

# Establishing Schools to Provide Reformed Covenant Education (9)

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That They May Teach Them to Their Children

Scripture References

**Book:**

Matthew

**Chapter:**

6

**Verse:**

33

**Book:**

John

**Chapter:**

1

**Book:**

Colossians

**Chapter:**

3

**Verse:**

10

**Book:**

Ephesians

**Chapter:**

2

**Verse:**

5

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This article completes the review of the critique by Herman Hoeksema of the Specific Principles adopted in 1925 by the National Union of Christian Schools. The final article in the critique was published in the Standard Bearer of July 15, 1932.

The previous article (Article 8) contained a review of the critique by Herman Hoeksema of NUCS Specific Principle 5. "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 (2 Timothy 3:17); and (b) by seeking in that same dependence upon God to reconstitute the sin-perverted world by realizing God's Kingdom in all spheres and phases of life ([Matthew 6:33](#)<sup>[1]</sup>). This is possible at least in principle through Christ, who is not only the Creator (as the Logos) but also the re creator ([John 1](#)<sup>[2]</sup>)."

The principle states that the all-embracing objective of the school is to promote the glory of our covenant God and to "equip the pupil to realize himself as God's image-bearer" and to "reconstitute thesin-perverted world by realizing God's Kingdom in all spheres and phases of life." Although these statements may have some ring of the truth, we concurred with Herman Hoeksema that this is an incorrect principle because the student cannot realize himself as God's image-bearer and he cannot reconstitute the world and realize God's kingdom. This is God's work, not man's work.

Statements like those used in Specific Principle 5 arise from the belief of many in the Reformed camp who teach that natural man has not lost completely the image of God. Many believe the image of God can be understood in a wider sense than "true righteousness and holiness." However, it should be observed that the Reformed confessions are very specific in their instruction concerning the image of God in man.

The Canons of Dordt, in Articles 1-4 of the Third and Fourth Heads of Doctrine, say that man was originally formed after the image of God. But man revolted from God and he forfeited his original excellent gifts. There remain in man the glimmerings of natural light, but it is a light that man in various ways renders wholly polluted. He holds it in unrighteousness, doing which he becomes inexcusable before God.

The Heidelberg Catechism is very specific in its instruction concerning the image of God in man. The Catechism defines the image of God as follows: "God created man good, and after His own image, in true righteousness and holiness, that he might rightly know God his Creator, heartily love Him, and live with Him in eternal happiness to glorify and praise Him" (Lord's Day 3). All this, man lost and instead became wicked and perverse. Instead of being the image-bearer of God, he became the bearer of the image of his spiritual father, Satan.

The Reformed confessions and the Scriptures teach that only those who are regenerated and are in Christ Jesus are bearers of the image of God. The Heidelberg Catechism in Lord's Day 3

teaches that we are so corrupt that we are wholly incapable of doing any good, and inclined to all wickedness, except we are regenerated by the Spirit of God. Colossians 3:10 <sup>[3]</sup> teaches that man can live as an image-bearer of God only because he is "renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him."

Principle 5 could have been made much more specific and true to the Word of God if it had used the language of the Reformed confessions and the language of the Scriptures. Ephesians 2:5 <sup>[4]</sup> declares concerning the child of God that he is "made alive in Christ," and it does not speak of "equipping the pupil to realize himself as God's image-bearer."

It may appear to some that the critique of Hoeksema is overly critical. Nonetheless, it is absolutely essential that the specific principles that describe the task of Reformed Christian schools be accurate and be in agreement with the Scriptures and the Reformed confessions. The language of Specific Principle 5 is very similar to the teaching of the postmillennial Christian Reconstructionists, who advocate the need for "culture transformation" and who speak of the need for "kingdom builders" preparing the world for the coming of Christ. If Hoeksema were living today, when the ideology of the Christian Reconstruction movement has become so prominent, he would oppose with vigor the teaching of those who advocate "culture transformation" and a "triumphant world-and-life-view." He would oppose the postmillennialists, who assert that Christ cannot return until the world has been prepared for Him and all institutions have been reconstructed or reconstituted and made Christian. Considered from this perspective, one ought to understand and appreciate Hoeksema's critique of Specific Principle 5 and his revision of this principle. In the revision he wrote that the task of the school is to "equip the pupil with that knowledge and wisdom which is necessary in order that he may be able to walk in the midst of the world worthy of the vocation wherewith God calls His people." This is the language of Scripture and the confessions.

In this connection we ought to notice that students in a Reformed Christian school must be taught, when they pray "Thy kingdom come," to believe what the Heidelberg Catechism teaches concerning the coming of the kingdom. Lord's Day 48 says concerning this as follows: "Rule us so by Thy Word and Spirit, that we may submit ourselves more and more to Thee." This means simply that Protestant Reformed Christian schools must teach the students that are ruled by the Spirit of God to live God-fearing lives in every area of human existence—the home, the school, work, government. It is in this way that the kingdom comes. The Reformed Christian student must learn that the rule of God and the coming of the kingdom begins with a personal commitment to the teaching of Scripture and that the "kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost" (Rom. 14:17 <sup>[5]</sup>).

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This brings us to the consideration of the Specific Principle 6 adopted by the NUCS in 1925.

"In determining the Course of Study to be offered, in preparing the lesson material, in giving daily instruction, the above purpose should be considered 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."

Concerning this statement Hoeksema says that the last part of the principle, which describes the necessary qualification of the teacher, presents something very desirable. A teacher must have the fear of God in his heart and he must have the determination to live it out in his profession. Hoeksema states that, although this may be desirable, and this is the kind of teacher the school

board ought to employ, it is possible that one who does not have these qualities can be successful in carrying out the Course of Study.

This is formally true, i.e., that the teacher who does not have the qualities cited in Specific Principle 6 can carry out the Course of Study. However, I have learned after fifty years of work in the Christian school that it is requisite that the Christian teacher must be a God-fearing man or woman. God commands that all His people must live what they confess, and such consistency is especially true for teachers. Teachers must be good examples and live their instruction. The apostle Paul, speaking to Titus on the isle of Crete, commands him to be a good example of the doctrine that he teaches. "In all things shewing thyself a pattern of good works: in doctrine shewing uncorruptness, gravity, sincerity, sound speech, that cannot be condemned..." (Tit. 2:7, 8 [6]). Although the apostle Paul is addressing a minister in the church, the qualities that he describes are the qualities that are requisite for teachers in the Christian school.

In his critique of Specific Principle 6, Hoeksema states that the circumscription of the qualifications of the teacher cannot serve as the working principle for the school boards in the appointment of teachers. To prove his contention, Hoeksema applies to the members of the school boards the Latin phrase that he indicates is well known in ecclesiastical circles: *De intimis non judicant curator scholae grammaticae* (i.e., school boards do not judge the secret things of the heart). Because no one can know the secret things of the heart, school board members cannot discern the inmost recesses of the heart of the teachers they employ. It is quite impossible for anyone to know whether the applicant for a teaching position has the fear of God in his heart and whether he has the determination to live it out in his profession.

Although all of this is true, it is true that just as one knows a tree by its fruits, so the school board will soon know the teacher by his works. God certainly uses weak and sinful means, but the impenitent and proud will not last long in the school where parents and school boards desire teachers that are both good instructors and good examples to the students.

With these reservations and special concerns I present Principle 6 as it was revised by Herman Hoeksema.

6. In determining the Course of Study of the Christian School the principles heretofore set forth should be adopted as the basis for the entire curriculum. And of the teacher, upon whom rests the responsible task of carrying out this Course of Study, it shall be required, that he present a testimonial from a consistory of a Reformed Church and a diploma from a Reformed Normal School. It shall also be required of him that he express full and whole-hearted agreement with the basic principles heretofore set forth and that he declare his purpose to make of the teaching profession no stepping-stone, but his life-task.

The essence of Principle 6, rewritten by Hoeksema, has become determinative for the Protestant Reformed Christian schools. Because this principle was written in 1932, almost seventy years ago, some aspects of the statement have been modified in the practice of the schools. In the first place, Protestant Reformed Christian schools require that the teacher be a confessing member in good standing in a Protestant Reformed church, not merely a Reformed church. In the second place, a diploma from a Reformed Normal School is not the norm. The Normal School (the name given to teacher training colleges in the days when this principle was written) does not exist. Many of the teacher applicants for positions in the Protestant Reformed Christian schools have graduated from public universities that train students for work in the state or public schools, and therefore the instruction the students have received is totally humanistic. Some applicants who

have graduated from colleges that are Reformed in name have not received training that is distinctively and consistently Reformed. In the third place, teachers are not required to declare that they intend to make of the teaching profession their life-task. School boards cannot do this, and teachers have left the teaching profession with legitimate reasons.

At the end of his series of articles written in the early 1930s Herman Hoeksema presented his entire platform of principles as he had revised them. Although these principles have been published in previous articles, the first five are republished here for your study and consideration.

1. The Bible is from the beginning to end the written Word of God, given by infallible inspiration. All school administration, instruction, and discipline shall be based on it and permeated by its teaching, for we acknowledge that the fear of God is the beginning of wisdom.

2. 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.

3. From a fallen and wholly depraved human race, and in the midst of a world that lieth in darkness, a crooked and perverse generation, God saves His elect, establishing His covenant with them and their children in the line of continued generations, forming them by His sovereign grace in Christ into a people of Himself, that they might be His friends, and, living in every sphere of life from the principle of regeneration through faith, they should show forth His praises and walk as children of light in the world.

4. In the midst of and in distinction from the evil world that lieth in darkness and is perverse in all its ways because of sin, it is the calling of the people of God to live by grace from the principle of regeneration according to the will of God in every sphere of life, individual, family, social, industrial, political, and ecclesiastical, so that they may be children of light in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation. Hence, they insist that all the education, that must prepare their children for such an all-sided Christian walk in the world, should be adapted to this purpose.

5. It is the objective of the Christian School to furnish the pupil with an education which in all its branches is rooted in the principle of the fear of God as the beginning of wisdom; and thus to co-labor, in its proper domain, alongside of and in distinction from the home and church, to equip the pupil with that knowledge and wisdom which is necessary in order that he may be able to walk in the midst of the world worthy of the vocation wherewith God calls His people, and that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.

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The Protestant Reformed Churches were only seven years old when the articles that have been reviewed were written—articles that resulted in the composition of the revised specific principles written by Herman Hoeksema to regulate Reformed Christian instruction. Herman Hoeksema prepared the seminal statements as revisions of the specific principles of the NUCS because he believed the original principles contained concepts that were developed under the influence of

the theory of common grace. This theory, which the Christian Reformed Church had adopted in 1924, states that God has a favorable attitude toward all men, and that God performs a gracious work upon the hearts of unbelievers in the world without saving them. Thus they are not totally depraved and have not lost completely the image of God. In this way God restrains sin in reprobate man so that he is able to do good deeds and therefore lead an outwardly good life and produce a good culture. The idea of common grace advocates is that the Calvinist would, for the sake of God, redeem and reconstitute all the spheres of this secular world. This Herman Hoeksema and those who followed him could not accept, and for this reason he wrote revised principles that would articulate the truth as it is confessed in the Protestant Reformed Churches. This is the reason he believed Protestant Reformed Christian schools should be established.

It is urgent therefore that those responsible for the establishment and maintenance of the Protestant Reformed Christian schools and all Reformed, Christian schools vigilantly study and apply the principle that were developed early in the existence of the Protestant Reformed Churches by Herman Hoeksema. Although we must not end with these principles, these are principles that give direction to the instruction and administration of the schools. In this way the Protestant Reformed Christian schools will continue to grow as genuinely Reformed, Christian schools.

Our prayer to God is that this series of articles will remind those responsible for the schools (parents, board members, teachers) concerning their high calling faithfully and properly to apply these Reformed principles and truths in the instructional program. The Protestant Reformed Christian schools may be small and seem to be of little importance in the world, but our calling is to be true to the faith once delivered to the saints.

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