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# REFORMED

# Education

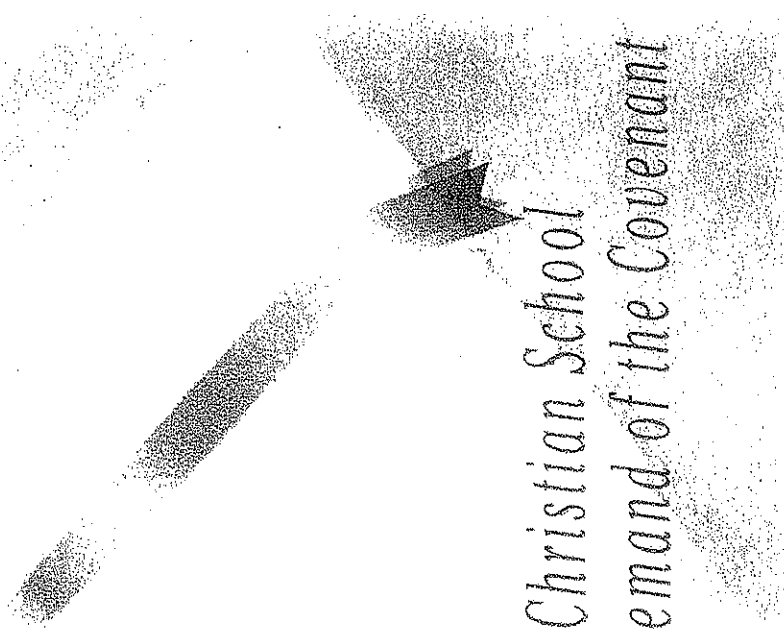
## World-flight

World-flight would also like to determine the Christian's life in the world and the activity within the school.

World-flight is sharply outlined in monasticism and Anabaptism. It considers the physical world and its institutions an evil and concludes that a Christian must get out of the world as much as possible. It advocates physical separation from the world, shunning normal, earthly life. Its view of the Christian life is that expressed in the Dutch proverb: *met een boekje in een hoekje* (literally: with a little book in a little corner).

The mind of world-flight shows itself in education in certain ways. For one thing, it has little use for the teaching of literature, secular history, and the other subjects of the liberal arts education. All its emphasis is on the teaching of Bible and Reformed doctrine. It is really suspicious of education as a threat to faith. Since the state demands some education, this mentality may send the children to the state schools. Or it may pull the children out of school as quickly as possible so that they can work. Or it may stress vocational education.

For another thing, world-flight, secretly or openly, esteems the Christian school mainly because it keeps the children



*The Christian School  
as Demand of the Covenant*

separate from the public school children.

Yet another manifestation of world-flight is its warning to covenant children: "No Christian may be a doctor!" "or a lawyer!" "or a politician!" "or an artist!"

It is worthwhile to point out that world-flight is neither the biblical view of the Christian life nor historically Reformed. It is not biblical. The book of Proverbs shows that the teaching of the covenant child, according to the demand of Deuteronomy 6, was not narrowly conceived in the Old Testament. Rather, it was understood to be the instruction of the child in all of human life in every earthly sphere: work and play, courtship and marriage, eating and drinking, conduct before the ruler—everything. The divine wisdom of Proverbs does not spurn human life or narrow it down; instead, it guides covenant children to live human life fully, in the fear of Jehovah.

Solomon's gift of wisdom was not confined to spiritual, religious, theological things—to the cultivation only of the soul—but extended to the whole range of created reality: trees, hyssop, beasts, fowl, creeping things, and fish. "And God gave Solomon wisdom and understanding exceeding much . . . And Solomon's wisdom excelled the wisdom of all the children of the east country, and all the wisdom of Egypt. For he was wiser than all men . . . And he spake three thousand proverbs: and his songs were a thousand and five. And he spake of trees, from the cedar tree that is in Lebanon even unto the hyssop that springeth out of the wall: he spake also of beasts, and of fowl, and of creeping things, and of fishes. And there came of all people to hear the wisdom of Solomon . . ." (1 Kings 4:29-34). What is so striking is not even that the divine wisdom, that is, Christ, legitimately extends to hyssop and creeping things, but that obviously these things are *important* to the divine wisdom. World-flight would say, "Why waste time on those mundane things?" Solomon was a

one-man, liberal arts Christian school, and his pupils were—and still are—people from all nations.

The God-fearing Israelite of the Old Testament did not turn his back on creation but contemplated it, knew it, and delighted in it (see Psalms 8, 19, and 104). He saw the Name of God in it, and he saw the parables in it.

The New Testament is full of doctrine about the creation and about the Christian's walking rightly in the world, here and now, in all kinds of earthly activities: eating and drinking, working, exercising the body, and the like. The New Testament indicates that Paul knew the heathen writers and did not hesitate to use their philosophical and poetical statements (see Acts 17:28 and Titus 1:12, 13).

The New Testament explicitly denies that world-flight is the proper life of the saint and affirms that the child of God may and must live the Christian life in all the human ordinances that the Creator has made. Jesus' prayer for us was "not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil" (John 17:15). Peter teaches that an excellent walk for spiritual strangers and pilgrims consists of activity, albeit *righteous* activity, in the area of government, labor, marriage, and fellowship among the saints (1 Pet. 2:11-3:17). So far is Christianity from being a doctrine of asceticism that it damns asceticism as "doctrines of devils" and calls its own ministers "good" if they warn against that error and teach God's people that "every creature of God is good, and nothing to be refused, if it be received with thanksgiving." Godliness does not despise and renounce the present life; rather, it is "profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come" (1 Tim. 4:1-8).

World-flight is not historically Reformed, specifically now as regards education. Luther's educational vision and system is proof of this. The Luther who raged against the synthesizing

of the medieval church (their imposition of the philosophy of that "damned, rascally, heathen Aristotle" upon Christianity), and who consigned schools devoted to Greek glory to the abyss, was the same Luther who opposed the world-flight spiritualism of the Anabaptists and the anti-intellectual materialism of the German peasants. Luther advocated Christian education to prepare the Christian children to live as Christians in the world, including their being officers in the state, doctors, musicians, writers, and the like.<sup>7</sup>

John Calvin was an educated man who could and did quote the philosophers. He knew the scientists and their theories. He set up a university in which there was a thorough education in the liberal arts. And he expressly condemned the know-nothings of his time:

Yes! you would drive away all men from the liberal and useful arts and sciences, and would boast among your fellows that all study and learning are useless and all the time spent in vain which is devoted to philosophy, to grammar, to logic, and even to divinity itself. You would thus cry down, I say, all useful learning for this very reason, that you might procure to yourself ignorant disciples, and make yourself great among them. And you say they that followed Christ were such. Just as if the Christian faith were a matter standing contrary to, and inconsistent with, learning! But let Christian readers here mark the difference which exists between you and me. I ever affirm that the wisest among men, until they become fools, and bidding farewell to all their own wisdom, give themselves up humbly and meekly to the obedience of Christ, are blinded by their own pride, and remain utterly unable to taste one

7. For Luther's views on Christian education, see his "To the Councilmen of All Cities in Germany That They Establish and Maintain Christian Schools" [1524], in *Luther's Works*, vol. 45, translated by Albert T. W. Steinhilber; edited by Walther I. Brandt (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1962), 339-378. Also see Luther's "A Sermon on Keeping Children in School" [1530], in *Luther's Works*, vol. 46, translated by Charles M. Jacobs; edited by Robert C. Schultz (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1967), 207-258.

drop of heavenly doctrine. For all human reason is tasteless in the mysteries of God, and all human perspicacity blind. I maintain, therefore, that the beginning and essence of all divine wisdom is humility. This strips us of all the wisdom of the flesh, and prepares us to enter upon the mysteries of God with reverence and faith. You, on the contrary, bid ignorant and untaught men to come forth into public; men who, despising all learning and inflated with pride alone, rashly attempt to pass their judgment on divine things. Nor will you acknowledge any to be legitimate judges in divine matters, but those who, content with the opinion of reason and commonsense, unceremoniously reject all which does not just suit their own mind and taste.<sup>8</sup>

The Dutch Reformed wanted a good, liberal arts education for all their children. The original Article 21 of the Church Order of Dordt read:

The consistories shall everywhere see to it that there are good schoolmasters, who not only teach the children to read, to write, to speak, and the liberal arts (*urije Consten*), but also instruct them in godliness and in the Catechism.<sup>9</sup>

The world-flight mentality has two possible effects. The one is that we reject our God-given calling to be in the world, glorifying God in all of earthly life and using and enjoying every creature of God. The other is that we become thoroughly worldly, paradoxical as this may sound. Live in the world we *must*, even the Anabaptist, but now we do so without the principle of living in the world to the glory of God and out of the new life of Christ. The result is that on Sunday we are pious, but on Monday we scabble with the ungodly in the pursuit of the dollar and the enjoyment of

8. John Calvin, "A Defense of the Secret Providence of God," in *Calvin's Calvinism: Treatises on "The Eternal Predestination of God" and "The Secret Providence of God."* Translated by Henry Cole (Grand Rapids: Reformed Free Publishing Association, [1987]), 348.

9. Bouwman, *Geformeerd Kerkecht*, 518. The translation of the Dutch is mine.

sinful pleasures. World-conformity is not the *only* threat, or the only really *bad* threat, as regards life in the world. World-flight is a doctrine of devils, a departure from the faith, and opposition to God as Creator and as Redeemer.