

# The Protestant Reformed Seminary and the “Good Christian Schools” (3)

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Convocation Address

Convocation exercises of the Protestant Reformed Theological Seminary were held on September 5, 2012 at Southwest Protestant Reformed Church of Grandville. The text of Prof. Cammenga’s address on that occasion continues here. Second installment of the address can be found in the March 15, 2013 issue, p. 276.

## Promotion of the “Good Christian Schools” Practically

Besides grounding seminary students in the basis for the “good Christian schools,” the seminary also commends to the students all of the ways in which officebearers, and especially ministers, ought to promote these schools practically.

Practical promotion of the good Christian schools includes the wise promotion of the establishment of them in areas where we do not have our own Christian schools. This includes patiently laying the groundwork for the establishment of such a school in the preaching. It includes pointing out in sermons how the Christian school, our own Christian school, is a “demand of the covenant.” It includes recognizing when God in His providence makes possible the establishing of our own Christian school, rather than radically and recklessly pushing for the school and foisting the school on the people. A clear majority in the congregation must be convicted of the need for the establishment of our own Protestant Reformed Christian school.

In areas where we have our own Christian schools, but not all the parents send their children to the schools, ministers, especially young ministers, must be encouraged patiently to labor with these parents. Some never change their mind and see the need to send their children to our own schools. The ministers or committees from the consistory ought to visit these families at least once or twice a year. They ought to ascertain the reasons on account of which they are not sending their children to those schools. Often it is just that they do not see the need. But in some instances there may be valid, or at least understandable, reasons for not sending the children. The officebearers ought then to work patiently with these parents in order to overcome their difficulties, in the hope that they will then send their children. Many will, also as they begin to see the good fruits, under the blessing of God, upon our own Christian schools.

Seminary students ought to be encouraged to promote the good Christian schools whenever they have opportunity in the preaching. When they preach on Lord's Day 38 of the Heidelberg Catechism, for example, in which Lord's Day the Catechism is busy expounding the Fourth Commandment, "Remember the Sabbath Day to keep it holy," they have such an opportunity. The 103rd Question is, "What doth God require in the fourth commandment?" And the answer begins: "First, that the ministry of the gospel *and the schools* be maintained. . . ." Their promotion of the good Christian schools in a sermon on this Lord's Day ought to demonstrate clearly the connection between the Christian school and obedience to the Fourth Commandment. Why is the Christian school one of the first things mentioned by the Heidelberg Catechism in this Lord's Day? And what connection is there between the schools and the ministry of the gospel? (One important point that the answer establishes—I cannot resist pointing out just this one—is that the Reformed churches have always believed in a trained ministry.)

Sermons dealing with Christian education are appropriate in connection with the administration of the sacrament of baptism. These sermons ought to draw out the implications of the vow of baptism that parents promise to see their child instructed and brought up in the true doctrine to the utmost of their ability. These sermons ought to call attention to the "three-fold cord" of church, home, and Christian school, which is not easily broken.

In Reformed churches the practice of preaching an annual "school sermon" in the Fall of the year, at the beginning of a new school year, is of long standing—a commendable practice indeed. Let Protestant Reformed ministers carry on this worthy tradition and take advantage of this opportunity.

The subject of Christian education and the Christian schools ought to have a place in the congregational prayers on the Lord's Day. Let our ministers pray regularly for our Christian school teachers and for our children and young people who study at these schools. Let the prayers include petitions on behalf of the parents who sacrificially support our Christian schools and the school societies and school boards that govern them. The men serving on the school boards volunteer tremendous amounts of their time and expertise in the service of our schools. Where would our schools be without such men willing to give of themselves for the great cause of Christian education?

Let the ministers and the consistories promote membership in the school societies—*active* membership. Let them promote membership in the societies not only by men of the congregation who have children attending the Christian schools, but also by both the young men who do not yet have children and the older men whose children are past school-age.

Let the ministers and elders make the subject of Christian education a matter for discussion on family visitation. At the visits, let the responsibilities of covenant parents in this regard be pointed out and let the parents be encouraged to fulfill "the demands of the covenant," especially in difficult financial times. As a pastor, whenever I heard parents groan about the high cost of tuition, I would always tell them that they couldn't afford *not* to send their children to the Christian school. On family visitation, let the pastor and the elders direct questions to the children and young people concerning their faithfulness in applying themselves to their studies in the Christian schools. And let promising young people be encouraged to give serious consideration to the teaching profession in our Christian schools. What a high calling among God's covenant people! What a need we have for qualified and committed Christian school teachers.

These are only some of the ways in which the seminary ought to be involved in promoting the good Christian schools among our students, the future ministers in our churches and sister-

churches, so that they in turn will be equipped to promote them to God's people.

## **The Goal at Which We Aim**

In promoting the "good Christian schools," our own Christian schools, we aim at a great goal. The seminary encourages prospective ministers to set this goal before themselves and before God's people in all their preaching, teaching, and writing, in which they promote the "good Christian schools in which the parents have their children instructed according to the demands of the covenant."

The goal is, first of all, the good of the children themselves. When parents fail to instruct their children to the utmost of their power, fail to carry out their calling with regard to the Christian education of their children, the results, apart from the intervening grace of God, are disastrous in the children. Then a generation grows up that does not know the Lord and, not knowing the Lord, does not serve the Lord. *That's* what happened in Israel, as God said would happen in Deuteronomy 6:12-15. A generation grew up that "forgot the Lord" (v. 12), that did not "fear the Lord thy God, and serve him" (v. 13), a generation that "went after other gods, of the gods of the people which are round about you" (v. 14). For that reason, "the anger of the Lord thy God," who is "a jealous God among you," was kindled and He "destroy[ed] the[m] from off the face of the earth."

But under the blessing of God the faithful instruction of the children bears fruit in children who know, who love, and who serve the Lord (Deut. 6:2, 18, 24). Oh, that makes all the hard work, all the sacrifices, all the tuition worthwhile.

In the second place, the goal is the good of the church. History shows that children not instructed in the fear of God leave the church. And children of parents who did not send their children to Protestant Reformed Christian schools, when they could have and should have, usually leave the Protestant Reformed Churches when they become older. As much as we want to see our children members of our Protestant Reformed Churches when they grow up and after they marry, so much we ought also to be committed to sending them to our Protestant Reformed Christian schools, where this is possible.

But ultimately the goal is the glory of God. That is God's purpose in the salvation of His people, that His mighty hand may be exalted (Deut. 6:21); that He may be feared (v. 13); and that He may not be forgotten, but remembered and adored (v. 12).

May God use the Protestant Reformed Seminary on behalf of the promotion of the "good Christian schools." May those schools stand in the service of God's covenant with us and with our children and children's children after us. And may those "good Christian schools" stand in the service of the still greater goal of the glory of His name, the name of the God who establishes and maintains the everlasting covenant of grace.

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