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That They May Teach Them to Their Children

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What makes Christian education to be what it is and to have the great value that it does? The great strength of Reformed, Christian education lies in its distinctive character. In addition to what has already been pointed out in the first segment, we note five main characteristics of Christian education.

Scripture and the confessions

First of all, Christian education is based on Scripture and the Reformed confessions. There is a movement among Christian schools away from this. It is the movement known as the AACCS, the Association for the Advancement of Christian Scholarship. This movement, born in the 1950s, was first known as the Association for Reformed Scientific Scholarship. Its headquarters is the Institute for Christian Studies (ICS) in Toronto. Adherents are found on the faculty of virtually every Christian college in North America, and Christian schools are widely affected.

The AACCS/ICS people are disciples of the Dutch philosopher Herman Dooyeweerd and his sphere sovereignty. They sharply delineate between home, school, and church, insisting that parents run the sphere of the home, but the teachers must control the sphere of the school. This is destructive of parental education.

In turn, they assert that the church is the sphere of faith, and the confessions are appropriate for that sphere but not for the school. Schools must have their own educational creeds. The result is

that in many school constitutions, Reformed creeds were removed as the basis for the instruction.

Even worse, the proponents of this movement effectively take the Bible out the school by redefining the term "Word." They play games with terms. There are, say they, many different Words of God. There is the Incarnate Word, that is, the Word become flesh. There is the spoken word of God (preaching). There is the Inscripturated (written) Word, by which they mean the Bible. And finally, there is the Word of God in the creation.

These different Words may be used only in their proper spheres, it is claimed. For instance, the Inscripturated Word is important for matters of faith. However, the Word in the creation is the proper study of the school. The calling of the school is to discover the Word of God in the different spheres. There is a word of God in math, in history, in art, in law, in business, etc., waiting to be discovered and applied.

According to this view, the school's search for the Word of God (or Law) in each sphere does not mean that the instructors will find principles about science, art, business, etc., in the Bible and apply the same to the study of the various subjects. Rather the goal is to discover the Word of God in the subject area (sphere) by a study of the subject itself. In this way, the Bible is effectively removed as the basis of the instruction.

This is exactly what has happened in many Christian schools across Canada and the United States. And what if the particular Word of God that the class discovered happened to conflict with the teaching of the Bible? Objections were met with quick dismissal — That Word of God (the Bible) is for matters of faith, not for the sphere of science. Only when people woke up and realized what was happening did some societies change the school constitution to read that "the basis for instruction is the Bible, that is, the Word of God contained in the Old and New Testaments."

Why is it so important to have the Bible and the confessions as the foundation of the school? First, the Bible and the confessions are the standard of truth. Thy word is truth, Jesus said (John 17:17). It is the only unchanging standard of truth. Secondly, all the creation can be understood only in the light of the Word. The Belgic Confession in Article 2 teaches that the Bible is the revelation of God that is clearer and fuller than God's revelation in the creation. The confessions set forth the same truth in a systematic way by summarizing the whole of the Bible's teaching in particular areas.

Remove the Bible and the confessions, and the school has no standard for rejecting the lie. The devil does not operate only in the church. He works mightily to corrupt the home and the school. Without the Bible and the confessions, who can say what is right? The history teacher avers, "I have studied this. This is God's word which I have drawn out of history, namely, that the kingdom of Christ is of the earth."

The science teacher maintains, "I have studied the material carefully and have learned that the world evolved out of a mass of material over billions of years. This is God's word in the sphere of science."

Who can contradict that? Take the stance that the Bible and the confessions are only for the sphere of the church, and there is no standard of truth in the classroom. In addition, the "clearer and fuller" revelation of the Bible is thrown out.

No, the Bible and the confessions are the essential basis of the Christian school's instruction. All instruction must be built on this foundation. All instruction must be evaluated and judged by the same.

Christ-Centered

A second significant characteristic of the Christian school is that all its instruction is Christ-centered. Since Christ is the center of the council of God and the Mediator of the covenant, the instruction must bear that out. Christ is the Creator of the universe. All things were made by Him. All things were made for Him. He is the Lord of history. He is controlling all things for His triumphant return.

Christ is the wisdom that children are exhorted to "get" (Proverbs 4:7).

He is the Word. This has obvious implications for teaching English and literature. Christ is the same yesterday, today, and tomorrow, and thus is the reason why $2+3 = 5$ every day of the year.

He is Life. He not only gives spiritual life to His own, He gives also natural life, and controls both the beating of the heart and the movement of the individual blood cells to every part of the body.

Christ, the Son of God, sees all our actions. He condemns the evil word and the cruel mocking on the playground. He demands love and obedience from covenant children. He is also righteousness, sanctification, and redemption for them.

Is there any area of the school curriculum or the school life where Christ can or may be excluded? There is none. This is what makes Christian education to be Christian. It is not merely prayer at the appropriate times in the school day. It is not merely having a Bible class in the curriculum. Nor is it the fact that teachers require students to memorize Bible verses or emphasize good morals. What makes the school to be Christian is that every aspect of the school's instruction and life is truly Christ-centered.

Covenantal Instruction

A third characteristic of Christian education is that it is covenantal in its instruction, that is, covenantal both in content and with respect to the manner of instructing and dealing with students.

That the content of the instruction be covenantal is possible and necessary because the whole purpose of Christian education is to equip the child to live in covenant fellowship with God. All the instruction in the Christian school will be affected because the covenant is all encompassing. It defines the child's relation to God, to the world, and even to the creation. The covenant child is a friend of the living God, even an adopted child of God. Consequently, he is the enemy of the wicked world.

We should add that the covenant of God includes the whole creation. This is plain from Genesis 9, which records the fact that God established His covenant with Noah and the creation. Romans 8 speaks of the creation groaning unto the day when it will be delivered from the curse. Thus the study of the creation involves the covenant. God created all things with an eye to His covenant.

The creation is designed to be the place where the covenant would be realized in and through the fall of man, the salvation of the elect in the cross, and the gathering of the covenant people out of the fallen race. In the end, God will save the creation through fire and recreation (II Peter 3).

The Christian schoolteacher must begin his task with a clear understanding of how each subject fits into the whole body of the truth of God, the covenant God. When the Christian schoolteacher makes lesson plans, he should face the question, "How does this knowledge equip the students to serve God as members of His covenant?"

Secondly, the instruction is covenantal in the manner in which teachers deal with students. That is to say, the students are viewed as covenant children. They are not treated as unbelievers, those who need to be regenerated. Rather, the students are considered to be what the Bible calls them, namely, Jehovah's heritage (Psalm 127:3) and God's children (Ezekiel 16:20-21).

Christian schoolteachers thus deal with their students as regenerated, believing children. They know assuredly that these children still have their evil natures. They are sinners. Christian schoolteachers know that their students will sin. They will need the rod and reproof.

At the same time, these children have been redeemed from sin. They are sanctified by the blood and Spirit of Christ. They have within them the principle of a new and holy life. They can and must be called to a life of thankful obedience.

Antithetical

A fourth characteristic of Reformed education in the Christian school is that it is antithetical. Antithetical instruction sets forth the truth over against what is false (the lie). The term antithesis is a Reformed concept, and therefore begins with God. God is the thesis, for God is truth. The believer is called to live antithetically by saying "Yes" to God, and to all that is pleasing to God.

However, there is a corresponding "No" in antithetical living. The covenant people are called to say "No" to all that stands opposed to God and to all that God hates. God set this calling before His people from the beginning— even in the garden of Eden. Part of God's purpose for the two special trees in the middle of the garden was to show Adam that he must say "Yes" to the tree of life, and say "No" to the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. That is living the antithesis.

The world in which we live is opposed to God and His Word. The calling of the believer is to live antithetically in the midst of this world. This is the reason why common grace is the death of sound Reformed education. It bridges the gap between the world and the church, between the Thesis (God) and the opposition (lie), between the life-style of the righteous and that of the ungodly.

If the Christian school will equip the covenant child to live antithetically, the instruction must be antithetical. Such a school will not merely teach a literal six-day creation, it will reject evolution. Truly Christian education will not merely teach the facts of history, it will expose the vanity (emptiness) of the philosophies of men and their kingdoms.

Antithetical, Christian education will both develop the taste for good music, and condemn the ungodly rock and country music. Such instruction will not merely teach some physical skills in sports, it will also put sports in the Christian perspective. Christian education condemns the

worship of athletes and sports. The Christian school likewise fights to keep its own sports program in the proper perspective with respect to the time required and the emphasis given.

Thus the Christian school develops the student's ability to think and evaluate. It teaches him to live by principle, not by mere laws. It warns against the current forms of evil, but also equips him to face the unknown future development of evil.

Reformed, Christian education is antithetical.

Progressive

Finally, Christian education is progressive. Man keeps growing in his knowledge and technology, developing the powers that God has imbedded in this creation. Natural man uses every new discovery to sin and to develop the kingdom of man. The Christian school must keep abreast of these developments if it is properly to train covenant youth. This demands that teachers continue to study and grow.

It means also that the Christian school must provide the teacher with the material needs for progressive classroom instruction. Computers, for instance, are a necessity for properly equipping the covenant child to serve God in today's world. Think of the tremendous power unleashed by the computer—for good and for evil. Churches are using it for printing publications and for spreading the truth even on the Internet. Godless men are using the computer to establish communication for the one, worldwide kingdom of man (Antichrist's) and to spread vile filth on the same Internet.

This is not to say that the Christian school must be as well equipped as the public school. In most instances, they neither can nor need be. At the same time, we must not simply ignore the advances in knowledge and technology. In every area where there is development or new discoveries (though not necessarily with every new invention) there is a good use, and there is an evil use. The purpose of totally depraved man is for evil. The covenant child must be equipped to press the new discovery or technology into the service of God, if it is possible to use it at all.

To accomplish its task, therefore, Christian education must be progressive.

This kind of education—Reformed, Christian education—is of the greatest value. That value we will examine concretely next time, the Lord willing.

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