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It was in September of 1968 that the doors of Covenant Christian High opened to admit the first group of young people of our Protestant Reformed Churches in the Grand Rapids area who were privileged to receive their secondary education in our own Protestant Reformed high school. The idea of starting that school, however, had been born long before. In the September 15, 1937 issue of the *Standard Bearer* there appeared an article entitled, "Our Own Christian High School." In that article Rev. Herman Hoeksema noted that it had been "at least ten years ago" that he had "pleaded for a Christian High School of our own." Rev. Hoeksema believed that, though grade schools of our own were indeed important, the need for a high school was decidedly more urgent. He argued that "the age when our boys and girls attend high school is the period in their life when they begin to reflect, to think for themselves, when, more than in the years of their childhood, they are able to imbibe and understand definite principles and doctrines, when it is .of utmost importance ,that, both with respect to their thinking and to their conduct they are guided in the right direction." What Rev. Hoeksema wanted, he said, was

"**specific** instruction" for the covenant young people of our churches. He was not at all content with "so-called **Christian** instruction in the general sense of the word, without emphasis on specific principles." "If we are serious about this," he wrote, "and want to reach this ideal, strive for it, realize this purpose, there is only one way: a school of our own." And he meant a Christian **high** school, a high school "based on specifically Protestant Reformed principles," which, he insisted, "is worth fighting for."

As it turned out, Rev. Hoeksema never saw the realization of that ideal. But the first tentative step was taken toward it already in 1937, some thirty years before the first teacher was hired for service in our own Protestant Reformed high school. On February 5 of that year a group of men met in the basement of First Church of Grand Rapids and decided to "start a society" and to "start with a high school." A couple of month later all of the men of our churches in the Grand Rapids area were invited to a mass meeting, with a view to organizing a school society, in order to begin to lay plans for our own school. That was on April 15, 1937, at 7:45 P.M., in "the large basement room of Fuller Avenue Church." It was there that the first Protestant Reformed Society for High School Education was born.

The newly-elected board set to work at once drawing up a constitution, investigating "state and city requirements for conducting a high school" and gathering facts and figures on "teachers, students, and buildings." The deliberations of the next several years, however, found the board increasingly of the opinion that efforts should be directed toward the providing rather of **elementary** school education, and at length it was decided to call a society meeting for the purpose of considering a proposal "to reorganize merely as a school society, omitting the special aims for high school education at this time."

At that meeting, held again in the basement of First Church, on April 18, 1941, a motion was made and carried "to disband the society, and thereafter to organize an entirely new society." The minutes of the board recorded instructions given at that time to the secretary to forward the files and funds of the old society to the board of the new society, and then they came to an abrupt conclusion with the notation: "END of the PROTESTANT REFORMED SOCIETY for HIGH SCHOOL EDUCATION."

The fruit of the efforts of the board of the new society was seen in the opening of Adams Street Christian School in September of 1950. It was a K-9 school. Apparently, however, the thought of working toward an extension of the educational program into grades 10-12 was not forgotten. For, at the Adams Street School Society meeting of May 21, 1952, there was discussion of building a high school on the corner of Adams and Kalamazoo. But, nothing ever came of that idea. Perhaps the split of 1953, with the resultant drastic drop in grade school enrollment, dimmed for a time the hope of being able to provide what is needed for education at the high school level. It seems, at any rate, that the Society for Protestant Reformed Education was content from then on to limit the scope of its interests to the provision of elementary education for the children of our churches in Grand Rapids.

The hope of having a high school of our own, however, was hardly dead. Before the decade was over, there was held at Southwest Church an organizational meeting of a Society for Protestant Reformed Secondary Education. Four years later (September, 1963) that Society was prepared to purchase ten acres of land, on Ferndale Avenue, within sight of Hope Church and Hope School. Several more years of preparatory work were necessary before construction began early in 1968, and before the board was prepared to give contracts to six teachers, with a view to the opening of school to tenth and eleventh graders in the fall of that same year.

On Saturday, April 20, 1968 the "date-stone" laying ceremony was held at the site of the new construction. Rev. Heys gave the address on that occasion. In that address he gave expression to the concerns of our people which motivated them to make the sacrifices required to provide distinctive instruction for our covenant young people; to the hopes, to the expectations of our parents with respect to the school which was soon to be built; and to the confidence that we might have that the Lord would bless our efforts.

It happens that that speech was printed in the May 15 issue of the *Standard Bearer* that year. I'm glad for that. It gives us an opportunity to look back over twelve years of the school's existence and ask ourselves, in the light of that article, whether Covenant Christian High School has been, and is, what it was hoped to be. "We are gathered here," Rev. Heys said at that time, "because within six months we hope to see **covenant** young men and young women, through the **covenant** faithfulness of their parents and friends, enter through the doors of **Covenant** Christian High to be taught the matters of their natural life by **covenant** blessings to be bestowed upon them, through this instruction, by our **covenant** God." He went on to suggest this: "Since we do, as covenant parents, pupils, and teachers have a covenant God Who promises covenant blessings, I would like to see engraven over the doors of our high school for pupils and teachers, for parents and board members, yea for all who enter; to read and consider, those beautiful words of Psalm 103:17 ^[1] and 18 as they are versified in our *Psalter*, number 28 1, the last stanza. The words are these:

All the faithful to His covenant

Shall behold His righteousness;

He will be their strength and refuge,

And their children's children bless.

. . . "And if," he added, "we cannot have those beautiful words engraven in stone over the door of our school, may God grant that they be written in that mercy in the hearts and lives of the pupils of Covenant Christian High, by the covenant instruction given unto them."

As it turned out, the words were never engraved in the stone. How about in the hearts? Have they been and are they being written there? Several weeks ago, when a board member and I were discussing together a particularly vexing problem he asked me, "Do you think that if, when we were considering the building of our own high school, we could have foreseen these problems, we would have gone ahead with the plans?" To ask the question is to answer it, of course; but would not that kind of foresight have given at least some pause for thought? Is the school that we have had for some twelve years now worth our wholehearted support, morally and financially? Have those beautiful words of Psalm 103 ^[2] indeed been written in mercy in the hearts and lives of the pupils of Covenant Christian High by the covenant instruction given unto them?

One of our seniors was recently assisting a customer at his place of part-time employment when the man asked him what school he attended. On answering, "Covenant Christian," the student heard the man reply, "That makes you all the better." The student felt pretty good about that. Perhaps, though, the man did not know whereof he spoke. Not being connected in any way to the school, he could not have known, for example, that that very week someone had driven a car

over the grass at the high school and did an effective job of "turfing." Nor could he have known that one night that very week three of our teachers had their houses egged—two of them after midnight. . . on Reformation Day. He could not have known that that sort of harassment of teachers (toilet-papering of trees, dumping of bags of leaves on home property, deflating of car tires, using cans of shaving cream to write vulgarities on lawns, knocking down mail boxes) occurs with distressing regularity. He never saw "Class of 1980" written with spray paint on the doorstep, and on the windows at Covenant. He could not therefore have known the grief that some of these "covenant young men and young women" cause teachers and board members, nor how those teachers and board members wonder sometimes about an apparent lack of vigilance on the part of the covenant parents of those young people who are out at that hour of the night. He could not have known either how young people of Covenant can be a cause of grief also to each other, in the form of hazing of underclassmen, or shunning an unpopular classmate. And, not himself having children at the school, he could not have known the frustrations **parents** sometimes feel with respect to the school; for things do not always go the way they would like to see them go (and sometimes the reason for that is simply that teachers and principal do or say things which should have been done or said differently).

The man, I say, could not have known these things—at least not the particulars. But then again it's just possible that he could have guessed the kinds of problems which appear at Covenant Christian. . . . and said what he did anyway. And I'd like to suggest that our attitude ought to be the same. I say that because, in the few short years that I've been at Covenant, I've sensed (rightly or wrongly) that there is a lukewarmness to the enthusiasm for our own high school. And, in a way, I guess I can understand that, too. From the teachers' point of view, it appears sometimes that the "support" which some parents give to the school in counseling their children amounts to this: "They're a bunch of fuddy-duddies, over there, but they are after all in authority, so be sure to respect them." Parents would hardly tolerate that kind of support from the teachers. It encourages the "respect" which reveals itself in night-time vandalism. And the result, understandably enough, is that teachers tend to become disillusioned by it all and wonder, "Are our covenant children and parents really any different?" But. . . they shouldn't. For the fact is that more parents are concerned, cooperative, and trying hard to help make their children's stay at Covenant one which works for their profit—both intellectually and spiritually.

From the point of view of some parents and constituents those same problems, and others like them, are perceived to be a reflection somehow on the school. A school whose students must, for example, be suspended from athletics for drinking is thought to have forfeited its right to the wholehearted support of its constituency. People begin to wonder, "Is our school, with our own covenant students and covenant teachers, really any different?" But, again, that ought not to be. We do well, of course, to be concerned about and grieved by the world conformity, the spiritual laxity and insensitivity which begins increasingly to show itself among us. The school, however, for reasons which ought to be obvious, should not be made the scapegoat.

There is, further, from the point of view of the school constituency, the matter of indiscretions, and supposed indiscretions, on the part of teachers, principal, and board. The pity of it all is that the reaction is all too often, "A school that does **that**(whatever **that** may be) is not going to have **mysupport**." I'm here to say that there **are** indiscretions. I'll be the first to admit that **I** am guilty of them. But the truth of the matter is that dealing hour after hour, day after day, with 150 teenagers is a task that will test the mettle of the best of men. It's a task, in other words, which requires an uncommon measure of grace. At Covenant we have a staff of teachers, each of whom has his own unique capabilities and personality, and each trying in his own way to serve the students . . . and their parents. We can only ask, when our fallibility becomes apparent, that

you be charitable.

Near the end of his speech at the date-stone laying ceremonies of Covenant, Rev. Heys advised that "when the way gets rough, when problems arise and sacrifices are demanded, . . . rest in the assurance that God is faithful to His covenant promise. . . ." Has the way at times been rough? Indeed it has. Will problems continue to arise? We can be sure of it. For we and our children are sinners. Have we, however, seen evidence that God is faithful to His covenant, also with respect to our high school? There can be no doubt about that. We have seen the school grow, from 60 students in grades 10 and 11 in 1968, to a high this year of 157 in grades 10-12. Throughout its history the school has been academically solid. And the teachers have tried hard to communicate to the students, through all of their instruction, a distinct perspective of creation. They have tried, too, in all of their dealings with the students, to impress on their minds the calling which they have to be responsible Christians.

What is the fruit of those efforts? Rev. Heys foretold in 1968 that "out of Covenant Christian High will come future ministers, elders, deacons, school teachers, covenant fathers and mothers who know God in His righteousness, will maintain the truth vigorously, sacrifice and work for the kingdom." Today, two of those who teach at Covenant have themselves graduated from the school; 'and no fewer than ten of their colleagues in the teaching profession have done the same. Two of Covenant's alumni are ministers in our churches, and four more are currently attending our seminary. In First Church alone there are two deacons and three Sunday School teachers who have come out of Covenant. And who knows how many faithful "covenant fathers and mothers" can be numbered among Covenant's graduates?

The idea is not, of course, that the high school in some way *produces* men and women of God. That our children remain faithful to the covenant, and that some of them become leaders in our churches, is a wonder of grace, a work of our covenant-keeping God. But, nevertheless, the Lord uses means. That means is covenant instruction—in our homes, in our churches, in our schools. And it's evident that the God Who moved us to start our own high school is continuing to use that institution for good in our churches. Problems persist (and, somehow, problems always seem to receive maximum visibility). But that's not the whole story. There are many, many students who, when they are at school, reflect favorably on the covenant homes from which they come, and who, when they leave our school, will be a credit also to the institution from which they have graduated.

In that 1938 *Standard Bearer* article, Rev. Hoeksema made an appeal for dedication of ourselves to the cause of Protestant Reformed secondary education. Perhaps it's time for a call to rededication.

There is a lot of hard work done at Covenant, by teachers and students alike. The Lord's blessing will surely rest on those efforts. And for that we thank Him. We thank Him for the rich heritage which is ours; for the desire he has given to parents to pass that heritage on to their children; for the high school he has given us, in which our children may be instructed by teachers whose convictions are the same as that of the parents; and for young people whose desire it is to walk in the old paths. Our prayer is that God's mercy might so rest upon us that we see in this life evidence of His blessing on our work, and that one day, as Rev. Heys put it at the close of his speech, we might "see in the new Jerusalem the fruit of the labors wrought in Covenant Christian High."

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Links:

[1] <http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?version=9&search=Psalm+103:17>

[2] <http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?version=9&search=Psalm+103>