interpretation on women in church office, and I have mine. So

what if they are completely opposed to each other? There is room in Scripture for both. Where this thinking prevails in the classroom the truth is lost and, in effect, so is the antithesis, because no thesis is discernible on many issues.

A third theory currently threatening antithetical instruction is known as non-directive education. According to this thought, teachers are to lay out all the options for the students in a given situation. Teachers are not to teach that anything is right or wrong, nor give any moral judgments. Children must make their own choices. The underlying assumption is that the child, being basically good, will pick what is good given the various choices. This is nothing new, of course; it is Pelagianism, and this has been the basis of the public schools' teaching for years. However, it is now definitely finding its way into the classrooms of Christian schools as well. And [school boards and principals beware!!] the (Christian and public) colleges of the land are most emphatically teaching education students non-directive methods of instruction. This method destroys the possibility of antithetical instruction.

And last, but not least, antithetical teaching is nullified by any contamination with the theory that God has a [common] grace to the wicked. You might be thinking that, of course, he had to bring up common grace, because, after all, he is a Protestant Reformed

minister. I used to think that, too. In fact, some years ago I made up my mind that when I became a minister I was not going to be one who saw common grace as the root of all evils. The trouble is that common grace would not leave me alone. I ran into it with my young people because of what their schools, high school and college, were teaching them, and what sinful entertainment these schools were encouraging them to pursue. And over and over the justification was common grace. God, by this, forced me to see not only the pervasiveness of this error, but also its deadly effect on the antithesis.

Reformed teachers have no choice but to deal with it. Common grace says that God has a favorable attitude toward the wicked, even the reprobate wicked, those whom God called the seed of the serpent in Genesis 3:15. That radically changes the way that you must present the calling of your students. They can, and must, go out and join hands with these wicked people, no matter their goals or their lifestyle. Common grace also says that these ungodly can do much good by that common grace. And that means you and your students can take what ungodly men do in every area, redeem their products, and make them something worthwhile. That thinking has enabled nearly all Christian high schools and colleges to justify movies, the dance, and rock music of the most vile kind. But the antithesis is

dead. If you are going to teach antithetically, your teaching must be consciously against common grace.

Let us note that antithetical teaching is not just a matter of theology which you must somehow cram into your instruction, no matter how clumsy it may be; rather, this is good pedagogy. The goal of all teaching is that the students will grasp and remember the concepts. A teacher strives to make the material crystal clear. To attain that, it is wise not only to teach what the concept is, but also to contrast that truth with what it is not. Do that with the spiritual values which must be taught in Christian education, and you have antithetical teaching.

Teaching antithetically also prepares students to face the lie after they have left the classroom behind. It is good for them to have investigated different ideas in the light of God's Word. It is irresponsible to give the covenant seed a narrow, one-sided education, not exposing them to any of the false doctrine, wicked attitudes, and man-centered philosophies that will assault them in the real world. Some maintain that our youth ought to attend a non-Protestant Reformed institution for at least some of their education to prepare them for the real world. This is not necessary if our instruction is antithetical. Giving them the skills they need to stand means equipping them to know the difference between good and evil and to recognize the various faces of

the lie. How well the covenant seed will be prepared to live antithetically if they have had such a training!

Suggestions for Antithetical Teaching

Having seen the need for antithetical instruction, we face the task of putting theory into practice. This is the calling of all involved in the education process — parents, school boards, administrators, and teachers — though obviously you teachers carry the bulk of the load. To begin, we call attention to three areas where we need to be on guard if we are to maintain this desired instruction. The first is the area of teacher education and qualification. School boards and administrators must take no small interest in the views their teachers have on this. I do not mean to suggest in any way that I think that many of our teachers are not antithetical. My experience testifies the opposite. Nevertheless, we must pay attention to this, especially due to the way the colleges are teaching. Even well-trained, Reformed college students who recognize that something is wrong in their instruction, cannot always pinpoint the error. In the college classroom the lie can be so effectively mixed with the truth! Some of the errors they heard in four years of instruction may well reside in their hearts when they leave college. We must do something about this. Our own college would be the best, but at the very least we must

work with our young teachers when they begin. Applicants should be asked about the antithesis and about their philosophy of instructing. Spiritual qualifications are always the most important qualifications for a Reformed teacher.

To maintain antithetical instruction, we must, in the second place, keep the state out of our education. I trust that you can see immediately how cooperation with the government in education will destroy its antithetical character. Even a government that pretends to smile or turn a deaf ear to our distinctive instruction will *not encourage* us to be sharply antithetical. And the whole movement afoot today is that we must tolerate each other's differences. State involvement will eventually force us to compromise on this principle.

In the third place the boards and societies must watch their own membership. We are a long way from being taken over by non-Reformed people, but nevertheless we had better learn from societies around us who have given up their membership to people who were not Reformed, and who therefore did not have any commitment to the antithesis. We must not let that happen.

Certainly, there are other things we can work on positively. One obvious goal is to be antithetical in every aspect in our curriculum, and in all levels. Reformed truths must be taught to the students at a very young age.

I recall (as an administrator) observing a first grade teacher in Bible class teaching election and reprobation in a very beautiful way and at the level of the children. This can be done at all ages. And it must be done antithetically. The truth of creation, sin, election and reprobation, of God Himself, the atonement, and the resurrection must be taught that way. To do this, you as teachers have to look for the lie; you have to expose the lie. Teach specifically the Reformed doctrines, and ask questions of your students that force them to face the lie. "Do you students know of people who do not believe what we said here today? Do you know that some deny this very truth?" Or present the lie first and force them to think through it and reject it.

That is the emphasis that we ought to have, too, namely on teaching students to think antithetically and make good judgments. We do not want to send our students out with a list of do's and don'ts. Then they will be very well equipped to say "No" to some things and "Yes" to others but with any new encounter with an item not on the list they are lost. Then we have failed. Teaching them to think antithetically will avoid the problem of legalism. To do this you must inculcate the Reformed world-and-life view. Students will then understand that the world is not our friend, and that the things of this world are not the things which the child of God should seek because they

are the lust of the eyes and pride of life.

An Antithetical Walk

We must teach our children an antithetical walk. Take the area of sports, for instance. Doesn't it make you cringe to see a covenant youth walking around with a picture of a godless man on the front of his T-shirt? The issue of the antithesis and whom we play in sports ought also to be faced honestly.

We have to teach them to think antithetically in entertainment. I beg of you teachers not to be afraid to stop the student jabbering about some godless television program and to confront them with the question, "Is this God-approved?" "Does God say 'Yes' to what you are talking about, to what you are watching?" I realize that many parents let them watch this stuff, but confront them nevertheless. You have a calling to do that. Do not hesitate to condemn rock music, including what is called Christian rock. Do not hesitate to condemn emphatically the dance. Do not hesitate to do that because it is your calling to do so.

You must teach also by your own example, so that you are not hypocritically preaching against these things in school but enjoying them in your private lives. Teach that by example in our school activities, too. When we in our roller skating parties let our students rock and roll to the music of the world, what have we done to the antithesis? We send

many good hours of teaching down the tubes, I fear.

I urge you teachers to teach antithetically so that your students will think in terms of the antithesis. We must not send out students who love the world and the things of this world and who think it is perfectly OK to join with them, play with them, and seek common goals. When we do that, we are destroying the covenant, God's friendship with His people. God will not maintain His covenant with a people who constantly seek the friends and lifestyle of the world.

This instruction will be all the more important as we come closer to the end. Never has the devil been so successful at blurring the lines that distinguish the truth from the lie as he is today. It makes your job much more difficult than it was even 20 years ago. Everything is relative. It is easy for the church to live with the world and enjoy the things of the world. Your diligence is crucial!

But rest assured that God's blessing will rest on antithetical instruction. Recall II Corinthians 6, where God speaks: "Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, And will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty." You see that the covenant relationship with God demands antithetical living. Teach your students that. Do that because the church needs that,

the children you teach need that, you the grace to be faithful in that
and because it is your calling as high calling. ●
Christian teachers. May God give

READERS' FORUM

Dear Don,

In the last *Perspectives in Covenant Education*, Volume XVII, number 2, Winter, 1992 under the theme "File Cabinet" Rev. Hanko's article on the "Objective of Christian Education" page 32 in the caption explaining the article it is mentioned that Hope School of Grand Rapids was the only Protestant Reformed School in the denomination.

Please confer the 50th Anniversary of the Protestant Reformed Churches in America, "God's Covenant Faithfulness," page 30, first paragraph.

Just setting the record straight. No offense.

Your brother in Christ,
Everett VanVoorthuysen

RESPONSE:

For those of you without easy access to the now out-of-print *God's Covenant Faithfulness*, the paragraph to which Mr. VanVoorthuysen refers reads as follows:

Gerrit Vos was Redlands' first minister, and he stayed for eleven years. He labored in a congregation that was still in its first love. It was under Rev. Vos' leadership that a church building was erected in the summer of 1933, and a school was opened in 1934. For seven years they had a school in the church basement. It was at that time the only Protestant Reformed school in existence. In 1936 a parsonage was built, and in 1941 a school building.

The school continued in existence till 1954 — that is, until it suffered the consequences of the 1953 split in our denomination. Some twenty years later (1975), Redlands, though still comparatively small, was again in a position to have their own school. The building (a very nice-looking structure) was erected by volunteer labor from church and school-society members.

Mr. VanVoorthuysen is therefore correct. The introductory paragraph to "The Objective of Christian Education" was in error. My apologies to Redlands for that oversight and thanks to Mr. VanVoorthuysen for pointing it out.

D.D.