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REFORMED

Education

*The Goal of
Reformed Education*

Chapter

That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.

—II Timothy 3:17

What is our goal, our aim, our objective with our Christian schools?

This is the question that we must answer now. It is an important question. It is necessary to have the goal of Christian education clearly in mind from the very outset of the instruction and not to forget it for a moment in the course of educating. Aimlessness renders the whole work futile. The pursuit of wrong goals will subvert the education that is given. On the other hand, the goal single-mindedly striven for determines the nature of the entire work of Christian education and makes that education good, worthwhile and profitable. Not only the parent and the teacher, but also the student, should know what the purpose is and remember it throughout his education. This requires parents and teachers to tell him the goal and to remind him of it repeatedly. The student must know the answer to his questions: "Why must I go to school? Why must I study? What am I doing here? Why do my parents put up our own schools?"

The goal gives sense and meaning to the activity of educating.

*The Christian School
as Demand of the Covenant*

"What is all this good for?" is a valid question, and there had better be an answer. The goal kept in mind is the incentive to the teacher to teach, to the student to learn, and to the parent to maintain the school where this teaching and learning go on. Especially for the student, this amounts to something like, "Eat your spinach, so that you can become a strong, husky man like your father." The goal unifies and directs the mass of material that makes up the instruction and, in fact, everything that has a place in the Christian school. The goal will also serve as a criterion by which to judge that which has no place in Christian education. Besides, the goal of Christian education is simply an end in itself, vital in Christian education, not only because of what it does but also because of what it is in its own right.

It becomes increasingly urgent that we know the goal because other goals are proposed and fought for vigorously. This is true as concerns education in the world, but it is also true as concerns education among Reformed Christians. There is an effort to *redirect* Christian education. If that effort is successful, it will deflect our aim from heaven to earth, from God to man, from the *Civitas Dei* to the *Civitas Mundi*; and the whole of education will be spoiled. In this case, it would be better for us that a millstone were hanged about our collective neck and we were drowned in the depth of the sea, for we would be a stumblingstone to multitudes of Christ's little ones.

We must derive our goal from our basis of Christian education: the covenant of God with believers and their children. The foundation determines the completed structure that stands on that foundation. On the foundation of the Sears Tower you do not build a chicken coop. Our aim in Christian education must be that contained in and expressed by the covenant command of Jehovah to believing parents.

We must not begin in the Spirit and end in our flesh, begin with the covenant of grace and end in the goals of the

Greeks, of the humanists, of the American pragmatists, or of our own proud, carnal ambitions for our children. This is easily done: Christian education, too, is constantly beset by the temptation to be conformed to this world. Today, in addition, there are enemies within the gates of the Reformed camp. They are deceitful. Evil men and seducers wax worse in the realm of Christian education, deceiving and being deceived. They speak of the covenant to get the parents' children and money, then labor for an end that has nothing to do with the covenant. They become more cunning still and disguise their noncovenantal goal as "the Reformed world-and-life-view" or "the kingdom of God."

In asserting this goal from the covenant basis of education, and especially in pursuing it in our schools, we must willingly expose ourselves to ridicule. Why should we suppose that Christian education is exempt from the law of the kingdom that the wisdom of God is folly to man, especially to the wise among men, to the "Greeks"? All that will live godly in Christ Jesus in education shall suffer persecution. We have heard, and still do hear, the jeers: "Anabaptists!" "Narrow, dogmatic, denominational schools!" "Schools without any kingdom-vision!"

As Regards the Covenant Child Who Is Educated

Many false goals are proposed for education. There is even a popular view that in education there is not, and may not be, a goal for the child. The child must simply be allowed to develop without hindrance. The work of the educator is to remove whatever might hinder the child's free development and to enhance the possibility of this development. On this view, it is educational heresy to speak of directing a child, much less all the children, to one, specific goal. This is radical aimlessness in education. But it is true, after all, to

the principles of evolution, the theory of the goodness and centrality of man, and the conviction of the nonexistence—or irrelevance—of God. Goalless education becomes apparent in many ways, both in the educating itself and in the lives of the children so educated.

There are many outrightly man-centered, earthly goals of education. There is the goal of the cultured gentleman; the goal of the well-adapted citizen in American society; and the goal of the successful man: wealthy, powerful, well-positioned, famous, and happy. In a totalitarian state, such as China, the goal is well-functioning cogs in the machinery of the state.

There are various false, religious goals. One is the saving of the child's soul in a school that practices evangelism. Another is the goal of the school dominated by fundamentalism: that there be some religion in the soul as well as knowledge in the mind. Educators committed to the social gospel, including the "Reformed" humanists of our day, aim at the betterment of society. ICS men and women work zealously to produce kingdom-visionaries and activists and, thus, their kingdom.

Radically different is the goal of Reformed, covenantal education. We have a goal. Our goal is a mature man of God, who lives in this world in every area of life with all his powers as God's friend-servant, loving God and serving God in all of his earthly life with all his abilities, and who lives in the world to come as a king under Christ, ruling creation to the praise of God, his Maker and Redeemer.

This is the goal proposed by Scripture, particularly in those passages that call parents to the Christian rearing of covenant children. To say that we derive our goal from the covenant basis of education is to say that we derive it from Scripture. Scripture sets forth the goal of the rearing of children; Scripture sets forth the end of man. In the Christian school movement, we must shut our ears to all the clamor of

man and must listen only to the Word.

According to Deuteronomy 6, the goal of the diligent teaching of the children is that they love the Lord their God with all their heart, soul, and might. Negatively, the purpose is that they not forget the Lord, forget Him when they inhabit great and good cities, forget Him in houses full of good things, forget Him when they eat and are full. Negatively, the goal is that they "not go after other gods, of the gods of the people which are round about you" (v. 14). These gods are named Baal, Mammon, Pleasure, and Self.

The goal is not children growing up to fear Jehovah *as well as* to live earthly life. Nor is it children growing up to fear Jehovah by *avoiding* earthly life. But the goal is children growing up to fear Jehovah *in* earthly life, that is, children growing up to live all earthly life unto Jehovah.

Psalms 78:1-8 teaches that the purpose of fathers' showing God's praises to the generation to come is that those children "set their hope in God, and not forget the works of God, but keep his commandments: And . . . not be as their fathers, a stubborn and rebellious generation . . ."

If Timothy 3:14-17 is an especially clear, pertinent passage. The covenant child, instructed by his grandmother and mother, becomes a man of God, a *mature* man of God ("perfect" is not "sinless," but "mature"), whose maturity manifests itself in this, that he is thoroughly furnished unto every good work. He is prepared for a life of good works here and now in the world. Such a life of good works does not consist of running around distributing tracts or making an occasional visit to the jail to sing Arminian hymns, but of loving and being faithful to his wife, providing for his family, patiently submitting to a forward foreman, paying his taxes, and the like. The goal is holiness: the consecration of oneself and the totality of one's life to God in thankfulness.

There is no need to list more texts; every passage of

Scripture that reveals God's purpose in creating man and in redeeming the new humanity in Christ teaches the same thing.

However, we should recall the message of Ecclesiastes. That message is not the vanity of earthly life absolutely. Ecclesiastes is not the shaken cry of the pessimist, who then kills himself. It is not the doleful dirge of the monk, who forthwith betakes himself to the monastery. But the message is the vanity of all earthly life, absolutely *all* earthly life—kingship, farming, learning, bookmaking—*apart from fearing Jehovah and keeping His commandments*. Knowledge apart from knowing God, all activity not motivated by the love of God and directed to Him, and life itself lived apart from God and away from God are vain. The application of this message, therefore, is: Know, be king, write books, drink wine, and farm in the fear of Jehovah! And teach the children to do this! This goal of Christian education accords with that proposed by Reformed thinkers. Herman Bavinck suggests this:

True piety organically combined with sound knowledge and genuine culture. Thus we form men of God, equipped unto every good work, completely equipped unto every good work.¹

Herman Hoeksema gives this as the goal:

You will aim in your education at the perfect man of God, knowing the will of his God for every sphere of life and for every step he takes upon the path of life, and you will take care that in his life he is well equipped with a clear and concise knowledge of all the precepts of the Most High.²

Jan Waterink states:

If I were asked to give a single-sentence statement of

the aim of education. I should prefer to formulate the definition as follows: "The forming of man into an independent personality serving God according to his Word, able and willing to employ all his God-given talents to the honor of God and for the well-being of his fellow-creatures, in every area of life in which man is placed by God."³

Our goal has two aspects. First, our goal in the rearing of the covenant child is that child's praise of God in eternity. This is not sufficiently remembered. But it is expressed in the prayer after baptism in the Form for the Administration of Baptism: "they may be piously and religiously educated . . . to the end that they may eternally praise and magnify thee . . ." Our children's praise of God in eternity is related to and realized through our rearing of them, also in the Christian school. I will not speculate on this, but I maintain that Christian education, in the schools, is serviceable for the child's life and reign with Christ in the new world. No genuinely Christian education is wasted, or lost.

Implied is the teacher's inability to see all of the fruit of his labor in this life. Like the husbandman, he must have long patience for the precious fruit. In education we live and work by faith in the unseen things that are eternal.

This eternal aspect of the goal ought to be the motivation of the parent and the teacher. If we are mightily moved by the pleasure we now have in "stalwart sons and daughters fair," what pleasure will we someday have when that which does not now appear shall appear fully in our children and students?

The second aspect of our goal is definitely the child's godly life on earth, here and now. We have a temporal goal. Its place, its inseparable connection with the eternal goal, and its subservience to the eternal goal, are all excellently

1. Bavinck, *Paedagogische Beginselen*, 53. The translation of the Dutch is mine.
2. Hoeksema, "Christian Education," 532.

3. Waterink, *Basic Concepts*, 41.

brought out in the prayer of the Form for the Administration of Baptism: “that they may be piously and religiously educated . . . and live in all righteousness, under our only Teacher, King, and High Priest, Jesus Christ . . . to the end that they may eternally praise and magnify thee . . .” They must live a God-centered (holy), obedient, responsible life in the world, living before the face of God in their station, as prophets, priests, and kings, and doing this out of gratitude for gracious salvation.

In this connection, we must remember that the one, great danger in the last days, according to Scripture—and present experience bears this out—is earthliness (secularism, materialism). There is a deadly divorce of holiness from everyday life in the world: God on Sunday and Mammon on Monday. The evil of those who will go under when God arises to judge the world in righteousness is not that they are grossly immoral, but “merely” that they are eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, and building houses. The Christian school is, in its very existence, the denial of earthliness, for it stands for the truth that God is at the center of all knowledge and reality and for the truth that men must seek God in all of life. But it must also exert itself to teach the children these truths and thus rear them to live so.

Therefore, Christian education is useful, in the highest degree useful, fitting the child to live life as life ought to be lived and, I may add, with an eye on the book of Proverbs, preparing the child to live a life that is blessed and happy. Pursuing its goal, Christian education, and it alone, escapes the condemnation that Alfred North Whitehead passed upon modern education:

The solution which I am urging, is to eradicate the fatal disconnection of subjects which kills the vitality of our modern curriculum. There is only one subject-matter for education, and that is Life in all its manifestations. Instead

of this single unity, we offer children—Algebra, from which nothing follows; Geometry, from which nothing follows; Science, from which nothing follows; History, from which nothing follows; a couple of Languages, never mastered; and lastly, most dreary of all, Literature, represented by plays of Shakespeare, with philological notes and short analyses of plot and character to be in substance committed to memory. Can such a list be said to represent Life, as it is known in the midst of the living of it? The best that can be said of it is, that it is a rapid table of contents which a deity might run over in his mind while he was thinking of creating a world, and had not yet determined how to put it together.

Astondingly, Whitehead concludes that “we can be content with no less than the old summary of education ideal which has been current at any time from the dawn of our civilisation. *The essence of education is that it be religious*”⁴ [emphasis mine]. But, alas, “religion” for Whitehead does not include God. So close, and yet so far away!

Not only Proverbs, but also the New Testament tells us that godliness is *profitable*, that is, *useful*. It is useful for all things, “having promise of the life that now is,” as well as of that which is to come (1 Tim. 4:8).

As Regards the Kingdom of God

Does our goal in education have anything to do with the kingdom of God? Is the kingdom an important aspect of the goal? Even if we were of a mind to ignore this aspect of our goal, consideration of this question is forced on us by educational theories within the Reformed sphere that emphasize the conception of the kingdom of God. There are two main groups: those who yearn for social reform and the ICS.

4. Alfred North Whitehead, *The Aims of Education and Other Essays* (New York: Macmillan, 1929), 18, 25.

The goal of the social reformers is men and women who will enter into society, joining the associations of the ungodly, in order to help in the effort to improve the human condition: solve the racial problem, assist the poor, improve working conditions, and even allay international tensions. In Reformed circles, it is wonderful to behold how John Calvin is made to fit the Procrustean bed of social improvement. One is convinced that Calvin had no other purpose for theology, preaching, or church than the improvement of man's earthly lot—until one takes the trouble to read Calvin himself, anywhere. The evangelicals also embrace this goal of education. Shimmering in the distance is the mirage of an unbelieving and unrighteous world of peace and prosperity, which is named "kingdom of God."

The goal of the ICS is the fulfillment of the cultural mandate of Genesis 1, and thus, a grand, peaceful, glorious, earthly society dominated by evangelical Christians [read ICS men: Plato's philosopher-kings in the flesh]. To this end, they are educating boys and girls to become organizers of Christian [read: ICS] institutions in all the land. Again, shimmering in the distance is the mirage of the "kingdom of God."

Our rejection of these kingdom-visions is as radical as can be: the kingdom envisioned is not the kingdom established by Christ, the kingdom revealed in the gospel, and the kingdom into which we believers have already been translated. The kingdoms of the social reformers and of the ICS are carnal kingdoms, earthly kingdoms, kingdoms erected by men, kingdoms based on the natural desire of men for earthly peace and pleasure. God's kingdom is spiritual, heavenly, building by the Son of God through the gospel, grounded in the righteousness of the cross of Jesus.

Since both the social reformers and the ICS have the same kingdom in mind, their occasional sparring is friendly sparring. Sooner or later they will find each other. Then,

because all roads lead to Rome, they will also find Rome, who had this kingdom-vision long, long ago.

But this may not lead us to overlook, or minimize, that we seek the kingdom of God in education. Least of all may we hide this from our children. The ICS has a powerful appeal to the young: "You may have a place in the 'kingdom,' may be active on behalf of the 'kingdom,' and may go marching on to victory with the 'kingdom,' if only you will adopt our vision of the 'kingdom.'" We are foolish, we are poor Christian teachers, if we neglect to teach our children, "You are citizens of the kingdom of God. You are reared for life in this kingdom. You are called to be active in the kingdom on its behalf." Christian schools are kingdom-schools; Christian education is kingdom-education. Listen once more to the baptism form: "...live in all righteousness, under our only...King...Jesus Christ; and manfully fight against, and overcome sin, the devil and his whole dominion..."

Indeed, we seek the kingdom in education, and we seek it first, seek it primarily, as is our plain duty according to Matthew 6:33. We do this in two ways. First, the activity of giving our children Christian education is, for us parents, itself an activity of seeking first the kingdom, trusting that God will add bread, clothes, and other earthly needs to us. Second, we so educate the children that they may live the life of the kingdom in the world.

Concerning this latter, we must be plain. We reject the carnal conception of the kingdom, and we do not allow our children to suffer the delusion or to chase the unsubstantial mirage of the social reformers and the ICS. We know what the earthly future of the people of God is. We know what kingdom will rear itself up on the earth in these last days. We must teach the youth this.

We and our covenant children live the life of the kingdom in this way. We believe and obey the gospel of Christ in all our

earthly life. We live in the world out of the new life of Christ. We faithfully and obediently serve Christ as Lord in government, labor, home, and church by doing His will in these institutions. We live the life of Matthew 5-7. This is what we aim at in the instruction of our children. It is obvious that this is the same as living the covenant life, the life of the friend-servant of God.

The goal of the life of the kingdom is emphatically not "full-time kingdom service," as we used to hear over and over in chapel, as if the goal were only reached in preachers and Christian schoolteachers. This is not Calvinism. This is not covenantal thinking. On the contrary, every child is to live a life of "full-time kingdom service," whether the child be scientist, mother, janitor, or lawyer.

Such rearing, like the life of the kingdom itself, is exhausting work. We confess that we do it, as we live the life of the kingdom, only in principle. We have but a very small beginning of the new obedience. Therefore, in our work of Christian education, we ought to be characterized by humility and repentance.

Yet it is glorious work. Work that aims at young men and young women living the life of the kingdom of God in the world is glorious. But even this is more believed than seen. The coming of the kingdom through Christian education is not spectacular, glamorous, and showy. The kingdom comes not with observation. Neither shall they say, Lo here! or, lo there! Nevertheless, it comes. Therefore, Christian education is worthy of our finest efforts, by grace.

As Regards the Glory of God

We aim at mature men and women of the covenant. We aim, in this way, at the kingdom of God. Our ultimate goal in Christian education, therefore, is the glory of God. In having God's glory as our goal, we are true to the covenant basis of Christian education, for in the covenant God must be God,

and the covenant with us must end in Him.

The goal of God's glory underlies our goal as regards the child, namely, that the child shall be a man who serves God in this world and in that which is to come. Since the goal is God's glory, covenant education cannot merely end in the child's being saved, much less in the child's earthly success. This would make *man* the goal of education. But the goal of covenant education must be the child's active service of God. Only then is *God* the goal.

To miss the mark of God and His glory is sin in education, as it is everywhere else. This makes education vain. Gigantic campuses are built at enormous cost, and staggering energy is expended—for nothing! Upon it falls the judgment of God, in time as well as in eternity. There is no alternative to covenant education ruled by and permeated with the Word, carried out by believing parents through God-fearing teachers, and directed to the glory of the triune God. The attempt either falls apart in a chaos of uproar, ignorance, and sensuality—as is the case in many schools today—or the whole of creation and the lives of the students are bent and twisted and distorted, with ruin for creation and misery for men, towards the establishment of the kingdom of Man, that is, the kingdom of the Beast. This will fall apart, too.

The goal of the glory of God is achieved *through* our rearing of the children; God is glorified in Christian education *through* the children's loving and serving and not forgetting Him.

This is *accomplished* in Christian education by parents and teachers. The children *are* reared to maturity. God uses, really uses, our education to bring His covenant child to become the man of God, fitted to a life of good works. There is power in education. Christian education is most significant: it is a demand of the covenant. What zeal, what carefulness, what faithfulness does this not call for?

But it is God's work. Here, Christian teachers and Christian

parents rest. The covenant is God's. The covenant and the covenant promise are gracious. They depend on no man. God makes covenant children. God brings them to spiritual manhood. God works in them to will and to do the life and labor of the kingdom.

Therefore, Christian teachers, like the parents in whose place they stand, ought to pray, ought to work praying, nothing doubting.

Jehovah, God of the covenant in the Lord Jesus, save the covenant children, and glorify Thy Name through them.