

SCHOOLS IN THE CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY

Statement

In order to gain a measure of insight toward the solution of some of the problems that plague us in the reformed Christian community with respect to the nature of Christian education and the place of Christian schools in contemporary society we propose to deal with (I) the internal nature of a school and (II) the relation of a school to certain non-educational institutions in society.

I. The internal nature of the school

A. A very brief definition of the school

1. A school is an educational or instructional community of teachers and pupils or students established to prepare the latter for meaningful participation in society.
2. This simple definition already implies that a school is not to be confused with other societal institutions: it has a character of its own that distinguishes it from the church, the marriage-bond, the family, the state, a business-enterprise, etc.
3. The Christian school, in its own unique way, must be an expression of the coming Kingdom of God through which the Lord Jesus Christ restores the direction of creation in all its fulness through history.

B. Concerning the basis of Christian education

1. The Word of God, as it comes to man in the Order of Creation, in the Scriptures, and in Jesus Christ (cf. John 1), gives the foundational direction to the life of Christ-followers in its entirety, and thus also to education.
2. The basic directives concerning education which the Christ-follower receives from the Word of God ought to be explicitly formulated in the constitution governing the educational enterprise.
3. Educational creeds and ecclesiastical creeds:
 - a. The confessions of a (denominational) institutional church should not take the place of a Christian educational creed in the constitution of a school society since:
 - (1) A school is a school and an institutional church is an institutional church; each of these societal structures requires a confession relevant to that structure.

(2) These church confessions were not intended to be and should not be looked upon as school creeds; they do not specifically express the directives of the Word of God for an educational enterprise.

(3) To act as if a church creed can be a school creed is to confuse and mislead. It is, in fact, to set up (a form of) church-schools in the Roman Catholic tradition.

(4) To employ church creeds as school creeds is to take the easy way - as if our fore-fathers had worked it all out correctly and in detail for later centuries. It is to take the way of fear - as if the Spirit no longer leads His people so that they grow in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ attuned to the written Word. Finally, it is the way of little faith - refusing to heed the admonition of Phil. 2: 12, 13.

(5) These church confessions were written at a time when schools as we envisage them today were largely absent. They thus do not deal with the modern educational problems and anti-christian views of education;

(6) Placing these confessions in a school constitution in a North American context - where the institutional church is tragically fragmented in hundreds of denominational pieces - would obstruct the desired development toward a genuinely Scriptural-ecumenical (inter) national system of Christian schools.

b. Supporters of the inclusion of ecclesiastical creeds in school constitutions must face the following questions:

(1) In what way does reference to the church creeds (which do not lay out the main Scriptural guidelines for education) improve the educational creed (which does lay out such guidelines)?

(2) If an educational creed does set forth the Scriptural directives for the educational enterprise, why must the church creeds then be added?

(3) If the church creeds are indispensable in a school constitution, why have a school creed at all? Why not simply refer to the church creeds or repeat certain sections? Why do those who take this position usually admit that some educational statement is needed in addition to the church creeds?

(4) If the church creeds must be included in a school constitution, why can they be omitted in the constitutions of other Christian cultural movements - such as a Christian trade movement, a Christian businessmen's association, a Christian political body, etc? What distinguishes a Christian school society from other Christian cultural endeavors on this point?

c. This rejection of (denominational) ecclesiastical confessions as a specifically relevant basis for Christian education should not be interpreted as a rejection of the Word of God as the foundation of the Christian school. Our reasons for this are the following:

(1) The richness of the Word of God is by no means exhausted in the ecclesiastical confessions.

(2) This richness must be spelled out specifically for the educational task of the Christian community.

(3) The institutional church, for which these confessions were often specifically formulated, in no way embraces the totality of the Christian's life as it has been restored in Jesus Christ (cf. Eph. 5, 6; Col. 3, 4).

d. In this context the following points are all-important:

(1) We reject the view that all Christian activity and witness must be channeled directly or indirectly through the institutional church. This view, found not only among many Roman Catholics and in the circles of the World Council of Churches but also in many evangelical and reformed churches, is un-Scriptural since it (a) confuses the Body of Christ and the new humanity (see Eph. 1: 22, 23 and 2: 15) with one institutional manifestation of it; (b) and thus loses sight of the all-encompassing nature of the Kingdom of God; and (c) in effect denies the office of every redeemed man in Christ.

(2) Reliance upon ecclesiastical confessions as a sufficient basis for Christian education leads to spiritual sterility and spiritual bankruptcy in the Christian educational movement since the educational relevance of the Word of God is not explicitly brought to the fore. This is evident in the frequent practice of appointing teachers and professors who are members of a church confessing these creeds when in effect the appointees are often wholly unaware of the fundamentals of Christian education. Adherence to ecclesiastical confessions thus may serve to hide the absence of a Scripturally directed educational curriculum.

C. Some suggestions for the development of a Christian educational creed:

In our view the educational creed to be included in the constitution of a Christian school society should be clear on the following issues:

1. **Adherence** to the Word of God in its three-fold form: the Law-Word ("general revelation"), the Inscripturated Word (the Bible), and the Incarnate Word (Jesus Christ).

2. Since the central tenets of the Christian religion are intensely relevant to all areas of human life, and thus also to education, a confession of these tenets should have a place in a school creed. The early Church expressed these central tenets in the Apostles' Creed; and we suggest that it be included in the constitutions of Christian school societies.
3. The purpose of the Christian school in society as a cultural endeavor on the part of the Christian community to serve the Kingdom of God in a specifically educational context.
4. Delineation of a Scriptural view of the world as God's creation, of history as the unfolding of that creation, and of society as the stage of Christian witness and action.
5. The nature of the educational process. Here the following questions need answering: (a) What is a child? (b) In terms of which conception of child-development does education take place meaningfully? (c) What effect does sin have on the educational process? (d) What is the specific task of the teacher in the educational process? (e) What is the nature of the team of teachers in the school? What is the relation between parents and the school?
6. Principles guiding the educational curriculum. Among these:
 - a. Each child, as an image-bearer of the Lord, is a responsible creature who must be accepted for what he is and as he is (as opposed to the classical curriculum-centered approach).
 - b. Creation is ordered by the Law-Word of God, and is thus the meaningful context of education (as opposed to the current child-centered approach in which man is seen as creator instead of as unfolder of the order of creation).
 - c. The authority of the teacher, given by God, is for the sake of the freedom of the pupils. The teacher is to guide and lead the pupils so that they come to acknowledge the all-inclusive nature of God's Kingdom; so that they come to see the norms which hold for the various sectors of this Kingdom; so that they are prepared to participate meaningfully in these sectors as God's representatives.
 - d. Inasmuch as the school is a place where pupils are led, everything that goes on in a school, including discipline, must have pedagogical or educative significance.
7. Rejection of contemporary un-Scriptural views of education.

D. The educational work-community:

1. Fundamental to our view is the conviction that the educational process is centrally focused on the class-room, where the teacher educates and the pupil or student learns.

2. For an entire school-community it is crucial that the teachers - the educators - do not form a loosely gathered body of individuals but that they form a team which, under the direction of the principal - the most capable leader in their midst - executes the educational task for the Christian community in a particular locality.
 - a. The creation of such a team depends in the first place upon adherence to the basic principles of a Christian educational outlook. Many Christian schools in North America, in spite of all good intentions, often fail in their task because the teachers do not in effect form a spiritually unified team with a common goal.
 - b. The creation of such a team also depends upon a proper division of labor so that the entire educational task is properly fulfilled. This means that the specific ability of each teacher is used for what it is worth in doing one part of the educational whole: the curriculum, which is the unifying link in a school's total program.
3. The function of the curriculum in the school.
 - a. The goal of education from kindergarten through high schools concerns the cultural development of the pupil and student. This goal cannot be achieved meaningfully without a curricular program in which the unifying focus of the Word of God is given educational expression.
 - b. A Christian school is not in the first place concerned with offering a series of "subjects" but is vitally interested in relating the diversity of subject-material taught to the unifying perspective of a Christian educational curriculum. This means, concretely, that a Christian school is not a "school with the Bible." There can be a poor Christian school even if it has a good "Bible department". Likewise, there can be a good Christian school without a "Bible department."
 - (1) The development of such a curriculum is an immense task, and should therefore be the common task of the best educational talents in the Christian community: the teachers; the educational specialists in the institutions of Christian higher learning; the Christian philosophers, whose concern lies in the Scriptural understanding of creation as a whole; and the special scientists, including the theologians, whose contribution lies in indicating how the material from their special discipline can best be taught at the various levels of the educational process.
 - (2) Since the development of a unifying Christian curriculum has hardly begun in North America because a Scriptural view of reality was often absent, those organizations that link

the individual schools together should assume this task as one of their main responsibilities, in conjunction with institutions of Christian higher learning. In view of this we express our deep regret about the fact that until now the National Union of Christian Schools (NUCS) and the Ontario Alliance of Christian Schools (OACS) have rejected the opportunity to co-operate on Christian curricular development with the Institute for Christian Studies.

c. Tentative comments about the function of a unifying curriculum:

(1) In the grade schools the teacher should consciously and purposely inter-relate the various subjects (science-studies, reading materials, literature, Bible-history, general and national history, church-history, social studies, etc.) so that the pupil acquires an awareness of the world and its development as God's world, in which man is placed to fulfill God's Kingdom design. From the very beginning the pupil should acquire a positive conception of the role which the Body of Christ must fulfill in history but should also learn to see that the Kingdom of Darkness is struggling for the allegiance of men in every major area of cultural endeavor.

(2) In the high school, the educational process is already differentiated according to the different places which the students plan to occupy in society after graduation. Here the following elements are crucial:

(a) In every Christian high school there should be a core-program for all students in which the unifying perspective of a Christian world-and life-view is expressed. Such a core-program should include at least the basics in the following areas: (I) study of the nature of Christianity as a world-view, related to the world-views of humanism; (II) history and social studies, in which the student gains an insight into the spiritual struggles of the past and is prepared for Christian service in today's society; (III) literary and art-studies, in which the student learns of the great but often decadent expressions of the humanist mind; and (IV) basic courses in the natural sciences, their potential and limitations in a technological society.

(b) In the last year of high school there should be a special course, notably for the students who are to continue their education in (an often secular) university. In this course the basic elements of a Christian perspective should be dealt with in depth, and compared to non-Christian perspectives. Such a course should round off the entire Christian educational program for which the school society is responsible.

- (c) With respect to the diversity of subjects to be taught in the Christian schools, a study should be made as to whether the world of art and music as well as the entire classical culture (languages and history) receive adequate attention. In this respect, as well as in other fundamental questions, the Christian schools should not too readily follow the pattern of the pragmatic humanism now dominant in the public schools.
- d. The training program of the teachers to be employed in the Christian schools should be carefully scrutinized as to whether it is adequate with respect to (1) academic quality and (2) the development of a radically Christian educational mind.

II The school and some of its societal neighbours

A school does not exist in a vacuum. Since many of the problems in the Christian educational world arise because there is no clarity in understanding the connections between the school and non-educational social units, we would like to discuss a few of these.

A. The school and the institutional church

- 1. The institutional church ought to occupy a crucial place in the coming of the Kingdom. Its major tasks are:
 - a. the proclamation of the Word of God as the total Directive for human life; and
 - b. the nurturing of the faith of Christ-believers by means of that proclamation (including catechetical instruction), the administration of the sacraments, the execution of ecclesiastical discipline, and the organization of worship-services.
- 2. The institutional church and the development of culture:
 - a. The faithful and radical execution of the above-mentioned tasks will call for a profound re-direction of human life, as it was evident in the first centuries of Christian history: in politics, economic relations, art and education.
 - b. Under a normal development, the proclamation of the Word will challenge Christ-followers to assume their responsibilities in the various areas of culture - including education - as an expression of the 'general office of believers' outside of the institutional borders of ecclesiastical authority.
 - A few examples of such Christian cultural expression can be found in the early church before the coming of the barbarians; in the first century after the Reformation; and - in a much smaller context - in the development of Dutch Protestantism after Groen van Prinsterer and Abraham Kuyper.

- c. Christian cultural expressions are thus not in the first place ecclesiastical expressions. Channeling Christian cultural expression via the institutional church generally has a negative effect on such expressions. Evidence: the general bankruptcy of the Christian mind in North America today.
- 3. Christian schools should develop as free Christian schools, free also from ecclesiastical control, bound only to the Word of God as described under (I), and the structure of the school.
- 4. The school's freedom from ecclesiastical domination is doubly urgent in view of the utter denominational fragmentation of evangelical Protestantism. This fragmentation implies that the institutional church has in effect forfeited its legitimate place in the development of history. It would be historical retrogression if today we would assign to the institutional church an illegitimate task, namely the control of educational development in a direct or an indirect manner (through the use of denominationally limited confessions in a school's constitution).

B. The school and the family.

In reformed circles it is often argued that the school is a '**parental**' **institution**, that it is an extension of the Christian family. Two arguments for this position can be noted: 1) and 2) infra.

- 1. The doctrine of the covenant
 - a. In the light of such passages as Gen. 12 ff. and Deut. 6, it is argued that the Lord has given a special covenantal responsibility to parents for the education of their children.
 - b. This view is subject to several misconceptions:
 - (1) In the first place, the 'covenant' is not made with parents-as-parents, but with Abraham, the father of all believers, and with the entire people of God. For this reason the sermon of Moses is directed to Israel - the people of the covenant in its entirety (cf. Deut 6: 4).
 - (2) The covenant of God with His people cannot on a Scriptural basis be narrowed down to the triangle of church, family and school; for the covenant embraces the entire life of God's people: temple worship, family-life, property relations, rules of hygiene, the kingship, etc.
 - (3) When the people of God are specifically instructed to teach the words of the Lord diligently to their children (cf. Deut. 6:7), we are not in the first place dealing with Christian education as we know it today but with the continuity of the covenant-community in history. Here indeed the parents occupy a special place, in the Old Testament context and also today. But this special place, and the special responsibility that goes with it, is not taken over by the Christian school.

(4) There were no schools in the Old Testament period. So only when the covenant is understood as the total relation between God and His people can we establish a meaningful connection between the 'covenant' and education in today's setting.

2. Parents' responsibility for their children in general.

- a. It is argued that since parents clearly have a God-given responsibility for the entire development of their children before they come to the age of maturity, the schools in which such children receive their education must evidently be of 'parental' character. These schools, it is said, are an extension of the home.
- b. This argument contains certain elements which we do not debate. These elements are:
 - (1) A father and a mother do indeed have the God-given responsibility for the entire development of their children, including the choice of a school in harmony with their religious convictions.
 - (2) It can indeed be said that the school presupposes the family. For without families, there would (normally) be no children; and without children, there would be no schools.
- c. The complicated issues which these two points raise can best be discussed under separate headings - which follow.

3. Parental "responsibility" and educational "authority".

- a. As long as a child is a minor, its parents have the specific responsibility to care for its proper development.
- b. But this responsibility of the parents before God, in a differentiated society such as ours, is generally executed via institutions that lie outside of the home, that are of a non-parental character, that - therefore - lie outside of the parents' range of authority. We therefore make a fundamental distinction between the broad responsibility of parents for their children and the specific authority of the parents in the home. And it is our conviction that the school as we envisage it today lies outside of the parents' authority in the home. Some illustrations might clarify this:
 - (1) The father's responsibility to feed, clothe and shelter his family may require a job outside of the home. Clearly, his place of work is not subject to paternal or parental authority; it is subject to industrial rules and regulations; it is subject to economic authority.

(2) The parents have a responsibility to care for the physical health of their children. But this responsibility is executed by the medical specialist. And the medical care is subject to the doctor's authority.

(3) If a child has special - let's say: musical - talents, the parents have the responsibility to see to it that these talents are developed. And this task they assign to the specialist in the community: the piano teacher, who executes his 'musical' authority in training the child.

(4) Parents have the responsibility to care for the spiritual health of their children. This includes taking them to church and sending them to catechism. But the authority exercised in the church and in the catechism class is that of the minister; it is ecclesiastical authority.

c. In a similar way we understand the relationship that in principle ties the home and the school together: parents have the responsibility for the proper education of their children; they execute that responsibility by sending the children to a school, within which educational authority is exercised by the team of teachers. From this vantage-point the authority of the parents does not reach into the educational process of the school. The educational authority of the teachers deals with factors such as these:

(1) The setting of the daily, weekly, and annual teaching schedules.

(2) balancing and unifying the curriculum;

(3) setting the criteria for passing and failing;

(4) arranging remedial assistance;

(5) maintaining the discipline in the school;

(6) selection of textbooks and materials;

(7) organization of activities outside of the school (e.g. trips to factories and museums) and securing the assistance of resource people outside of the school;

(8) actual teaching in the classroom.

d. Our position does not imply that the parent is now entirely excluded from the school. The following factors are important to keep in mind:

(1) When we say that the team of teachers executes authority in the school, we do not mean to say that the teachers are autonomous. In the first place, they are responsible to God. But also to the school board, elected by the Christian community, including the parents.

(2) The child in the classroom is always more than a pupil. This implies that the teacher's authority does not embrace the entire life of the child in the school. The parents, for example, 'determine' when the child is too sick to attend school; what clothes it should wear; whether corporal punishment is to be allowed; in what context homework is to be done, etc.

(3) Moreover, a father and a mother have responsibility for their children's educational progress. They will thus want to stay in close touch with their childrens' classroom teacher, to resolve problems that may arise.

(4) The points mentioned under (2) and (3) imply that within a school society there should be an active Parent-Teacher Association.

4. The school presupposes the family.

a. Without families, we said, there would (normally) be no children, and thus also no schools. It is our position that this relation does not make the school an extension of the family.

b. In order to clarify this position we can point to analogous relationships in society:

(1) The family (parents and children) presupposes marriage (husband and wife). Nevertheless, a family is not a marriage-bond.

(2) A political party presupposes the existence of the state. Nevertheless, a party is not a state.

(3) A trade-union presupposes the existence of industry. But a union clearly is not an industry.

(4) A student-union presupposes a university, but their respective structures must be clearly distinguished.

C. The school and the state

1. We accept the principle of state-support for the entire national educational enterprise.

2. Since education is never neutral with respect to the fundamental (i.e. religious) convictions existing within the nation, we are convinced that a just distribution of tax-monies allocated for education implies equitable support for the major religiously distinct school systems: Humanist, Roman Catholic, Protestant, and Jewish.

Conclusion

1. We consider this document a provisional statement on Christian schools since we fully realize that we have in effect presented only a skeleton which requires painstaking elaboration. It is our sincere hope that the Christian teachers in our midst will joyfully assume their individual role in the execution of this common responsibility.

2. The vision that makes for Scripturally-directed education cannot simply be put down in a document of this kind. For such a vision demands total commitment and surrender to Jesus Christ - the King of our lives, the Creator of the world, the Lord of history, and the Re-Creator of a new mankind. It demands such commitment on the part of everyone connected with the Christian school - not only the teachers but also the members of the Christian school society. And the very meaning of Christian school lies herein, that its pupils and students are clearly confronted with the radical consequences of such commitment in their lives.

It is our conviction that the salvation for the dark world in which we live today - in the totality of its diverse activities - can only be found in the re-discovery of the radical meaning of such surrender and commitment to our Lord. Only to the extent that Christian education expresses this radicality can it play a proper role in the coming of His Kingdom. And again, only to that extent does it deserve our wholehearted support. We hope that the present statement will be used in that light.