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That They May Teach Them to Their Children

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This article is an introduction to several articles concerning the development and establishing of the Protestant Reformed Christian schools. Articles concerning the development of the PR schools are appropriate in view of the planning authorized by synod to commemorate and celebrate the 75th anniversary of the Protestant Reformed Churches in America.

Recalling and rereading this history will be a review for some. For others it will be an introduction. Those remembering the period 1934-1953 in the history of our churches will remember the establishment and operation of the First Reformed Christian School of Redlands, California. Some may remember attending this school and learning their lessons during those early days in the church basement of the Redlands PR Church.

The establishing and developing of the PR Christian schools is part of the past which serves as the foundation for our current schools. It is an important legacy that we ought to know and celebrate. It is part of the heritage out of which we live.

In this first article we intend to survey the literature and some of the writings that have provided the stimulus and positive direction for the development of the PR school movement.

Leadership was provided early in the days prior to the existence of the schools and in the early days of the PRC by Rev. Herman Hoeksema and other ministers who advocated our own Christian schools. These leaders and spokesmen for the cause taught and promoted the truth that believers could most correctly carry out their promise to instruct the seed of the covenant in

the doctrines of Scriptures as these are summarized in the Three Forms of Unity by establishing PR schools that were staffed with teachers who were members of the church and had espoused the distinctive doctrines that led to the formation of the PRC. Not all agreed that such schools were necessary, but such leadership did serve to help in the founding of the fourteen schools that are in existence today.

Since October, 1924, when the first issue of the Standard Bearer appeared, over three hundred articles concerning Christian education and Christian schools have been written and published in the Standard Bearer. This plethora of information and this proliferation of articles is an indication of the importance that education of covenant children has in the lives and thinking of members of the Protestant Reformed Churches.

A perusal of the recently published index of the first 73 volumes of the Standard Bearer makes obvious what I have indicated about the number of articles.

A review of the articles written will indicate that some of the articles were critical of the established Christian school movement supported primarily by the CRC. Others were more positive in that they provided specific direction for those developing Christian schools. A series of articles has traced the history of education during the sixteenth century Reformation. Other articles have urged parents to form societies and have exhorted parents concerning their responsibility to erect distinctively Reformed Christian schools staffed by well-prepared and orthodox teachers. Still other articles have been concerned with finances, intrusion by the government, place of doctrine in the schools, consistorial promotion of Christian schools, etc.

The first of the more than 300 articles published in the Standard Bearer concerning Christian education was the text of a sermon preached by Rev. Herman Hoeksema prior to the existence of the PRC. Rev. H. Hoeksema preached this sermon in September of 1916, when he was a minister in the Fourteenth Street Christian Reformed Church, Holland, Michigan (cf. Standard Bearer, Volume 3, pp. 532-536, September 1, 1927).

The text for the sermon was Deuteronomy 6:7. In this classic and well-known passage Moses exhorts the people of Israel to teach the precepts of God diligently to their children, to talk of them when they sit in their houses, when they walk by the way, when they lie down, and when their rise up.

Emphasized in the sermon was the truth that the education of the children must be specifically Christian and that education should be viewed as one of the most important tasks of the Christian parent. The sermon demonstrated the biblical basis of Christian education, particularly of Christian education in the school, and stated summarily and clearly the fundamental nature of such education.

Four years later, in a series of ten editorials running from November, 1931, to August, 1932, Herman Hoeksema subjected the principles of the existing Christian school movement to a careful examination. He contended that the Christian school movement (National Union of Christian Schools, now Christian Schools International) was governed by basic principles that are generally Christian but not specifically Reformed.

The positive purpose of these articles was to make clear to the Protestant Reformed supporters of Christian education their calling with respect to covenant education. In these articles Hoeksema argued that Protestant Reformed people use the existing Christian schools as long as

nothing more ideal existed. He urged reformation of the Christian schools that were then being used but, if that did not succeed, he advocated an independent movement that would establish schools on fundamentally sound principles.

His tenth and final editorial in this series of articles concluded with the six specific principles Herman Hoeksema proposed as the basis for all Reformed Christian education. (Cf. Standard Bearer, August 1, 1932, Volume 8, pp. 488-489.)

These principles have been used by all of the school societies in the Protestant Reformed Churches in the Constitutions adopted by the school societies.

We reproduce these principles because they should not merely gather dust in the constitutions and archives of our schools but they should be studied and understood. These six principles, composed more than six decades ago, articulate the basic reasons, the essentials, for the establishing and maintaining of Protestant Reformed Christian schools.

Six Fundamental Principles

1. The Bible is from 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 education, that must prepare their children for such an all-sided Christian walk in the world, shall 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 own proper domain, alongside of and in distinction from the home and the 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.

6. In determining the Course of Study of the Christian school the principles heretofore set forth should be adopted as a 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 Reformed Normal School. It shall also be required of him that he express full and wholehearted 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 language of these six principles is non-compromising and confessionally Reformed. They may appear to be out-of-date to some, but to the Reformed Christian these principles express the Reformed distinctives that must regulate the instruction, discipline, and administration of truly Christian schools. These Reformed distinctives are those that should drive and give direction to all fourteen of the Protestant Reformed Christian school societies that have established schools and have employed teachers to educate the children and youth attending these schools.

It should be apparent that genuine interest and concern for the education of the covenant seed has always been the concern of Reformed believers because of their responsibility as a covenant people. Truly Reformed Christian education was a significant concern of the early leaders of our churches and of the people of the churches. Interest in the PRC for distinctive Reformed Christian education free from the errors and influence of the common grace theories and the deviant world view advocated by Abraham Kuyper and adopted by the Christian Reformed Church in 1924 goes back to the origin and early days of the Protestant Reformed Churches.

A goodly heritage is ours, marked out with gracious care.

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