

# Establishing Schools to Provide Reformed Covenant Education (3)

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That They May Teach Them to Their Children

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In two preceding articles (Nov. 15, 1998 and Feb. 15, 1999) I have reviewed important early writings about Christian education and Christian schools. These articles by Herman Hoeksema and George M. Ophoff in the earliest years of the publication of the *Standard Bearer* influenced and helped in the eventual development and formation of the Protestant Reformed Christian schools.

When I began my teaching career in the Protestant Reformed Christian schools in the early 1950s, I was not aware of the discussions and articles about the Christian schools and Christian education in the 1920s and 1930s that preceded the organization and development of the PR Christian schools. Many teachers like myself in the late 1940s and early 1950s, when our Michigan schools were just beginning, were teaching 30-40 students, most often in multi-grade settings. During my first year in teaching (1951-52) at Hope Protestant Reformed Christian School I taught 33 students in grades 3-5. This gave little time for research like I am doing to write this series of articles.

Familiarity with the articles about Christian schools and Christian education in the *Standard Bearer* would have been helpful to the teachers, but daily preparation in order to teach each day and survive in the classroom was more important. Research into the early writings would have eradicated some of the wrong thinking that existed. Many undoubtedly thought the Protestant Reformed Christian schools came into existence because parents were cantankerous and simply organized PR schools because of some trouble in or dissatisfaction with other schools. Research into the early articles would have resulted in a better understanding of the way in which parents became concerned about creating good Christian schools.

Many who are currently parents and teachers of children attending our PR schools are also not aware of the early discussions and articles published in the Standard Bearer. For some the issues and controversies during these earliest years in our churches may seem to be of minimal significance as they carry out their responsibilities in the training of the covenant children and the maintenance of the Christian schools God has provided.

In the current series of articles I am contending that significant articles were written in the early issues of the Standard Bearer that forged the theological and ideological background — the *raison d'être* or justification for the existence and development of the Protestant Reformed Christian school movement. This writer believes that the articles written seventy years ago by the early leaders of the Protestant Reformed Churches were God's means that served to convince and convict the members of the PRC that the development of PR Christian schools was a necessity and calling of parents and grandparents.

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In a series of editorials in the Standard Bearer (SB) running from November 15, 1931 to August 1, 1932, Herman Hoeksema subjected the existing Christian school movement to a thorough examination and judged it to be a "failure." The occasion for this series of eleven editorials, entitled "The Christian School Movement Why a Failure?" was a lecture presented by the well-known R.B. Kuiper, president of Calvin College. In this speech for a meeting of the Michigan Christian Teachers Institute, held in Grand Rapids, Michigan, Kuiper stated that the Christian schools were facing moral and financial crisis. That the schools were in a financial crisis is understandable in view of the time of the speech — August 1931. Financial support for the Christian schools in the 1930s was affected no doubt by the Great Depression of the 1930s. However, it was the "moral crisis" that most interested Herman Hoeksema. For this reason Hoeksema quoted R.B. Kuiper as follows:

*... The moral peril threatening the Christian School movement consisted in the fact that our people are losing the conviction that the Christian School is necessary for Christian education. Among the causes of this decline in interest our people evince in the cause of Christian instruction, the speaker enumerated the following.*

*1. The attempt to introduce religious education in public schools, which would seem to make the separate Christian School superfluous and only cause unnecessary expense.*

*2. A tendency in the churches to place all emphasis on missions at the expense of Christian education at home.*

*3. An inferiority complex in the hearts and minds of many of our people caused by the superiority in equipment and buildings of the public schools.*

*4. A failure to realize the greatness of the threatening danger of modernism.*

*5. A growing desire to conform to the world in the realm of education. (Cf. SB, November 15, 1931.)*

Even a cursory review of the issues identified by R.B. Kuiper affecting Christian schools near the beginning of the twentieth century will indicate that many of these are issues that continue to hamper the cause of Christian education at the end of the twentieth century.

Also the fundamental theological and ideological issues have not changed. George M. Ophoff and Herman Hoeksema argued in articles on the school issue that the parentally controlled Christian schools that had been established in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries by members of the CRC were heading in the same wrong direction that the CRC had taken in 1924. They contended that the fundamental principles that gave direction to the schools established by members of the CRC were erroneous and heterodox. As a result the schools would not be distinctively Reformed, and therefore in this sense they were a "failure."

Out of deep concern for the Christian schools George M. Ophoff wrote three articles in the *Standard Bearer*, Volume 3, Nov. 1, 15, and Dec. 1, 1926. The same concern for the schools and Christian education was the cause for Herman Hoeksema's series of eleven articles in the *Standard Bearer*, Volume 8, Nov. 15, 1931 through August 1, 1932.

Ophoff and Hoeksema reviewed and critiqued the pamphlet *Basic Principles of Christian Schools of America* published July 1925 by the National Union of Christian Schools (NUCS) now Christian Schools International (CSI). These were the principles that had been espoused and recommended by Professor C. Bouma in his speech of August 1926 (cf. SB, Nov. 15, 1998).

Ophoff and Hoeksema contended that these principles are not true to the Calvinism found in John Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion* but that they are influenced and determined by the wrong theories prevailing in the Christian Reformed Church and adopted by the CRC synod in 1924.

Ophoff writes that Dr. C. Bouma's Calvinism "is a bigger, a more inclusive, and a differently articulated thing than the particular standards (i.e., creeds and confessions, AL) of any denomination" (SB, Nov. 1, 1926, Vol. 3, p. 66).

Hoeksema wrote: "This declaration is specific only in the sense that it embodies all the errors of the Three Points of 1924. It stands very specifically on the platform of the Christian Reformed Church.... It certainly excludes the possibility of any Protestant Reformed man's signing it" (cf. SB, April 15, 1932, Vol. 8, pp. 318-319).

This article will initiate the review of the critiques by Herman Hoeksema and George M. Ophoff of the "Basic Principles of Christian Schools of America" adopted and published by NUCS in 1925. In this way we intend to continue to establish our contention that one must know the writings and controversies of the past to understand the thinking, the theology, and the ideology that influenced the forming and establishment of the PRC school societies and schools.

In the first article in this series (Nov. 15, 1998) I spoke of the earliest school that was established by members of the PRC — the First Reformed Christian School of Redlands, California. It is worthy of note that the First Reformed Christian School was established when the articles under consideration were written. This was more than a decade before the PR schools were established in Grand Rapids or other communities. Worthy of note too is the fact that this school was established under the leadership of the late Rev. Gerrit Vos, a student of H. Hoeksema and G.M. Ophoff. Parents and grandparents who had left the CRC and organized the PRC of Redlands believed that a school based on truly Reformed and scriptural principles must be established for the instruction of their children and grandchildren.

I will have more to say about the First Reformed Christian School and the development of our

We have indicated that the "Basic Principles" critiqued by H. Hoeksema and G.M. Ophoff were adopted and published by the NUCS in July 1925.

At the outset of his third articles in the series, "The Christian School Movement Why a Failure," H. Hoeksema wrote that he was not aiming at the destruction of the Christian school but at its upbuilding. "I would consider it a day of great calamity when people would forsake the principles that all our education, primary and secondary, must be positively Christian." He stated that his critique "was not directed at any particular school but that he was dealing with the Christian School movement in general" (SB, Jan. 1, 1932).

Hoeksema also indicated that he was not a lone voice in claiming that there is something fundamentally wrong with the movement of our Christian education and its development. Although Hoeksema did not believe that R.B. Kuiper pointed out the underlying cause of "failures" in the Christian school movement, he expressed agreement with some of the concerns of R.B. Kuiper in his speech of August 1931.

*When Kuiper, therefore, pointed to the danger of mistaking a religious education for a Christian education, he certainly was right. Religious education in the public schools I consider more dangerous still than the intentional avoidance of all mention of religion as far as this is possible.*

*He (Kuiper, AL) was right, too, when he emphasized that our Christian schools must be distinctive. We must not be satisfied with a little biblical instruction added to the curriculum, which in other respects is entirely like the instruction given in the public schools; but the principles of the Word of God must permeate all the instruction and the school life. Naturally, it is true that this distinctiveness of Christian education will appear more emphatically in some branches than in others. There is, in this respect, a great difference between mathematics on the one hand, and history and general science on the other. But it remains true, nevertheless, that the whole of education must be based on and permeated by the principles of the Word of God (SB, Dec. 15, 1931).*

He also referred to a speech by Dr. Herman Kuiper given at the Educational Convention of the National Union of Christian Schools at Holland, MI the previous year, August 26, 27, 1930. The subject of Dr. H. Kuiper's speech was "How Should We Seek to Guarantee for the Future the Distinctive Character of Our Christian Schools?" In this speech the speaker cited the results of a questionnaire that he had sent to leading men in the teaching profession. Answers to many of the questions indicated a weakness in the schools. Hoeksema includes eight of the answers to these questions. Although it is impossible to reproduce all the responses received to questions in the Kuiper questionnaire quoted by Hoeksema, the answers all indicated that serious effort would be required to assure the future distinctive character of the Christian schools. Following are three answers that are representative (SB, Jan. 1, 1932).

*We are today facing the sad fact that a great proportion of our people, and among them a large number of the graduates of our Christian schools, exhibit a noticeable lack of interest, not to speak of enthusiasm for Christian instruction.*

*A good many of our teachers don't know the real difference between a Public school*

*and a Christian school. Many of our teachers cannot apply the Christian principles as they should, i.e., permeate all instruction with Christian principles. Too many of our teachers do not grow in the right direction. If they take courses they get them at the wrong place. All extension work is full of Dewey's, Thorndike's and Kilpatrick's principles.*

*The majority of our teachers have not sufficiently grasped Calvinism as a world and life view. For them religion is too much a thing apart. They do not see its basic significance for all knowledge imparted in school.*

Before going on to the review of the critique of the "Basic Principles" we should note that Hoeksema expressed his basic love for Christian education. He wrote: "Do not imagine that I write these things to induce our people to send their children to the public school. My eyes are open to the good elements there undoubtedly are in the instruction that is offered in the Christian schools even as they are. I rather would warn our people, that they should not abandon the principle of Christian instruction, neither remove them from the Christian school even as it is today."

He also writes: "I have great respect and am very thankful for the heroic efforts of some Christian school teachers to base their instruction on the Word of God throughout. But it depends almost entirely on the efforts of the individual teachers, whether their instruction shall be distinctive or not.... Although, therefore, I am always ready to express my appreciation for the efforts of individual teachers in this direction, the fact remains, that there is something fundamentally wrong with the system as such" (SB, Dec. 15, 1931).

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## ***Review of the Basic Principles of Christian Schools of America***

George M. Ophoff and Herman Hoeksema individually reviewed and critiqued the six "Specific Principles" that were written and published in 1925 to give direction to Christian schools of America. Professor C. Bouma in his speech to the Convention of 1926 recommended these "Principles." The "Principles" received his recommendation because he pronounced them to be consistent with the new Calvinism that he recommended and believed needed development.

We begin our review of these "Basic Principles" as both Ophoff and Hoeksema do by quoting the six "Specific Principles" written and adopted by NUCS in 1925. I suggest that you refer to the first article in the series (Nov. 15, 1998) to compare the "Specific Principles" proposed and written by Herman Hoeksema with those quoted here from the NUCS document.

### ***SPECIFIC PRINCIPLES***

*The following is an attempt to interpret the more specific religious principles basic to education to which orthodox Christian school communities are committed:*

*A. The Bible is the Book of books. By virtue of its divine organic inspiration (II Pet. 1:21) it is unique among all books. The Bible is not only the infallible rule of faith and conduct, but also the infallible guide of truth and righteousness. All school administration, instruction, and discipline should be motivated by biblical principles.*

*B. God is triune (Matt. 3:16, 17). He is the Creator of all that is, the Sustainer of all that exists, and the ultimate end of all things (Rom. 11:36). God who is transcendent (Is. 40) and immanent (Ps. 139) is the absolute loving Sovereign over all (Dan. 4:31); men should seek to do His will on earth as it is done in heaven.*

*C. Man is a fallen creature (Gen. 3). Though depraved man is nevertheless an image bearer of God (Eph. 2:5), and through restraining grace he is able to do civil good (Rom. 2:14). Though lost in sin, man can be saved through faith in Christ (John 3:16); and through restoring grace, in principle, is able to do spiritual good (1 John 3:9).*

*D. The world is steeped in sin. All aspects of life, individual and family, social and political, industrial and economic, even the animal world, nature, and things inanimate, show the marks and scars, the subversions and perversions of sin (Rom. 8:22). The virtue, order, and beauty which is still present in the world is a manifestation of God's goodness (Matt. 5:45).*

*E. The all embracing objective of the school is to promote the glory of our covenant God: (a) by seeking in humble dependence upon God to equip the pupil for his supreme task, namely, to realize himself as God's image-bearer (II Tim. 3:17); and (b) by seeking in the same dependence upon God to reconstitute the sin-perverted world by realizing God's Kingdom in all spheres and phases of life (Matt. 6:33). This is possible at least in principle through Christ, who is not only the Creator (as the Logos) but also the Recreator (John 1).*

*F. In determining the Course of Study to be offered, in preparing the lesson material, in giving the daily instruction, the above purpose shall be consciously present as the all-embracing objective. To accomplish this great task, the teacher must have the fear of God in his heart and the determination to live it out in his profession; and he must utilize to the full whatever light God's Special Revelation sheds upon the various realms of human knowledge. (Cf. SB, Nov. 1, 1926, and Jan. 1, 1932).*

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Concerning these "Specific Principles" Herman Hoeksema wrote that he did not know who the original authors were. He did not care because his purpose in this analysis and critique was not to fight persons. He was interested in the cause of Christian instruction. He asserted that the platform of "Principles" was unfit to serve as the basis of Christian education. He concluded that "on such a basis our Christian school must totter into ruins."

Hoeksema continues as follows: "Partly it is altogether too vague and colorless. Partly it is erroneously characterized by omission of the most vital elements. Partly it enunciates principles that are modernistic rather than Calvinistic" (SB, Jan. 1, 1932).

Concerning these "Principles" G.M. Ophoff wrote: "The above formulation is, to a degree, very specific, and reflects the doctrinal distinctiveness of certain creeds also. Principle (a) is the embodiment of certain tenets of the Reformed faith. Also principle (b), and to a degree principle (c). Principle (c), (d), (e), and (f) are expressive of the doctrinal distinctiveness and of certain elements present in the creed of Pelagius and the creed of Dr. A. Kuyper. That is to say, among the elements constituting the above interpretation of religious principles are also found the theory of common grace, the doctrine of the free will of man, etc. (underscoring, AL)" (SB, Nov. 1, 1926).

What do you think? Can you begin to see that the Protestant Reformed Christian schools are a necessity?

(Review of the analysis and critique of "Specific Principles" to be continued.)

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