

Our Own High Schoolâ€™A Necessity

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I have been asked to write an article for our *Standard Bearer* on the subject of our own Protestant Reformed Christian High School. This request did not come to me floating out of the air, so to speak; but it was made by a group of men who have already done a considerable amount of work in order that our own high school may become a reality.

Although I have no personal acquaintance with the work of this committee, nevertheless I would like to inform you of some of their efforts. It was shortly after the first of the year that a committee voluntarily constituted itself in order to work on this problem. This committee was and is now composed of two lay members from each of our churches in Michigan, and has met from time to time in the course of the year. They were appointed by no one and are answerable to no one, but they are deeply interested in our high school movement. It is sometimes difficult to know just how to start a movement of this nature, and these men felt that this way would be the best way. Their purpose is not to take the whole matter of a high school into their own hands, for this they could not possibly do. But they do intend to be a "steering committee" to start the movement and give it direction. I am personally not in a position to inform you of what work they have done up to this point, but I do know from talking with one of their members that their goal is a society meeting of all men in this area and outside of it. This meeting they hope to call sometime in September at which time they intend to present to this society the fruit of their labors and point them to the feasible direction in which to go especially in connection with the host of problems that arise in any such venture. They hope that at that time a society will be definitely organized and that a school board will be elected which can carry on the work that has to be done.

Now it is time, these men feel, for their work to receive some publicity so that their efforts may be brought before our people. It is time for the importance of a high school of our own to be presented to those of you who will in the future support the movement and send your own children to this institution.

They have asked the undersigned to emphasize in this article particularly the necessity of a Protestant Reformed High School. This implies that in the mind of the committee there is really no other choice but to have a high school of our own. It is, with them, not a question of utility or of the proper time; it is not a matter that can be shrugged off indefinitely; it is simply a necessity

which must be faced now and about which something must be done. With this I agree completely.

In the briefest sense of the word it is, of course, true that the reasons why we have elementary schools of our own are the same reasons why we must have a high school of our own. This is denied by some. There is an argument to the effect that our own high school is not necessary at all because of the fact that our children, once having been trained in elementary schools which are Protestant Reformed, are now able "to stand on their own feet" and throw off any false doctrine that may be presented to them in the existing high schools. With this argument I cannot possibly agree. The reason for my disagreement is not primarily that I doubt the ability of our high school students to "stand on their own two feet," but rather that the need for our own high schools has a more positive basis and foundation than mere negative criticism. Although at the same time I question whether any man is completely impervious to constant instruction in false doctrine no matter how old he may be. But such negative reasons deserve a secondary place.

The positive reasons may be familiar to all of you who have given thought at one time or another to our educational program, but are nevertheless worth reviewing.

We believe that the schools in which our children are taught are extensions of the home. The complex culture in which we live and the vast body of knowledge that has been accumulated in the past ages make it impossible usually for a child to be taught in the home. So there are schools organized in which teachers are hired to take the place of the parents and assume the responsibility for the instruction of the children.

Now, it is the deepest desire of the hearts of covenant parents to see their children instructed in the truth of God's Word. This truth has entered into the hearts of the parents themselves; they have learned to love it and cherish it; it is to them a priceless treasure for which they will sacrifice all, yea life itself. It is but natural then that these covenant parents have no deeper desire than to see their children grow up to love that same truth as they come to spiritual maturity. To see one's children show antipathy to the truth is always very difficult. But to conclude that the reason is that we have not been faithful in teaching them is far worse.

This is not to say that schools are miniature seminaries in which only doctrine is taught, but it is saying that the knowledge of God must permeate all knowledge of all things before it can ever be said to be knowledge at all. If the study of trees and the starry heavens, of the earth's crust and the history of the nations is not a study of the knowledge of God, there is no profit in it in this life or in the life to come.

But this desire which is undoubtedly found in the hearts of covenant parents is rooted in a deeper obligation which is given them of God. The children they bring forth are not their own, but are children whose names are written on the pages of the Book of Life with the ink of the blood of the Lamb of God. These children are God's because God has chosen them to be His own and redeemed them in the cross of Calvary. We receive them from Him for a time in order that we may take them on our knees to teach them and lead them by their hands in the way of God's precepts. If our minds wander from this fundamental truth, we will lose the courage to instruct them in God's fear and our patience with them will wear thin.

So we must have schools where we can fulfill these obligations. Certainly we would never take pains in our homes to inculcate into their minds things which were repulsive to us: We would never spend time and energy in our home to make sure that our children mastered the

fundamentals of errors with which we cannot possibly agree. We would not force them to learn evolutionism as the truth or Common Grace as the Word of God in our homes. We should not do it in our schools. This is inconceivable. There too, it is in reality covenant parents teaching covenant children although they have delegated the responsibility to others.

From this it follows that the ideal situation is to have a complete system of education for our children beginning with the kindergarten and continuing on through the university. The trouble is that it has happened repeatedly in the past that the church has organized such a system of education only to see it fall into the hands of those who no longer wish to confess the truth in all its purity. The result is that the church must start all over once again. And this all requires time and money. Nevertheless, this is obviously the will of God for our lives, and it is once again incumbent upon us to see to it that we have schools of our own.

Yet there is another strong positive reason why such schools which we can call our own are a necessity. This reason is that there is a very definite need to develop a distinctively Reformed approach to the whole field of education. This has never been completely done. There is little if any attempt in the existing grade schools, high schools and colleges to do this. Most generally, pedagogues are content with what they have which has been in the main developed by the world and which is changed by them only to the extent of a Bible lesson. It is not as if we come armed with an entirely complete development of the fundamental principles of education as we approach a high school of our own, but it is high time this is done. We need to know and develop the principles that are the foundation of any Reformed education. We need to develop these principles in the light of our own distinctive truth which warrants our existence as Protestant Reformed Churches. We need a Reformed set of principles of education; a Reformed educational psychology, a Reformed understanding of the child which is being instructed and of the best way to instruct that child. We need to know how the knowledge of God can be imprinted upon and become the essence of every subject which we teach in our schools. This can only be done in schools of our own. Within Protestant Reformed schools, given consecrated school societies and boards and teachers that love the truth with all their hearts, there is the possibility and probability of developing all these things for the sake of our children. But the importance of doing all this cannot be overemphasized.

It stands to reason that this is all impossible in the existing schools. This is primarily because of the fact that we cannot maintain control over them by putting our own men in the majority on the boards and staffing the schools with our own teachers. I do not mean to say that we have the right of control, for certainly we are not in the majority in the existing high schools. Nor am I even saying that we have been as faithful as we should in attempting to make our voice heard in the existing schools. But apart from all this, it remains a fact that our voices are drowned out in the clamor of those who are greater in number than ourselves. The result is that the existing high schools are not above criticism. It stands to reason that the all pervading world and life view of common grace will have its deleterious effects on the whole body of instruction which is given in them. Given teachers imbued with it and board members building upon its foundation, it can be no different. This is not merely a matter of formal instruction in the theory itself, but is on the contrary a matter of emphasis and approach in any subject of the curriculum. I am not denying them the right to teach in this fashion if such is their conviction, but it is not and ought not to be for us.

We would not tolerate instruction of this sort in our homes; we may not in our schools.

I am not unaware of the many practical problems which arise in connection with a high school of

our own. There are problems of finances, of teachers, of curriculums, of providing the necessary plant and equipment to make our instruction in these schools what it should be. I for one feel very strongly that the teaching given should meet the rigid requirements of any accredited school, and that our school should be able to compete successfully with any high school as far as the quality of the instruction is concerned. But these are not problems which cannot be overcome. A few remarks about these things would be in order.

1) In the first place, the quality of the instruction is determined primarily by the fact that it should be Christian instruction. I do not mean that a course in biology, must ignore the huge body of facts that have been accumulated in the past concerning the organic part of the creation. But mere mastery of facts in our days has become a fetish in itself so that instruction is Christian in name only. This ought not to be the case with our schools. And I am quite content to rest in the knowledge that any teacher who is earnestly desirous of being a true Christian school teacher and not one in name only will see to it that the formal and factual aspects of the course are not neglected. This is emphatically the case in our existing schools.

2) In the second place, the elaborate and often ornate school buildings, the perfectly equipped laboratories for science courses, the multi-thousand dollar gymnasiums are not an essential factor in Christian education. They are indeed nice to have, but they are not essential to the school—to a *Christian* school. No more than a church building makes a congregation does a school building make a body of pupils or a staff of teachers. Again I am not making a plea for school to be held in a hovel in the city dump, without chalk or blackboards, without any equipment which is essential to sound teaching; but there is room for emphasis on the point that it is not essential to compete with existing schools public or Christian in the erection and equipping of our own edifice. If we must have the most elaborate and very best in equipment and facilities, our own school is out of the question. The only thing I insist on is the very best of school boards and the very best of teachers. And by "best" I mean school board members and teachers who are dedicated to the cause of Christian instruction as we understand it. If our parents who support our schools are dedicated, our schools will have staffs and boards who have this same dedication.

3) We have to make no apologies for our size as churches nor feel any twinges of embarrassment that we do not measure up to the standards which the world sets for success. We need not do this as churches; we need not do this when we build our schools. We need feel no compulsion to defend a school that is not architecturally beautiful and modernly equipped and capable of offering an elaborate physical education program in a huge gymnasium, if the subjects that are taught are capably taught and if the pupil passing through the doors and walking down the corridors and finding his seat in the classrooms is given instruction in the knowledge of God no matter what subject he may study. The approval of God upon work well done is sufficient reward in itself. I am reminded of the words of the prophet Zechariah in 4:10: "Who hath despised the day of small things?"

4) These things which are presented above are well within our means and are goals which can be successfully reached by us now. The movement is started, and to procrastinate now will be fatal for our entire movement. As churches and as schools we must continue to go ahead. The opportunity to do this is ours at this time. Let us not shirk our calling at this crucial point!

The movement of our churches as a whole and of each individual endeavor in particular is a movement of faith. Without faith in the cause of the Lord we are easily tossed about on the stormy seas of the times in which we live without guidance or goal. But faith which looks to the

future is able to overcome all the problems that confront us and to establish this vital link in, our educational program.

That there is a necessity for our own high school is apparent. What is a covenant obligation and necessity for us, the Lord never makes impossible to perform. When He gives us responsibility in His covenant, He does not shut the door before us to the fulfillment of these responsibilities, but opens the way with guidance from on high. All the spiritual qualifications of a high school are no doubt present with us—we have a most blessed truth; we have consecrated teachers; we have dedicated men to serve on our boards; it remains to make this a reality. Let us then support the committee which is now working! Let us by all means attend the coming school society meeting! Let us make a high school of our own an actuality!

—H. Hanko

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