

Does "Reformed" Make A Difference?

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(Less than a month ago, many children and young people among us graduated from Reformed, Christian schools. Many others completed a year's study. A goodly number of men and women looked back on a year's work of teaching or of administration in

these schools. Parents gathered at the graduation exercises to rejoice, not only in their child's finishing the course, but also in the covenant community's maintenance of the school for another year. Many others celebrated, viewing the children of the church as their children too and supposing themselves to have a stake in these children's education. To all these—is anyone overlooked?—is this editorial directed.)

Graduates, faculty and administration, families of the graduates, and friends of Christian education, "Reformed" makes a difference!

"Reformed" makes a difference for education!

"Reformed" makes a difference for life!

The faith that the Holy Spirit of Jesus Christ restored to the church by the Reformation in the 1500s and that is confessed by Reformed churches in the Heidelberg Catechism, the Belgic Confession, and the Canons of Dordt makes a difference in the education that believing parents give their children and in the life that the young people live by the power of this education.

Reformed, Christian education is costly, to be sure; but it is also priceless.

This was brought home to me in a forceful way, a couple of years ago, in the devastating criticism of higher education in the United States by the University of Chicago professor, Allan Bloom: *The Closing of the American Mind* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1987). Higher education in America does not educate. It is impoverishing the minds and souls of students. The reason is that it believes nothing, stands for nothing, and really knows nothing. Not a Christian himself, Bloom notes with alarm that the product of education in America is a life of nihilism, of immorality, and of despair, and this, on the part of the youth—a nation's most valuable resource.

This is not the fault only of the schools. Bloom sees the relation between home and school and blames the home equally. The home no longer gives the children religious instruction, particularly instruction as to the difference between right and wrong. The family no longer reads the Bible for the benefit of the children, a necessary thing, says this perceptive unbeliever.

"Reformed" makes a difference!

It makes a difference in education. The difference is simple and radical: the difference is God, the God Who is truly God. The faith called Reformed acknowledges God—the Triune God and Father of Jesus Christ the Lord. He is sovereign, which is to say "truly God," and not merely some idol dependent upon almighty man. He is Creator of us and of all things. He saves the church that He has chosen. He governs all for the sake of this church.

This is God's own testimony about Himself in [Isaiah 45](#) ^[1]. "I have made the earth, and created man upon it: I, even my hands, have stretched out the heavens, and all their host have I commanded" ([Is. 45:12](#) ^[2]). The LORD calls Himself "the God of Israel . . . mine elect" ([Is. 45:3, 4](#) ^[3]). He declares that He has raised up Cyrus, mighty head of the Persian world-power, so that this heathen monarch "shall build my city and . . . let go my captives," even though, in fact, Cyrus has not "known me" ([Is. 45:13, 4](#) ^[4]). Such is the relationship between the God revealed in Scripture—our God—and even the most powerful of humans—a Cyrus, a Gorbachev, or a Bush—that God is Potter and humans are clay ([Is. 45:9](#) ^[5]).

Because God is God, He is the beginning and the end, or goal, of education, as He is of every aspect of human life and labor.

The basic flaw in modern American education is that it has left God out, indeed has banished God. Bloom sees this:

The critical standpoint from which to view modern culture is its essential atheism (p. 197).

To banish God from education makes a difference. If God is not in all their thoughts and theories, education disintegrates. If God's blessing of the educational enterprise is rejected, His curse blasts it. To banish God is to invite the devil.

Where the living God is the beginning and goal of education, where He is the foundation on which all teaching builds, where He is the light that illumines the instruction, where He is the very life of that mystery that we call learning, education has meaning, integrity, coherence, worth, and profit. Things make sense. Everything hangs together. There is good reason to know the world and to live knowledgeable and wisely in it.

The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge.

Yes, and education is joyful. I hope that some of you graduates have felt the sheer joy of learning! I trust that all of you teachers have experienced the sheer delight of teaching!

It is the outstanding mark of the Reformed faith that God is honored as God.

This great God has made Himself known in His Word, Holy Scripture. Because Scripture is the Word of the sovereign God, it has authority. This is a second way that "Reformed" makes a difference in education. We humbly receive this Scripture by faith as the very Word of God, breathed out of God by the Holy Spirit.

Scripture not only gives us knowledge of heavenly things, e.g., the forgiveness of sins through the cross of Jesus, but also of earthly reality. As John Calvin wrote in his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, the Scriptures are the glasses through which we blind people can see the truth of creation for the first time.

Just as old or bleary-eyed men and those with weak vision, if you thrust before them a most beautiful volume, even if they recognize it to be some sort of writing, yet can scarcely construe two words, but with the aid of spectacles will begin to read distinctly; so Scripture, gathering up the otherwise confused knowledge of God in our minds (received from the creation—DJE), having dispersed our dullness, clearly shows us the true God (I.vi.1, Battles edition).

Not only do we know God from the Scriptures, but we also know ourselves, the starry heavens, the course of history, and right behavior in distinction from sin. Without the glasses of Scripture, modern, well-educated American people cannot even see the difference between protecting the life of unborn human beings and their murder.

Scripturally based education does not close minds, but opens and expands them. They now think great thoughts—thoughts about God; about the world as bearing the impress of God's glory; about human life, not as the accidental and meaningless movement of rational slime, but as

devotion to the living God or as revolution against Him.

At the very beginning of his book, Bloom remarks that one thing a professor in an American, secular university or college can be absolutely sure of is that almost every student believes that truth is relative. Students are sure of nothing except this, that nothing is sure. For them, there is no such thing as truth—rock-solid, unchanging truth. The apostle of the Truth described them in II Timothy 3:7 ^[6]: "ever learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth."

Necessary for education is a source of truth, a basis of truth, a standard of truth. This is the Bible, the Word of God Who is Truth Itself. And this is found in good Christian schools which, although they do not specialize in teaching the Bible, teach all in the light of the Bible. Therefore, there can be knowledge, rather than ignorance—young people do come to the knowledge of the truth. This knowledge is certain, not doubtful, whether it be the real existence of the creation, or the law of non-contradiction, or the resurrection of the bodies and final judgment of every human, or that killing the unborn is murder.

This happy knowledge of the truth is the privilege of the children of believers. "Reformed" makes a difference, not only as regards God, the beginning and end of education, and as regards the Word of God, the authority in education, but also as regards you who are being educated. Precious knowledge is not a right or a possibility for all children. It is a gift. And God graciously gives it, through education, to the children of believers. It is a covenant gift.

The Reformed faith has an eye for the covenant of God with believers and their children. God's sons and daughters must be Godly taught.

We must have good Christian schools!

We must have good Christian high schools and colleges, as well as grade schools. If this is possible, we ought to have a Reformed university in North America. But they must be schools that are Reformed in reality, and not in name only: God-centered schools! Scripture-honoring schools! Covenantal schools!

From them, and from genuinely Reformed homes, we expect a difference in the life of the young people.

"Reformed" makes a difference in life.

It sends you young people into the world. It requires you to use your abilities. It permits you to enjoy every creature of God. It involves you in all the ordinances of human life—work, government, marriage and family. We must have nothing of fleeing the world, huddling fearfully off in a corner, waiting for Jesus to come.

But in the world, it calls you to devote yourself, not to the world, but to the great, sovereign God, to Whom you owe everything—your creation and your salvation. You may not conform to the world of godlessness. Your mind is claimed—by God. Your bodies are claimed—by God. Your abilities are claimed—by God. Your possessions are claimed—by God. Your time is claimed—by God. "I am the LORD, and there is none else, there is no God beside me" (Isaiah 45:5 ^[7]). Such a life (the Bible calls it a holy life) is a life of obedience, rather than self-will, and a life of self-discipline, rather than self-indulgence.

This is a hopeful life.

Allan Bloom points out the well-nigh universal despair of young people. These are not the deprived ghetto-dwellers, but the university students—university students at the University of Chicago.

Nobody really believes in anything anymore, and everyone spends his life in frenzied work and frenzied play so as not to face the fact, not to look into the abyss (p. 143).

". . . so as not . . . to look into the abyss"! The abyss is death, which not only cuts life off finally, but also renders all of life futile, senseless, absurd, vain. You hear the despair in their music. You see it in their drug culture. You find it in their promiscuity.

If God is not, nothing matters. Human life is one absurd thing after another, and death is the thing after that. The apostle of the living God Who has conquered death and the grave in the resurrection of Jesus and Who has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel, put it this way: to be "without hope and without God in the world" ([Ephesians 1:12](#) ^[8]). You hear the melancholy winds howling; you feel the chill of infinite cold; you get a glimpse of the vast void; you shudder with the soul's sense of unutterable loneliness. ". . . without God in the world," and therefore "without hope."

But for you, God lives. With all He is, He is your God in Jesus the Christ. Everything matters. Your life has worth and purpose: knowing God and enjoying Him forever. Your work and play need not be "frenzied," but may be hearty, because you are always looking into the heights of eternal life in the Day of Christ.

Reformed education nourishes hope.

Therefore, I congratulate you graduates on completing this chase of a Reformed education.

I thank you teachers and administration for serving us parents, our children, and God in the high calling of Christian education this past school-year.

I make myself so bold as to urge us all to carry on in the great work of the God of truth and covenant, education that is Reformed.

—DJE

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- [1] <http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?version=9&search=Isaiah+45>
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