

# Establishing Schools to Provide Reformed Covenant Education (5)

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**AUTHOR:**

Lubbers Agatha

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**Book:**

Matthew

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3

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16

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Romans

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36

**Book:**

Isaiah

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40

**Book:**

Psalm

**Chapter:**

139

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Daniel

**Chapter:**

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**Book:**

II Timothy

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**Verse:**

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**Book:**

II Timothy

**Chapter:**

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**Verse:**

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**Book:**

II Timothy

**Chapter:**

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**Verse:**

17

**Book:**

Matthew

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17

*Miss Lubbers is a member of First Protestant Reformed Church in Grand Rapids, Michigan*

Four articles (cf. Nov. 15, 1998; Feb. 15, 1999; March 15, 1999; and October 1, 1999) have summarized and reviewed the early writings by Herman Hoeksema and George M. Ophoff concerning Reformed Christian education and Christian schools.

I have indicated that articles respecting Christian education during the very early years of the publication of the Standard Bearer influenced the thinking of those who labored to establish and

develop the Protestant Reformed Christian Schools. Although the schools were not to be schools governed by the churches, the schools were to be faithful to the Scriptures and the Reformed confessions—the truth preached and taught in the Protestant Reformed Churches. The Protestant Reformed Christian Schools are controlled and governed by believing parents who are responding in faithfulness to the promises they made at the time of the baptism of their children. They promised that they would to the utmost of their power see to the pious and religious education of their children. This means, if at all possible, schools that are Reformed, Christian schools.

The Protestant Reformed Christian schools have adhered to the doctrines taught in the church—doctrines that are faithful to the Holy Scriptures and the Reformed confessions. These doctrines regulate the lives of the people of God in every area of life, including the education of the covenant children. In order that the schools would remain Reformed and Christian, it was taught and maintained that the Reformed confessions must be an important part of the statements of principle that would direct the instruction in the schools.

The First Reformed Christian School of Redlands, California began sessions in 1934, because those who established it took seriously the teachings and beliefs of the Protestant Reformed Churches in America. The Hope Protestant Reformed Christian School was established in the late 1940s, the Adams Street Protestant Reformed Christian School was established in 1950, and since then many other PR schools were founded because parents and many others were committed to the teachings and beliefs of the Protestant Reformed Churches.

Articles written in 1926 by Rev. George M. Ophoff and in 1932 by Rev. Herman Hoeksema stated that Reformed, Christian schools must be distinctive, and the teachings must be true to the Reformed confessions. Any movement away from these confessions and any denial of the necessity of these confessions for the regulation of the instruction and administration of the school would be detrimental to the instruction given in the schools.

It has always been a vital concern in the PRC that the teachers in our schools must be well prepared to infuse their instruction with Reformed principles. Teachers who were being prepared for work in the Protestant Reformed Christian schools during the 1940s had an opportunity to study with Professor Ophoff in an organization called the PRC teacher-student club. The meetings of the organization made it possible for teachers and future teachers to receive specific instruction and to have an opportunity to discuss important aspects of the instruction of the covenant youth in the schools. During the 1950s, after the Grand Rapids schools had been established, the Federation of Protestant Reformed Christian Schools sponsored seminars that were attended by ministers and teachers and those training for the teaching profession. At the present time teachers have an opportunity to attend a seminar called Principles and Practices in Reformed Education. This seminar is taught and directed by Mr. Jon Huisken and is sponsored by the Federation of Protestant Reformed Christian Schools.

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In the preceding article in this series, I began to review the analysis and critique by George M. Ophoff and Herman Hoeksema of the six "Specific Principles" for Christian Education. These principles were part of a booklet entitled Basic Principles of Christian Schools of America, published July 1925 by the National Union of Christian Schools (NUCS), now Christian Schools International (CSI).

Article 4 examined "Principle a," which speaks concerning the Bible as the Book of books. Both G.M. Ophoff and H. Hoeksema were critical of "Principle a" because of its vagueness and

because it left room for too many incorrect interpretations. They said that modernists and higher critics would be able to agree with it because it lacked the necessary specificity and distinctiveness. By specificity Ophoff and Hoeksema meant that the language should be so specific that there was no possibility for any interpretation but the correct scriptural and confessional interpretation.

In this article we examine "Specific Principle b," the second of the six "Specific Principles" published and adopted by the NUCS.

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## ***An Examination of the Review, Critique, and Restatement of the Specific Principles***

The second of the "specific" principles is the following:

*God is Triune.*

Matt. 3:16, 17 <sup>[1]</sup>

*He is the Creator of all that is, Sustainer of all that exists, and the ultimate end of all things.*

Rom. 11:36 <sup>[2]</sup>

*God who is transcendent*

Is. 40 <sup>[3]</sup>

*and immanent,*

Ps. 139 <sup>[4]</sup>

*is the absolute loving Sovereign over all;*

Dan. 4:31 <sup>[5]</sup>

*men should seek to do His will as it is done in heaven.*

Ophoff gave his analysis and critique of "Specific Principle b" in his series of articles "Dr. Bouma's New Platform" (Standard Bearer, Vol. 3, pp. 81-83, November 15, 1926).

Ophoff began his analysis of "Specific Principle b" with a critique of the statement, "God is Triune." He asserted that this statement, although not erroneous, is not specific enough to be a Specific Principle. He argued that it is inappropriate and wrong to substitute for the unmistakable and articulate language of the Belgic Confession concerning the doctrine of God, the simplistic statement "God is Triune." He saw this as a tragic mistake.

Ophoff believed that "Specific Principle b" would have been much better if it had quoted Article VII of the Belgic Confession and used the language and content of this article instead of the terminology of "Specific Principle b" concerning God. He did not want the Specific Principle

concerning God to be so general that Jehovah's Witnesses and other Trinity-denying persons would be able to accept this principle. He stated that the following version was far better. "... We believe in one only God, who is the one single essence, in which are three persons, really, true and eternally distinct, according to their incommunicable properties; namely the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost...."

Ophoff concluded his comments on this aspect of "Principle b" by saying that Article VII of the Belgic Confession says something. Because he was concerned that Dr. Bouma was making the set of principles for Christian schools so general that anyone could adopt it, he wanted to make certain that the language of each of the principles eliminated the possibility of everyone being satisfied with this kind of educational principle. Therefore he wrote: "No Russelite (i.e., Jehovah's Witness) would endorse it (i.e., Article VII) as expressive of his view of God. This much cannot be said of the statement, 'God is Triune.'"

Ophoff also critiqued the statement, "God is the Creator of all that is." He asserted that the theistic evolutionist would agree with this. He referred again to the language of the Belgic Confession in his critique. He said the theistic evolutionist would not declare that "the Father by the Word, that is by the Son, hath created of nothing the heaven, the earth and all creatures, as it seemed good unto Him, giving every creature its being, shape, form, and several offices to serve its Creator."

He also stated that the Belgic Confession and God's Word not only assert that God created all things but that God created all things after their kind. "This last phrase," said Ophoff, "the Union failed to incorporate into its principles and was satisfied with the mere statement that God is the creator of all things." He contended that the language adopted by the Union was so unspecific it wittingly or unwittingly opened the door to the theory of evolution.

Ophoff expressed concern about the section in the second principle that "God is the Sustainer of all things." He quoted question 27 of the Heidelberg Catechism and Article 13 of the Belgic Confession. These confessions teach the doctrine of divine providence. They maintain that God does not forsake His creation but that He rules and governs all things according to His holy will so that nothing happens in this world without His appointment.

Ophoff asserted that the statement "God is the Sustainer of all that exists" is not specific enough. He declared that it contained a loophole large enough for anyone that denies the miracle to crawl through. He affirmed that our Reformed confessions closed the door to those espousing these heresies.

Ophoff singled out seven most important statements from the Reformed confessions that he believed should be included.

- a. God upholds and governs heaven, earth, and all creatures.
- b. All creatures are so in His hand that without His will they cannot move.
- c. God rules and governs all things created, according to His holy will.
- d. Nothing happens in this world without His divine appointment.
- e. Nothing befalls us by chance but by the direction of our most gracious and heavenly Father.

f. God keeps all creatures so under His power that not a hair of one's head or a sparrow can fall to the ground without the will of our Father.

g. God so restrains the devil and all our enemies that without His will and permission they cannot hurt us.

I must agree that, because this list includes the language and doctrine of the confessions, it is a decided improvement over the easily misinterpreted first two sentences of Principle b.

Ophoff continued his critique by calling attention in his article to the clause that asserts that "God is the absolute loving sovereign over all" and that "God is transcendent and immanent." He noted the similarity of this declaration with the first article of the Belgic Confession.

*We all believe with the heart and confess with the mouth, that there is one only simple and spiritual being, which we call God, and that he is eternal, incomprehensible, invisible, immutable, infinite, almighty, perfectly wise, just, good, and the overflowing fountain of all good.*

Ophoff stated that it was inappropriate to set aside the confessions. He could not see that the language of "Specific Principle b" was an improvement upon the language of Article I of the Belgic Confession.

He believed that it was a matter worthy of note that the Union singled out "love," one of the ethical virtues of God, but failed to make room in its specific principles for a clause asserting that God is "just, holy, and righteous."

Ophoff declared that the desire for cooperation with non-orthodox groups was the cause for this omission. Ophoff stated as well that he believed the Union failed to incorporate into its platform the doctrine of a God who is just because that doctrine is out of place in the system of thought known as common grace. He wrote: "Dr. Bouma in particular and the members of the Union in general are aware of this. And they agreed to pass the doctrine by."

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Hoeksema gave his analysis and critique of "Specific Principle b" in his series of articles "The Christian School Movement: Why a Failure?" (Standard Bearer, Vol. 8, pp. 247-249, March 1, 1932).

Herman Hoeksema granted that "Specific Principle b" expresses many of the great dogmas of Christendom concerning God. He wrote that by doing so it eliminated many erroneous and unbiblical modern views of the Most High, such as Unitarianism, Pantheism, Deism, and to a certain extent at least, also Evolutionism. He became more severe in his analysis when he wrote:

*The article would fit nicely in a general Christian confession of faith but as an element in a specific declaration of principles upon which our Christian schools are founded, it is too general and quite worthless. There is nothing "specific" in it, unless the Union means by specific the same as generally Christian.*

Hoeksema wrote that Roman Catholics, Methodists, Lutherans, Baptists, Pre's, Post's, and A's will all be ready to subscribe to the language of Specific Principle b and that the only class of believers that might have scruples against signing their name to this statement are those of the

Reformed type.

According to Hoeksema, the Reformed person would ask several questions about this declaration concerning God. A Reformed person would inquire concerning the statement that God is the "loving Sovereign over all." He would particularly be concerned about the meaning of the word "all" in this connection. Does the word "all" mean "all men"? If the word means "all men," then no true Reformed believer will subscribe to it. Hoeksema says that "a Christian school that is based on such principles as these is dangerous to the maintenance of the Reformed faith."

Hoeksema also stated that the Reformed person would ask a question or two about the last statement: "... men should seek to do His will on earth as it is in heaven." He noted that the statement is rather general and vague.

Hoeksema noted that the statement should not be condemned if it merely intends to express that all men are responsible before God to live according to His will, to serve and glorify Him. Nevertheless, Hoeksema expressed his doubts about the intent of the statement. He asked the rhetorical question, "Does the statement not smack of the modernistic idea, that all men must simply unite to strive for the realization of God's will in this world? By doing so will we not establish the kingdom of God in the world; and that this is entirely possible because of man's inherent goodness?"

Hoeksema also indicated that the "truth of God's sovereign counsel" and the specific "truth of election and reprobation" were omitted from Principle b. These important truths Hoeksema declared to be more closely related to specific Christian education than statements about the transcendence and immanence of God. He believed the truths of election and reprobation and the truth concerning God's sovereign counsel led more directly to a reason for the establishment and maintenance of separate Christian schools than any other truth declared in this second principle.

Hoeksema wrote:

*Should not a platform of principles, of "specific" principles of Christian education show, at least, why it is the duty of Christian parents to maintain separate Christian schools? Surely, the doctrine of the Trinity, of the transcendence and immanence of God, of the loving sovereignty of God over all—these truths do not necessitate the maintenance of separate Christian schools. Why, then, while declaring truths about God, did not the Union also declare our faith in the eternal counsel of God? And why did it choose to cover up this truth in ambiguous and very general and vague statements, that may easily be interpreted as being contrary to our Reformed faith, such as the declaration that God is "the loving Sovereign over all" and that "men should seek to do His will on earth as it is done in heaven"?*

Ophoff earlier and now Hoeksema indicated that there was a studied attempt to be as vague and general as possible. Hoeksema wrote:

*It seems as if the Union proceeds from the notion that the existence of our Christian schools has nothing to do with the more specific truths of sin and grace, of election and reprobation, of the fact that God's people are a peculiar people in the world, and that, after all, the existence of separate Christian schools is entirely due to the fact that Christian parents cannot make a common cause with the world, especially in the*

*sphere of education.*

Hoeksema continued his concern by expressing dissatisfaction with an article written in Christianity Today, December 1931 by the general secretary of the Union.

*... To give creation its God-implied interpretation and have it serve its God-intended purpose—this is the business of all true education. To educate a child implies that we lead the child to think God's thoughts after Him. Education is an attempt to make the God-glorifying purpose read through the life of the child.... In and through the life of the child God must become all in all.*

Concerning this, Hoeksema wrote that Christian education that is based upon such principles is not Christian but is mere modernism. He said we must not imagine that it is possible for the Christian to think the thoughts of God after Him as revealed in creation or that an education that aims at this as its goal will thoroughly furnish the man of God unto all good works. He says, "This is mere philosophy."

Hoeksema continued as follows:

*The apostle Paul does not write to Timothy that by thinking the thoughts of God in creation after Him the man of God will be thoroughly furnished unto all good works, neither do you find this in Scripture at all.*

What does the apostle write?

*And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness; that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.*

II Tim. 3:15-17 <sup>[6]</sup>

Hoeksema noted that this is quite different from the language of the article by the secretary of the NUCS. To know the truth of God in Christ Jesus from the holy Scriptures and to receive grace to apply and live this truth of God, this is for the man of God to be thoroughly furnished unto all good works. True Christian education is to instruct the child in this wisdom, the beginning of which is the fear of the Lord.

Hoeksema called his readers to flee an apologetic attitude with respect to the Christian schools. He said, and we say with him that our schools must be specifically Christian—they must be distinctively Reformed.

We should not make an attempt to present our Christian schools as generally acceptable to all religious groups or persons in this world. This will result in the destruction of our schools.

Hoeksema submits a revision of the "Principle b" as follows:

*God, who created and sustains all things and governs them according to His sovereign counsel; who is triune, and, as such, lives an eternal covenant-life of friendship in infinite perfection; from eternity chose and in time forms a people unto*



*Himself, to stand in covenant-relationship unto Him in Christ Jesus their Lord, that they might walk in all good works which He ordained for them, and in all their life in the world should be to the praise of His glory, children of light in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation.*

This principle has become more than a final paragraph in an article written nearly 70 years ago. It is a fundamental principle that has become part of the constitutions and articles of incorporation of many of the Protestant Reformed Christian schools. Based on the truth of this principle, instruction is given to the covenant children and young people who attend our schools.

Our prayer is that God will give Protestant Reformed teachers the grace to be faithful to this fundamental principle.

... to be continued

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