

The Necessity of Good Christian Schools

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This is the text of a public speech given in Ballyclare, Northern Ireland in October, 1984, under the auspices of the Association for Christian Education in Ireland - a fledgling movement on behalf of Christian education in Northern Ireland. The purpose of the speech was the promotion of Christian education, especially among Presbyterians in Northern Ireland, for whom Christian education in private (non-State) schools is a new thing.

The speech treats truths which are, however, applicable to every country and nationality. Hence, we present it to encourage others to promote also this necessary enterprise.

Two deep concerns of Presbyterians lead naturally to a zeal for Christian schools. One is the insistence of Presbyterians, as good Protestant Christians, that all the people of God have good knowledge of God and of His will, inasmuch as all the saints are prophets, priests, and kings under the Lord Jesus Christ. God's people have the anointing of the Spirit of Christ, so that they know God's Word and confess it; consecrate themselves to God; and fight against God's enemies in this life with a view to reigning with Christ hereafter. Above all, they can, and must, know God's Word, Holy Scripture. They must have it, in their own language. They must be able to read and understand it. Then they can compare all teaching with the Word, receiving what is true and rejecting all that is not in agreement with the Word, as we read of the Jews in Berea that they received the Word with all readiness of mind, and searched the Scriptures daily whether the things preached by the apostle were so ([Acts 17:11](#)). Only if God's people have this knowledge are they able to serve God in all their earthly lives, as we are called by God to do. Presbyterians have always refused to allow the saints to be kept in ignorance, as tyrants, both ecclesiastical and civil, would like.

A second concern of Presbyterians is that their children receive a good, godly upbringing, because these children, in the mercy of God, are special children. They are not, of course, naturally special. We Reformed do confess with sorrow that our children, like ourselves, are naturally conceived and born in sin, even as the others (cf. [Ephesians 2:1-3](#)). But God is pleased to deliver our children from the present evil world and to give them a place in the church of our Lord Jesus. The sign of this grace of God is the baptism of our infants; and the presentation of their children for baptism by the parents indicates their faith in this grace of God. As special children, these children must be specially reared and taught: and this every Presbyterian parent vows to do at baptism. *

When you combine these two important concerns of Presbyterians, namely, the concern that all the church-members have good knowledge and the concern that the children receive a good, godly upbringing, you have a strong interest in good Christian schools.

This interest is part of a long and honorable tradition. Quite early in the history of the church after the apostles, during the reign of the Roman emperor, Julian, known as the "apostate," the Christians established their own Christian schools, when Julian decreed that the instruction in the schools of the empire would be pagan. The schools of the Middle Ages were Christian schools, although they became corrupt along with the increasingly

corrupt church. The Reformation of the 16th century called for good Christian schools and worked to establish them. Luther wrote vigorously and often on behalf of Christian schools; and he and Melancthon actually started a system of Christian schools in Germany. Towards the end of his life, John Calvin was successful in establishing the "Academy" in Geneva, where the children could be given Christian instruction. Since then, many Reformed people, in Europe, North America, and other places, have worked on behalf of good Christian education and have established good Christian schools. They have done this in the conviction that good Christian schools are necessary.

What is a good Christian school?

It is certainly an institution for the teaching of children in all the various branches of earthly knowledge. A Christian school is not a school for the teaching of Bible and the Catechism, or for the teaching of Bible-history and Bible-doctrine. This is the task of the church.

The Christian school gives instruction of another sort: it teaches reading, writing, mathematics, history, and the other subjects that are also taught in the State schools. It is, and must be, sound academically; it must give the students a thorough education in the various aspects of human knowledge. It develops the natural intellectual powers and earthly abilities of the children. It is busy, in this way, to prepare the children for earthly life. Now this is not the only aim of the Christian school, for it also prepares children for eternity; but it is certainly the task of the school to prepare children to live and work in this world. Indeed, the school must prepare the children to live in the particular country and society where God has put the children and where God calls the children to serve Him. In Ulster, the Christian school does not stress the history of China, but the history of England, Scotland, Ireland, and Northern Ireland. Here, it does not teach French, but the English language. This is in keeping with the view of the life of His people that comes out in Jesus' prayer in [John 17:15](#): "I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil." For the Christian school to accomplish its task, good, competent teachers are required; a good Christian school is staffed with qualified, hardworking teachers.

But the Christian school gives this instruction *in the light of the Word of God, Holy Scripture*; it prepares the children to live their earthly lives in a particular society *to the glory of God*; and it requires teachers whose qualifications include *that they are God-fearing*.

A good Christian school has its basis in Holy Scripture. The Bible is the foundation and rule of the entire school. All of the instruction is based on Scripture and is faithful to it. The behavior of teachers and students alike is controlled by Scripture. This is no small matter. In the State schools in the United States, there is wild disorder and gross immorality on the part of teachers and students alike. The Christian school is marked by discipline, the discipline of the Word of God. By His Word, God Himself, as revealed in Jesus Christ, is the foundation and authority of the Christian school and its work. Thus, Christ is the Lord over education. The education is Christian -- subservient to Christ. Presbyterians have always been zealous for the crown-rights of King Jesus. It would be unworthy of them to ignore Christ's crown in the area of education, the mind, ideas, and the rearing of their own children.

The Bible is the foundation of the good Christian school, according to the understanding of the Bible that is set forth in the Presbyterian and Reformed Creeds. The Creedal basis of the schools should be written into the constitution of the school; it should never be elided; all involved in the school should be striving to implement this

basis more and more. For there is a Presbyterian (or Reformed) view of Scripture; a Presbyterian view of the children; a Presbyterian, view of education; a Presbyterian view of discipline; a Presbyterian view of every branch of knowledge; and, most emphatically, a Presbyterian view of God, the Triune God revealed in Jesus Christ -- His glory, His claims, His sovereignty, His worthiness to be praised by the child's every thought, word, and deed. The goodness of a Christian school will be in direct proportion to its faithfulness to the truth expressed in the Presbyterian (and Reformed) Creeds.

The Christian school is based on Scripture also in the sense that the work of the school is done in obedience to a calling from God. In the great task of educating our children we must be found in the way of the Lord in the sense that what we are doing, we have a Divine call and warrant for doing. As a preacher, I must be sure that I have a calling to preach. I had better not be preaching without a call and mandate from God. I had better not even be found doing the work of a preacher in a congregation other than the one in which God has placed me. Similarly, those educating children must be certain that their work rests on and flows from a Divine call. I am convinced that a basic reason for the collapse of State education in my own country, at present, is simply that people are engaged in the business of education without any call from God. They are running in education, but God has not sent them. For God does not call the State to educate. The children are not the State's, but the parents'. The State has neither the duty nor the competency to rear the children. The God-given task of the State is, to quote Edmund Burke, "the public peace, the public safety, the public order, the public prosperity."

In contrast, the Christian school is established in obedience to the call of God in His Word, Holy Scripture. This indicates the necessity of good Christian schools.

As to the Necessity of Good Christian Schools

The necessity is, first, the calling of believing parents to rear their children in the fear of the Lord, to the utmost of their power, because their children are members of God's covenant. The Christian school is a demand of the covenant. You could not have chosen a more fitting name for your school - *Covenant Christian School*. This calling is bound upon parents by the book of the old covenant: "And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children. . ." (Deut. 6:7). It is renewed in the book of the new covenant: "And, ye fathers, bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord" (Eph. 6:4).

One vital aspect of God's covenant with His people is God's gracious inclusion of the children of believers in the covenant. God revealed this in Genesis 17:7, in His promise to the father of believers: "And I will establish my covenant between me and thee and thy seed after thee in their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee." The apostle makes it indisputably plain that the children of believers are heirs of the new covenant when, in Ephesians 6:1 ff., he addresses the children of believers as members of the church with their parents: "Children, obey your parents in the Lord...."

His application to them of the commandment, "Honor your father and mother," proves that, in the new covenant as in the old, Jehovah is the God of the children of believers as well as of the adults and has delivered the children as well as the adults out of the land of bondage. The children, therefore, as well as their parents, *must* live the covenant-life.

Our children are God's chosen, redeemed, and renewed people, by His grace in Jesus Christ. They are the people of God's possession *as children*. Jesus impressed this upon His disciples in Luke 18:16: "Suffer little

children to come unto me, and forbid them not: for of such is the kingdom of heaven." The little children were babes in arms, "infants" according to verse 15. Their coming to Jesus was not their own activity, but the carrying of them to Jesus by their parents. Of these babes is the kingdom, i.e., the infants of believers are citizens of the kingdom.

Not every child of believers is a child of God. Romans 9:1ff. teaches that the true seed of Abraham in the old covenant and the true seed of believers in the new covenant are not all the natural offspring, but rather the children of the promise, according to God's sovereign election. Nevertheless, because God is pleased to gather His children out of our offspring and to continue His covenant in the line of our generations, we are to rear all our children in His fear and to teach them all His Word.

Nor is it necessary to suppose that every elect child of believers is born again in infancy. I believe with the Westminster Confession of Faith that the Spirit of Christ "worketh when, and where, and how He pleaseth" (Chapter X). But Scripture requires us to understand that the rule is that elect children of believers are regenerated from infancy. The evidence is not so much the testimony of Scripture that John leaped for joy in his mother's womb at the presence of the Christ, thus manifesting regeneration (cf. Luke 1:41-44), as it is Scripture's testimony concerning the children of believers, both in the old covenant and in the new covenant, that, as they grow up from youngest childhood, they can and do fear the Lord, keep His commandments, and serve Him -- spiritual activity that is impossible without a regenerated heart. The experience of the Psalmist in Psalms 71:5b, 6 is not unique, but representative of multitudes born and raised in the covenant: "Thou art my trust from my youth. By Thee have I been holden up from the womb: Thou art he that took me out of my mother's bowels: my praise shall be continually of Thee." He adds, in verse 17, "O God, thou hast taught me from my youth; and hitherto have I declared Thy wondrous works."

The sign of this is baptism, as circumcision was the sign among Israel.

The children are God's. My children are God's; and this causes my wife and me more trembling than most other matters. This is exactly what God says about the children of His covenant-people in Ezekiel 16:20, 21. Rebuking Jerusalem for their enormous wickedness of sacrificing their children to the idols, Jehovah says, "thou hast taken thy sons and daughters, *whom thou hast borne unto me*, and these hast thou sacrificed. . . . Is this. . . a small matter, that thou hast slain *my children*...?"

Because the children are God's, they must be "piously and religiously educated," to use the language of the historic Reformed "Form for the Administration of Baptism." God's children must be godly taught. This instruction is essential for it is the means of God to train up the children to godliness, to a mature man or woman of God. Such is the importance of this teaching that it is part of the vow at baptism: parents promise to give this teaching.

This required instruction includes schooling to the extent that parents are able to provide it. First, the command of the Lord, in Deuteronomy 6:6ff. and Ephesians 6:4, is simply all-embracing and all-comprehensive: "...when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up." To exclude from the command all the time spent at school, i.e., most of the child's life between the ages of five and eighteen - the most crucial period!, would be arbitrary in the extreme. Second, the claim of God on our children is total. If anything, God claims their mind primarily: "Love the Lord. . . with all thy soul," i.e., your mind. Third, the life of the child is one life - a unity; and the one, whole life is to be nurtured by the Word of Christ. Fourth, the Word of God must be the content and rule of all the instruction, and not only of the spiritual part at church. All knowledge, to be true knowledge, and not the Lie, must be based on Scripture. In other words, all education

is religious education. Either it glorifies God, or it dishonors Him; either it confesses and bows to His sovereign authority, or it rebels; either it promotes a godly life, or it hinders it.

Such instruction is the responsibility of parents. Friends of the covenant may and will support the work, as covenant-work; but the parents have the calling: "And, ye fathers.. ." (Eph. 6:4). The setup of a good Christian school honors this reality: it is an extension of the home; it is parental; the teachers stand in the place of the parents.

Implied is that the Christian school is for covenant children only, to rear them to maturity. It is not an institution for the children of unbelievers, to evangelize them. One important, practical consideration here is that our children are not to have friendship with the children of the world. I cannot see how I can keep my children from friendship with bad companions if I send them to a school where the world attends.

The rearing that God requires is done by the teaching of the Truth; and this is the second reason why good Christian schools are necessary.

God requires that covenant children be taught the Truth. In Deuteronomy 6:6ff., the parents in Israel are commanded to teach "them" diligently to their children. The reference is to the content of the teaching. This content of the teaching. This content is "these words," according to verse 6. Verses 4 and 5 show "these words" to be two great Words of God. First, there is the Word that Jehovah our God is one Lord. Second, there is the Word that we are to love the Lord our God with all our heart, soul, and might. We must, therefore, teach our children Who and What God is and how they are to praise and serve Him. We must teach the Truth; and Jesus has answered the question, "What is Truth?" "Thy Word is Truth" (John 17:17); "I am . . . the Truth" (John 14:6).

This demands a good Christian school, for teaching the Truth is not only beginning the day with prayer and Bible-reading, nor even having a class in Bible; but it is the teaching of all the subjects -- reading, math, history, science, and the others -- in the light of the Word of God. It is a mistake to suppose that in the Christian school all the subjects are taught just as in the State schools, but that the Christian school is different inasmuch as it also teaches Bible, or Christian doctrine. The principle of Christian education is that we can see light only in God's light, as we read in Psalms 36:9. Scripture shines its light on every branch of knowledge; on all the aspects of creation; on all the ordinances of God that children learn about in school. Only regenerated teachers and children can see this light and want to see this light, teachers and students into whose hearts the light of the Gospel has shined (II Cor. 4:6). Apart from Scripture, man is groping and stumbling about in the darkness. Indeed, this is what he chooses to do, because of the depravity of his wicked heart. The unregenerated hates the light and does all in his power to extinguish the light, because his deeds are evil (John 3:19, 20).

If I am working in a factory at night, with parts and pieces, with machinery, and with fellow workers, I need light to shine on everything; so that I can see everything as it really is, put the parts and pieces together, and cooperate with the other laborers. Without light, I stumble about helplessly. I feel a few parts, but cannot put them together. I botch up everything.

God's Word is the Light, as it is the rule and authority, in the classroom. Nothing is taught as Truth that conflicts with the Word, e.g., evolution. Nor does the instruction ignore the Word, as though God and His Word have nothing to do with the creation, learning, or earthly life. This is no better than outrightly contradicting the Word. One of the monstrous evils of our time is the banishment of God's Word from earthly life, in order to confine it, safely, to the church services on the Lord's Day, or to the Sabbath-school. If anything has characterized Presbyterian, or Reformed, people in past ages, it is the conviction that the Word of God governs all of life; the

insistence that we are to live our entire life in the world *coram Deo* (before the face of God); and the confession that Jesus is Lord over all. Only when our children learn the correct facts in the light of Scripture, only when teachers teach the subjects in the light of Scripture, are the facts Truth; and if our children learn correct facts, apart from the Word of God, they learn the Lie.

If my child gets knowledge of the human body that is scientifically correct, but learns that the human body is merely an animal-body, like that of the brutes, because it evolved, and that, therefore, she may use and gratify her body as she pleases, she has been taught the Lie. It is just as bad, really, if she is taught all about the body, without a word being said concerning the body's being a creation of God, whose chief purpose is to glorify God. The Truth about the body of the covenant child, in the science classes at school, is this, and nothing less: the body is all the wonderful things that science discovers it to be, *as fearfully and wonderfully made by God* (Psalm 139:14). Bought with the precious blood of the Son of God (I Cor. 6:20) and indwelt by the Holy Spirit (I Cor. 6:19), it is to be devoted to God, in purity of life (II Cor. 7:1) and in service (Romans 12:1), whether this service be bearing and rearing children, or working in a garage to the glory of God, or giving the body up to the flames of the stake as a martyr.

Such teaching of the Truth is the demanding task of the Christian schoolteacher; and such learning, the duty of the covenant student.

One of the questions raised by those who cannot yet see the need for Christian schools is whether it is not possible for a God-fearing child to know and hold the Truth even though the child attends a school where the Truth is not taught. After all, the child has the church and the home. The answer is that this is possible; indeed, it has often been the case, especially where Christian schools were impossible. But it is also the case that many children are weakened, and some even destroyed, spiritually. We must not underestimate the power of education, whether for good or for bad.

Although it is possible for covenant children to know the Truth and embrace it apart from Christian schools, we Christian parents cannot be content that our children receive instruction five days a week, seven hours a day, for some twelve or fifteen years, that opposes and undermines our teaching at home and at church. We are desirous that all the teaching be harmonious and complementary. We are convinced, with the wise Preacher, that a threefold cord of home, school, and church is not quickly broken (Ecc. 4:12).

Besides, Reformed people are convinced that the Lie has no place in the world whatever, much less a place in the training of our covenant children. The Lie is a usurper and intruder in the world. It came in by the Devil -- he is the father of it. Its aim is to blaspheme God's Name, to rob God of the glory of His works, and to recruit boys and girls -- *your* boys and girls - for the war against the Kingdom of God.

Only the Truth has a rightful place in the world, much more in the schools that educate God's children. The Truth magnifies God's Name. It ascribes all glory to God, specifically for His works of creation and providence. It trains the children to seek first the Kingdom of God and to fight on behalf of this Kingdom against the coming kingdom of Antichrist.

We do not ask, then, how little Truth we can get away with, and how much Lie we can put up with; but we burn to educate our children in the Truth entirely and exclusively. This is the Lord's command: Teach the Truth diligently to your children, always and everywhere.

I merely note in passing that it is in the Christian school that the conviction is alive that Truth can be known. To a

large extent, the very idea that Truth exists, and the belief that men can know Truth, have long since disappeared from the educated world. There, the skepticism of Pilate reigns: "What is truth?" Not only is it true of the thinkers and scholars of the world that they are "ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth" (II Tim. 3:7), but they also boast of this, as though this were the noblest philosophy of education, rather than the most damning indictment of their learning.

Always, there are benefits of doing the will of God. The benefits far outweigh the costs. In Christian education as in every other aspect of the life of the child of God the principle is, be willing to sacrifice and pay a high cost in doing God's will, as a disciple of Christ, and God will greatly reward you, both in this life and in the life to come. There are rewards. They are rewards of grace; but there are rewards. These are incentives, because the work of the Lord always goes forward with much difficulty in this world.

Establishing and maintaining Christian schools is costly, difficult work. It takes a great deal of money. There are troubles of various kinds -- struggles, problems, and disappointments. We need to be encouraged by the benefit of the work, in God's mercy.

That benefit is that our children grow up fearing the Lord and walking in His ways. Deuteronomy 6 puts it this way: they learn to know God as the one Lord and to love Him with heart, mind, and might. Psalm 78 holds before us that they will set their hope in God and not forget the works of God, but keep His commandments. Proverbs 22:6 promises the benefit that they will not depart from the way of the Lord: "Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it."

Some who have reservations about Christian schools ask whether sending children to Christian schools does not harm the children later on, when they must finally go out into the world. The thought is that in Christian schools the children are over-protected, so that they are unable to stand up against the world -- its antichristian philosophies and its ungodly way of life -- when they leave the Christian school.

It is certainly true that the world is an enemy of our children. Christ said that we are sheep among wolves. It is also true that we are concerned about our children's not being devoured by the world. But exactly because the world is a foe of our covenant children, we want to protect them while they are children. We do not want to throw the lambs to the wolves. In the Christian school, we are preparing them for the inevitable conflict that is coming. There is a war going on. It is not a carnal war, not a war "after the flesh," as the apostle writes in II Corinthians 10: 3ff., but a war that is spiritual, a war that has to do with "imagination, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God." It is a war of ideas; of thoughts; of doctrines; of teachings. These are the great issues and battlefronts: the sovereignty of man versus the sovereignty of God; the reign of Antichrist versus the reign of Jesus the Christ; the authority of man's word versus the authority of God's Word, Holy Scripture; a life of pleasure-madness versus a life of holiness; despair versus hope; the worship of the totalitarian State versus the worship of God, the Father of Jesus Christ.

In this war, a main object of the enemy is our children. John saw this, prophetically, in Revelation 12:17: "the dragon was wroth with the woman, and went to make war with the remnant of her seed, which keep the commandments of God, and have the testimony of Jesus Christ." The Christian school, like the Christian home, certainly does protect the children from the dragon, during their childhood. At the same time, it is preparing and training the children to be valiant saints in the unavoidable battle, later on.

God blesses the training of the Christian home and the Christian school by giving us young men and young women who hold high, in confession and walk, the glorious banner of the Lord Jesus Christ and who stand,

firmly stand, amidst all the din and violence of the battle of the ages. They carry on, after us, the cause of God and Truth in the world. Hereafter, they praise God eternally.

May this precious benefit be a powerful incentive to us to carry out the necessary work of Christian education.

* The "Directory for the Public Worship of God," adopted by the Westminster Assembly of Divines in 1645, requires believing, Presbyterian parents to present their child for baptism, on which occasion the minister must exhort the parent "To consider the great mercy of God to him and his child; to bring up the child in the knowledge of the grounds of the Christian religion, and in the nurture and admonition of the Lord; and to let him know the danger of God's wrath to himself and child, if he be negligent: requiring his solemn promise for the performance of his duty" (*The Confession of Faith*, etc. [Edinburgh and London: William Blackwood & Sons Ltd., 1969], pp. 149-152).

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