

# **TOWARD A THEOLOGY OF EDUCATION**

By

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## Preface

From time to time Calvin distributes scholarly contributions by Calvin faculty members in order to stimulate thinking and dialogue.

Henry Beverluis retired from the Calvin faculty in December 1979. But during that fall semester he and his wife Gertrude traveled thousands of miles in their venerable Dodge van so that he could speak in 55 Christian Schools International communities in the United States and Canada.

The response from schools to President Anthony Diekema's letter of invitation was overwhelming. Far more responses came in than could be accommodated. Henry and Gertrude pored over maps, calculated mileage, and came up with a tour package that honored as many requests as possible.

Speaking on the general theme of "Christian Philosophy of Education" and focusing specifically on the Calvinist vision in Christian education, Henry gave public addresses and also led faculty seminars.

The paper reproduced here was prepared for the Calvin College Board-Faculty Conference in February 1980. It is, as Henry said, a partial account of what he found out and what he said on the tour.

Henry taught philosophy of education at Calvin for many years. Before coming to Calvin he was a high school teacher and, for eight years, a high school principal. He has addressed many Christian school groups, from conventions and ministers associations to principals conferences and PTAs. He wrote *Christian Philosophy of Education*, published by the National Union of Christian Schools in 1971. He is a graduate of Calvin College and Seminary, holds masters degrees in theology from Westminster and in history from Columbia, and has a doctorate in educational philosophy from Teachers College, Columbia University.

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## INTRODUCTION

This paper focuses on the religious question in Christian day school education. As in anyone's educational philosophy (Dewey's, Plato's, or that of the contemporary public school), so in ours: the religious question is central. Understood in its *educational* sense, the religious question includes but goes beyond asking about the creedal, institutional, and ceremonial components of the Christian religion. In the context of education this question above all has to do with religion as a world and life view, as a comprehensive life orientation. It has to do with what H.R.Niebuhr called the "Christ and Culture" question.

In that educational sense, answering the religious question precedes the school's choice of aims, curriculum pattern, graded courses of study, as well as all that we mean by "teaching effectiveness." It precedes all of these because the school's religious vision must give point and focus to all the rest. That vision has to do mainly with what Reformed people have all these years spoken of as "distinctiveness" in Christian education.

Getting clearer on our answer to the religious question can help us clarify what that distinctiveness comes to. That distinctiveness in turn can help us get past two bad disjunctions that often short-circuit or distort our educational program. The first bad disjunction is implied when we ask whether in our schools we should aim at personal piety or at cultural obedience; the second is implied when we ask whether we should teach pupils or teach subject matter. Any one-sided answer to either of these bad questions foreshortens the religious vision and blunts the distinctiveness of Reformed Christian education.

Although I will here mainly address the "piety and culture" question, I will be implying all along that for their religious growth through *education* all persons need the enriching and disciplining subject matter of the liberal arts and sciences.

In the three sections following I will discuss (1) the current relevance of the religious question; (2) the need to keep piety and culture together; and (3) the biblical -- covenantal warrant for such religious wholeness.

## RELEVANCE OF THE RELIGIOUS QUESTION

One of the chief discoveries I made in my recent travels to over fifty CSI schools was that almost everywhere parents and educators were again asking about the distinctive religious vision of Christian education. They realized, of course, that many other sorts of matters also needed attention. These had to do with teaching strategies and methodology, with classroom organization and management, with the important *how* and *when* questions in education. They realized that getting clear on the religious goals of the school would not automatically answer all such derivative questions. But they wanted discussion of the *prior* questions, those having to do with the *what* and *why* of Christian schooling. They wanted those prior questions discussed because in their bellies they knew those were the first-order questions.

One reason for this heightened concern about the religious question is the continuing crisis of loyalty to Christian education. Rising tuition rates, eroding conviction, and young parents taking or threatening to take their children out of Christian schools were causing mothers-in-law, consistory members, and school principals to ask as never before the old questions: What mean these bricks, these slogans? What are we really aiming to do in these schools? How do we really justify them? What is really *distinctive* about them? What is the Christian thing about them? And, increasingly, what is *Reformed* about these schools?

Perhaps an even more pressing reason for concern about the religious question is the gradually changing population in many CSI schools. Although in my planning for the tour I was prepared to urge a wider admissions policy, I was amazed by what I discovered. From east to west, in Canada and the U.S., in older and newer as well as in smaller and larger schools, in both mainline and emerging Christian Reformed communities, I found that CSI school enrollments now include 20%, 40%, 50% and more of youngsters from non-Reformed homes. In taking account of this phenomenon, CSI school leaders were discovering the issue of distinctiveness to be far from academic.

In this new situation, many old-line (Reformed) Christian school people are asking all sorts of probing questions having to do with very practical concerns: Must our application forms, or our conditions for voting membership include reference to the Reformed creeds? Do we need to be Reformed in education? What is it to be Reformed in education? Can we write an educational creed that is Reformed? And questions like these: Should we appoint non-Reformed teachers? Should we have non-Reformed board members?

These questions were partly intended to get rid of purely ethnic and ecclesiastical barriers to the new members' sense of belonging. Their main intent was, as several persons put it, "to use this opportunity to get clearer on our philosophy of education."

But was all of this a real problem? Was it not just another case of getting our *theory* straight, without much relation to getting our *practice* straight? Some of the concern sounded doctrinaire and stuffy. But much of it had to do exactly with the religious question, with the problem of "piety and culture." That the new enrollment phenomenon intensified the problem is not surprising. Note the following:

1. In almost all the areas I visited in Canada and the U.S., evangelical Christian schools are arising -- at the rate, I heard a TV preacher say, of three a day. Most of these are the

Texas-based Accelerated Christian Education (ACE) type. My hunch is that many of the evangelical Christians who now send their children to Calvinist schools have been stirred up by ACE advertising, but either have found no ACE schools close at hand, or have tried and rejected them.

2. I judge that many of these "new" parents come not only with typical fundamentalist answers to the Christ-and-culture problem, but also with typical civil-religious anxieties about public schools: drugs and sex, violence and evolution, anti-patriotism and bad novels, decline in the basics, and a creeping communism. These worries, joined to the prospect of five-day a week evangelism plus an end-run around integration laws, have led to a mass exodus by evangelicals from public schools.
3. However much of this outlook on life or this way of judging schools new parents bring with them, and however much we welcome those parents in a Christian exchange of real benefits, some of their deviant views have brought tension. The tension comes because in various measure some of those views find acceptance among many old-line Christian school parents. (One Christian Reformed minister said to me that he feels "much closer" to some Baptist ministers than to some Christian Reformed ministers.) That new alliance of views, while a good stimulant for discussion, has also made it more difficult (and more urgent) for community leaders to say what a Reformed vision of life and schooling comes to.
4. Perhaps predictably in any case, but now with added fundamentalist overtones, I repeatedly heard of concerns like these: Why the lack of spirituality among students? Why these stories and novels with non-Christian content? Why all this criticism of TV advertising? Why do high schools require eight semesters of English and only four of religion? Why don't students carry Bibles to their classes? Shouldn't we aim at more decisions for Christ? One teacher told me parents were fussing about the Narnia stories because "they had a witch in them." I heard a man complain in a large school gathering because the school board was "still not requiring" a daily flag salute. He added: "We pray every day, don't we?" (He got only a very mild response.) I heard about a principal who gave out detentions to kids who had attended a rock concert, and about a music teacher who was scolded because the children were learning "worldly" songs instead of only hymns.
5. Standing firm on the other side, and I'm sure they are the majority, are the many stout-hearted ones. Some are college graduates, but most are ordinary fathers and mothers in Zion (whom we here at Calvin must come to understand better and to help more than we do). They recognize the genuine concern of those other parents and work hard to maintain communion, but many of them are confused. What it comes to is a question. Besides *ad hoc* answers, they are in effect asking, is there not an outlook, a framework, a philosophy of education for all this -- one we can understand? Is there not a *platform* of common religious -- educational beliefs, on the basis of which we can together face these matters of Christian school *practice*?

And you listen, as you travel from community to community, to a principal or a board member or a teacher, before a meeting, perhaps over dinner. And you say to yourself, but it *is* there, isn't it, that *religious* framework, that educational philosophy? Or it should be there. Certainly it can be dug out, out of our history, our rhetoric?

And you think of that history and rhetoric. That big synodical decision of almost a hundred years ago that the Christian schools should no longer be parochial, but must develop "their own reasons for existence." Then, sixty years later, that burst of writing and discussions about Christian schools (Jellema, Jaarsma, Boer, the Stobs, Zylstra, Flokstra, Schultze), much of it in doomsday accents, and all of it saying in effect that pioneering work needs to be done. Then, after all that time, in 1979 you are asked, in New Jersey, in Ontario, in South Dakota, in Calgary, in the Pacific Northwest, in California: Who are we in Christian education? Where are we? What are we really all about?

You know of course that all is not bleak or in disarray, and that generally we have remained on course. You know that at the level of second-order concerns (teaching styles, graded courses of study, classroom organization, and the like) many schools have made great progress. But you know too that at that other level, what the Synod ninety years ago called the *rationale*, and what, thirty years ago, Harry Boer called "line and purpose based on biblically and culturally grounded principles," and what William Harry Jellema called a "mind," an outlook, not of verbal propositions but one with which we *think* and *live* Christian educational philosophy -- on that level, the Christian school communities are far from anything like agreement.

Maybe it's impossible, you say to yourself. The grand hypothesis can be not a dream but a nightmare. An "official mind" has never yet been as productive of community vitality and progress as many minds exploring together. Perhaps *ad hoc* essays and speeches are enough. Perhaps the Calvin curriculum report (*Christian Liberal Arts Education*) will seep down. Perhaps Evan Runner's contributions and those of the Association for the Advancement of Christian Scholarship (AACS) will evoke some educational dialogue. Perhaps the old essays and speeches will come forth out of the files and speak to us again.

And you look at the people you are eating dinner with. You think of all that searching. You ask yourself: Are these schools worth the great cost, and much more besides? Is there a religious vision which says they are? Will another speech do any good? You're going to try but you're not going to help all that much. But you're not sorry that last May you planned the kind of speeches you did. You worry because what you have is still pretty theoretical. Besides, you have only forty minutes. You head out into it anyway, with some sense that you're not going to be entirely irrelevant.

In the next two sections of this paper (a composite of several speeches on the tour) I will try to show that a big religious vision in education is required by a biblical *theology* of education.

A couple of statements from among the many wise things Henry Zylstra wrote about Christian education remind us of the close relation between theology and education. One has to do with *christology*. In Christian education, Zylstra said, nothing matters but the kingdom of Jesus Christ; but because of the kingdom, everything else matters. The other is about *sanctification*. A Christian school, he said, must give young persons more to be Christian with. Reminding ourselves here on this Calvin campus that theological education and liberal education have a common religious goal can, I believe, help us as seminary and college professors shore up our students' understanding and support of Christian day school education.

The following summaries present some general theses as background for my discussion, next, of *piety and culture* and of *covenant and education*:

1. A good Christian school is one in which academic excellence and the Christian religion are so interrelated that each enriches the other, and both together show forth the depth and breadth of the Christian life in the world.
2. The costs of Christian schooling are so great that only a good Christian school can prevent the erosion of loyalty, among young parents in particular. To get loyalty right side up, with spine in it, requires getting beyond second-order loyalties -- to mothers-in-law, to employers, to consistories, to a sub-culture. Such loyalties can support, even enrich, but are no substitute for loyalty to Jesus Christ.
3. Loyalty to Christ comes with a tradition, a history. This is evident in the new ACE schools and must be more consciously so in CSI schools. Loyalty to Christ in our tradition will not let us be content with what appear to be dominant in many of the new Christian schools: negativism, pietism, jingoism, inferior pedagogy, and moralized curriculum.
4. The Christian religion is not only, or mainly, creedal, ceremonial, and institutional, plus personal morality. It is a comprehensive life orientation, a world-and-life view. Therefore a good Christian school is one in which the answer to the question, What must Christians be and do in the world? is given not *ad hoc* or piecemeal, or in terms of only "restricted" religion, but within the framework of such a world-and-life view.
5. Teachers in a good Christian school, in addressing the enduring question of Christ and culture, will see to it that the answers acted on in the school promote not only a lively sense of Christ's kingship but also a continuing, developmental response in sanctification.
6. Although the excellence of a good Christian school depends on the excellence of Christian teachers in all sorts of second-order methodological skills and personal attitudes, the whole case for Christian education depends on good answers to the prior religious question, and on the degree to which the practices entailed in those answers are followed.

Because the religious vision a Christian school follows has to do simultaneously with the *depth* and the *range* of human-religious calling in the world, the question of piety and culture, and that of covenant and education, are important to explore.

## **PIETY AND CULTURE**

From earliest times, when the church first pushed out into the world, people have asked: What has Jerusalem to do with Athens? Some answered, either fearfully or simplistically: "Nothing at all." Others answered, because they either did not want to be odd or did not understand Christianity: "Almost everything in every way." That religious disjunction between pietist-withdrawal and cultural-accommodation still disturbs Christians today, in their private lives and in their joint activities, especially in the schooling of the young.

For good health in our adult living and for good education in Christian schools, we must abolish that disjunction. For this to happen, we need what I will call the big religious vision. That vision,

I hold, must include both piety *and* culture, not as two components apart, or even in sequence, but both together, all interrelated. Let us for the moment consider them separately.

### **Piety in the Christian Life**

Piety must be distinguished radically from pietism. Pietism is a bad thing. It is a kind of undernourished Christianity, trying ghost-like to live above life. It is other-worldly, negative, subjective. It is fearful not only of worldly tensions but of the world itself. It withdraws from history. It is reactionary and closed to the dynamics of sanctification. Pietism also is legalistic. Attempting to reduce the complexities of Christian obedience to rules and codes, it becomes judgmental and harsh. Because keeping one's own codes tends to be self-justifying, pietism also becomes proud, pharisaical. A Christian needs piety but not pietism.

What then is piety? Piety is trusting in God's promises; it is repentance; it is rejoicing in the Lord. Piety is practicing the presence of God. Piety celebrates life. It is serenity both at the depths of life and at the frontiers of each new day. Piety is religious devotion and contemplation. It is mystical union with Christ. Piety lives between doubt and faith, between guilt and renewal, with hope. Piety is the practice and the celebration of the presence of God *in the midst of life*.

When piety possesses us, we understand Augustine's word, Lord, you have created us for yourself, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you. We understand the Reformation reality of open access to God. And we understand the meaning of the Calvin College seal, that is, the offering of one's heart to God without hesitation and without reservation. Piety means the existential knowledge and confidence, as both the *Heidelberg Catechism* and *Romans* say, that we are possessed, body and soul, in life and death, by the One from whose love nothing can separate us. Piety is healthy and robust religion. A Christian needs piety.

You say, yes of course, but aren't you talking about the business of homes and churches when you talk about piety in this way? My answer is that, of course, in these times of corroding worldliness homes and churches need to nourish personal faith and religious celebration. But I am also talking about schools -- second grade, tenth and twelfth grades, and college. I don't know quite how we must do it: I am not talking about altar calls or testimonials, nor about TV revival techniques or large-print handouts from gospel hucksters. I am far from intending pietism and moralism, riding out at children on a constant flow of preaching-talk. I have in mind the opposite of pushing at kids with either mushy sentiments or doomsday warnings until genuine piety is either starved or poisoned.

But the nurture of piety -- yes, of course. A school is a community of truth, we say, and a community of love; it must first of all be a community whose members practice the presence of God. How teachers can promote this needs professional skill of the highest kind, and the grace of God.

One way is, of course, in devotional periods and chapels appropriate to a school, not replicas of family devotions two hours earlier or Sunday school two days before. A most significant way, one suited to schools, is at appropriate places within the rich content of curriculum. Probably the most effective way is through what we call modeling, the teachers' example. I remember few things from high school as vividly as the time when a teacher whom I greatly admired for his



worldly culture and physical attractiveness led us in a simple and fervent chapel exercise in communal piety. It not only made piety respectable for me; I was nurtured by it in my own life.

Certainly, something of what homes and churches must mainly do must not be undone in the school through excessive moralism or through neglect. Certainly, too, however, what young persons learn in the Catechism about their true shalom is not just to be stored up for future use. Teachers, I am saying, should feel bound through the vitality and celebration of their own piety to promote it wisely and pedagogically in the lives of young people in their classrooms. The Christian adult community must believe that piety is the indispensable *depth* dimension of the Christian vision of life.

### **Culture in the Christian Life**

Consider now that other component of the Christian life, cultural obedience. By culture, in this connection, I mean piety expressing itself in honesty, fairness, not violating God's commandments. But I mean far more. I mean participating in the world's work. I mean making things or changing things, and doing this as image bearers in conformity with what we understand to be God's will. By culture I mean working with the givens, the "materials," in the world of nature or in society, doing this with insight and understanding, with moral sensitivity and accountability, and with creative imagination and self-expression.

Culture happens when a farmer plows over the prairie grass and makes wheat fields; when a craftsman changes a piece of metal into a tool; when a girl turns a reed from the swamp into a flute or a pea-shooter. Culture happens when a committee solves a poverty problem; when a teacher explains a mathematical procedure; when a boy writes a poem. These are all good things. Culture also happens when people make or change things so that the products are bad -- like killing off the buffalo, manipulating the stock market, or producing false theologies. We see from this another part of cultural obedience. It is to take serious notice of the work of others; sometimes just appreciating and encouraging them; sometimes rejecting or opposing them. The Christian life requires *doing* culture, but also *judging* culture.

What I am speaking about, then, is cultural obedience as opposed to cultural accommodation. Accommodationism, like pietism, is bad, the corruption of something good. It too is undernourished Christianity. Accommodationism tends to be either indiscriminating or unjudgmental. It has private idolatries like intellectual respectability, American civil religion, or the pleasure principle for conduct. Accommodationism tends to ignore the dark line between sin in its many forms and godliness in its central essence; it tends to slide over the difference between truth and its many facets and falsehood with its many faces. The accommodationist walks back and forth across that dark line without much care or sensibility. Pretty much anything goes, and religion is reserved for designated times and places. In this Christian's life of cultural accommodation there is little or no religious oddity or turbulence, and a good deal of smugness; little or no discipleship, and a good deal of ordinary worldliness.

Cultural accommodationism is almost the exact counterpart of personal pietism. Like pietism, it diminishes and impoverishes the Christian life. It forgets that we are to be disciples of Christ, who said: You shall be my witnesses; who said that we must show and tell that he is the truth in the midst of falsehood, the *way* in the midst of confusion, the *life* in the midst of death. The

accommodationist tends to deny the reality as well as the finality of both God's judgment and his grace in human history.

What then is the better way? What is cultural *obedience* and how does it promote the Christian life? Cultural obedience is doing the world's work with discrimination and accountability. It is human and worldly celebration before the face of God. Not *of* the world in ultimate allegiance, this obedience is nevertheless in, under, and with the world, the only place a Christian has to be *not* of the world. Being culturally obedient is part of Christian sanctification. It is piety facing outward, toward life, and growing thereby. Cultural obedience gives body and history to piety. It rejoices in life, and thanks God for it. Certainly it takes account of sin, and aims to transform culture. But before that it *affirms* the world.

Taking account of this sequence is itself part of cultural obedience. The obedience is first of all affirmational. It affirms the natural world of our existence to which we are bound by the flesh and breath of our bodies. It affirms also the societal domain to which we are bound in a shared humanity and a common history until the Lord returns. It is only within, as part of that affirmation, that cultural *transformation* must also take place.

Because we affirm that the world and its fulness are the Lord's, transformation is all-important. The obedient Christian accepts with gladness the vast deposits of God's common grace in human history, and he does much of the world's work joyfully and productively together with unbelievers. But he also, all along the way, takes account of that dark line that runs through all of history. In his cultural obedience, he exposes untruth and opposes wickedness. Above all, he proclaims the good news that, in the midst of death, life can be revived through Jesus Christ. This is God's world, and the Christian's religious calling in it is to transform and restore it until the Lord returns.

And so worldly obedience is obedience to Christ, to whose truth and way and life we are witness-bearers. The celebration and the transformation are in the name of Christ. In this perspective there is not a secular domain next to a spiritual domain. Our Lord's domain includes both together, unconfused and unmixed, but also undivided and unseparated -- not unlike the mystery of his own personhood. Piety and culture together are the way of the Kingdom.

Thus Abraham Kuyper in his pastoral meditations calls us to the piety of "being near unto God," and in the same breath declares that there is not a square inch in this whole universe of which Christ does not say: It is mine. William Harry Jellema, warning against identifying Christ and culture, declares that without culture Christianity is impossible. Speaking of education, he says it must be a kingdom enterprise: education in a kingdom, by a kingdom, and for a kingdom. Evan Runner charges us to seek an integral vision of life, lived before the face of God in obedience; this, he says, will release the energizing power of the Word of God for all of culture and religion. Nothing matters, said Henry Zylstra, but the kingdom, but because of the kingdom, everything matters. The Catholic editor, Orestes Brownson, charged his kind of Christian schools to aim at making Christ incarnate in society as when in his days on earth he was incarnate in the flesh. The Lutheran martyr, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, declares with the power of one who knows the awesome relevance of this vision, in a time when Satan seemed incarnate, that *worldly* holiness must be the Christian way. Cultural obedience, so far from being optional, is the way of affirming the reign of Christ in the world.

But this reign of Christ, summoning us to dramatic judgment and transformation, summons us also to the hallowing of the ordinary and commonplace. The Reformers declared that it *is in the world* that common holiness is to be practiced. Every vocation, they said, is a religious vocation. Ministers and missionaries have their special calling, of course, but farmers, tradesmen, housewives, and merchants are also called to religious vocation -- in the mundane affairs of daily life. If I knew the Lord would return next week, Luther is reported to have said, I would still plant my trees today.

Doing the world's work is the other side of piety; it is piety celebrating itself, deepening itself, practicing the presence of God, not in some upper story above life, but within the routines and challenges of every day. It is within those challenges that the affirming and the transforming must happen. The life we are called to as Christians would be impoverished without our accepting God's assignment to culture.

But it must be culture and piety *together*, each constraining the other, each enriching the other. Kept together that way, in our adult life and in the education of the young, they are God's way for our sanctification. If we keep piety and culture together this way, we will be learning what Herman Bavinck meant when he said the Christian needs two conversions: one away from the world to Jesus Christ; the other, in the name of Christ, back to the world.

But is this way of looking at the religious question in Christian education the right way? If so, we must seriously face the question of why it has not caught on more than it has. Some of what I have been saying has been said for a long time. What went wrong?

You know what happens in many of our communities. Piety and culture get pulled apart. We begin to emphasize the one *or* the other. We begin to choose sides. We act as if either piety or culture were optional. We prefer one or are afraid of the other. The one we choose is safer, or more urgent, or more sophisticated, or more biblical. We sit in judgment on each other. We exert pressures. We form factions: the breach widens. And Christian education bears the scars of this disjunction, this pulling apart of what God has joined together. What happens in this pulling apart is that piety runs off into pietism, and cultural obedience becomes cultural accommodationism. Each faction has forgotten what the other is mainly emphasizing, and what each is left with is not half of the truth, but distortion of the truth.

But what really happens? Why do the slogans not work? Why is our world and life view mostly theory? Why this disjunction of piety and culture? Why the blurring of the big religious vision?

There are doubtless more reasons for this than I know. I believe a major one is that we have not sufficiently grounded our theory in the Bible.

## **COVENANT AND EDUCATION**

Can we find warrant in the Bible for religion as comprehensive world and life view -- one that embraces both piety and culture? Can we in this way find a biblical basis for religious vision in Christian day schools and for what must mainly go on in these schools? I believe we should look for such warrant in the biblical idea of covenant, an idea deserving a far more imaginative and comprehensive commitment than we usually give it in discussing Christian education.

To go in this direction requires more, however, than explaining individual texts and more too than exploring the universal biblical themes of obedience and discipleship. It means rather to go the way of biblical theology. This is the way of tying texts and themes together, of seeing the progress of God's revelation in them. And especially, as in the case of covenant, it means letting the light of the early chapters of *Genesis* help us understand God's purpose and ways, as Colossians puts it, in the restoration of all things through Christ. I can here, of course, only sketch some of the central points of this approach.

Some years ago James Daane and Hugh Koops wrote some articles claiming that the doctrine of the covenant was a doctrine for the church, not for the Christian school, and that another basis for the Christian school should be sought. Around the same time, a statement was issued by members of the Reformed Church of America declaring that while they too believed in the covenant, and took their baptismal vows with utmost seriousness, they did not think this at all entailed sending their children to Christian schools.

These views come to what is at best a half-truth. They are partly correct if by covenant we mean only the redemptive covenant. That redemptive covenant of grace is most certainly the golden thread that runs through all of Scripture, through all of history, from paradise lost to paradise regained. Nothing I say here is intended to diminish the supreme importance and centrality of the covenant of grace; it is the crown jewel of biblical theology. But it is precisely because of the importance and centrality of this covenant, and in order to stress what God's saving covenant really comes to, that we must see covenant in its wider sense.

And so I believe Daane and Koops and those others are half right. The covenant of grace, if understood just by itself, as it has been by many of us all through the years, is no warrant at all for teaching science and art and math and physical education and poetry. Louis Berkhof, in a long essay said to be one of the first that ties together the covenant of grace and Christian education, discusses mainly covenant *nurture* and the fostering of piety but hardly mentions educational or cultural matters. By itself, the covenant of grace provides profound *motivation* for religious nurture but little direct warrant for schools as schools and for what should go on in them.

But the critics are wrong too, profoundly so, I think. They overlook covenant in its wider sense, a sense that has everything to do with what schools ought to be mainly doing. Covenant in this sense I will call the creation covenant, the covenant God made with the man and the woman before the fall. We have a kind of theological codeword for it, a capsule word. We call it the "covenant of works," thereby tending to change the sense of what this covenant was in *itself* to what, as compared with grace, it now is *not*. What that covenant was in itself, in essence, was a covenant of life and celebration, entailing worship and work, piety and culture.

That creation covenant is still in effect, and will be so on into everlasting life. It is in effect not with the man and the woman now, not with us directly, but with Jesus Christ. But then it must be said, too, that when believers are grafted into the life of Christ, when they possess him because they are possessed by him, they are once again, like prodigals come home, restored through Christ to that all-encompassing covenant of life. Then the grace covenant of deliverance and promise becomes at the same time the creation covenant of obligation and obedience. In both together the Christian celebrates the life in and with God -- in the world.

That creation covenant in the beginning and, through Jesus Christ, in force today can tell us much about the religious vision that ought to illumine our adult lives and therefore also the education of our children. For in the beginning, in that pristine covenant of life, was the essence of religion: *piety and culture*, undivided and unseparated. In the beginning was education, the kind we want for God's sons and daughters. What is covenant? In the beginning, to paraphrase a familiar poem, God said, I'm lonely. So he created the birds and the trees, the grass and the animals; he hollowed out the lakes and the rivers, and he flung the stars out into the black night. When he looked at it all, God saw that it was good, but he said, I'm lonely still. And he sat down and thought, and he said, I'll make me a man.

In the beginning God created covenant. Covenant is a giving and receiving between two partners, in immediate awareness. It is, as someone has said, a lived dialogue. The best example is a marriage.

Covenant in the Bible is such a bond, such a partnership, such a dialogue. God is the high and the holy One amidst the lightning of Sinai, but he is also God-with-us in tabernacle and priestly symbol. *With us*, he is friend to Abraham, father of his children, and, above all else, husband of Israel, as Christ is of the Church. Covenant in the Bible is *relationship*.

In the beginning God created relationship with the man and the woman. As in all authentic relationship, so in this: its essence was growth, growth by the man and the woman in their life with God. They were to know God, enjoy God, and glorify him forever. Of that abounding and sanctifying life with God, the tree of life there in the garden was the beckoning and sacramental sign and seal. The covenant was a covenant of life. But then this must be noted: If it was to be a life *lived*, lived in vital relationship, in a giving and receiving, the means God provided were all-important. These were, on the one hand, his revelations to the man and the woman and, on the other hand, their endowments as imagebearers to receive those revelations; to receive and acknowledge them in their life in the world. Covenant relationship was to be a relationship of vital *encounter* and *response*.

Now we must ask: What was that word of encounter and what was that life of response to be like? Given the great silences of *Genesis*, the answer we receive is, I think, the more startling. For the answer has to do with nothing else than piety and culture, joined together.

In his word of encounter, the Lord engaged the man and the woman with two supreme commands, both for the fostering of their life and relationship with him. The first command, Do not eat of the forbidden tree, we call the probationary command. The expression, accurate enough, is theological shorthand, and we tend to run over it too rapidly. What does it really mean? I think this: The Lord says to Adam and Eve, Although I have entered into covenant with you and you may come to me freely, although we talk and walk together, and I am your partner and friend, remember that I am the Lord. Remember that I am the Creator and the Sovereign of heaven and earth. You must worship me in the beauty of holiness. You must reverence me. You must love me and rejoice in me, and celebrate the relationship between us. You must practice the presence of God with heart and soul and mind and strength. This is your first duty, the greatest command of all.

That first word was the command to piety, to religion at the *depths* of life. It required ultimate allegiance in love and worship and celebration.

Along with that command comes the second word of *Genesis*, about religion in its *extensive* sense. Almost as if Adam and Eve had asked the question, that word comes. Amidst the silences of those first two chapters, it is a word of profound religious significance. Almost as if they had asked, Lord, what is it all for? Why are we here? What besides morning prayers and evening prayers and our special celebrations every seventh day -- what more is there? As if in answer to such questions. God's second command comes: Dress the garden, subdue the earth, and have dominion over all things. For this too we have the familiar words: Cultural Mandate. But it was a religious mandate, first of all. It pointed not to secular activity, to something lower for their bodies, next to that other command for their souls. Rather, it was the other side of the first command. It pointed the man and the woman toward the world. In their personal piety, they were above all to be worldly; they were to practice the presence of God within the totality of their natural, social, cultural, and historical existence.

That second word was the command to do the world's work, in holiness. How? By tending sheep and planting olive trees? Yes, of course, but also far more. The command required also the making of tools and musical instruments dams and bridges, alphabets and mathematical systems, poems and laws and art objects. It included classifying the plants, naming the animals, organizing libraries, sawing lumber, composing symphonies. And they were to teach the command, and obedience to it in all these ways, to their children one day. As image-bearers of God, with superb gifts for knowing, for choosing, and for creative work, the man and the woman and their children were to inherit the earth.

But all of it was to be *religious* response, in a stewardship. They knew the earth and its fullness were theirs to revel in and work in, but that they were God's first of all. Not only were they not to violate the earth or waste its treasures; they were to find in those treasures, and in their work, the way toward God and toward each other in an ever-growing communion of life. The world was for celebration, for work, for worship. Piety *and* culture together were the covenant way of worldly holiness.

But what of the fall, you ask, the great sin? Was all this now not abrogated? In a way it was. The fall was a dark tragedy. Whatever we say about the catastrophe and totality of sin's effects is right and true: lawlessness, guilt, judgment, death. But we have not said it all until we also say that *covenant* was broken. The man and the woman now hide from God. Piety becomes an idolatry of self, in an alliance with the serpent. Culture becomes autonomous, self-justifying, without thought of God, in defiance of God. The fall was the prodigal leaving his father's house, becoming a fugitive and wanderer on the earth. If God had let him go, his final end would be the abyss of total alienation.

But God seeks him out, comes looking for him: Adam, where are you? Again, we have the words for it: regeneration, conversion, justification, sanctification. But again, we have not said it all; we have not probed, as St. Paul says, the depths of the riches both of the wisdom and the knowledge of God until we say that in Jesus Christ the *covenant* is restored.

In salvation through Jesus Christ we learn that our shalom, our comfort, is that God comes looking for us, breaks our covenant with Satan, and brings us back into the life with God. Through Jesus Christ, by whom all things were created, all things are now restored. The earth and its fullness are still the Lord's, as the psalmist sings -- after the fall. God's sons and daughters

are still crowned with glory and honor -- after the fall, for dominion over all things. The covenant is restored, under the sign now of the covenant of grace and the cross.

And so we rightly say that redemption is the prodigal come home. The father, Jesus says, draws him back, back into covenant: Give him shoes to wear, and a robe. Put a ring on his finger. Kill the fatted calf and let's have a party, with singing and dancing. Restoration is in the signature of celebration. The returned sons and daughters are to live as family members in God's house. They are not to live as hired servants, backstairs in the world. Theirs is not a kind of subsistence or survival religion. They are again heirs and stewards within the earth and its fulness.

My point is that if it is so that the creation covenant is restored in this way, now under the sign of the cross and of Pentecost, it means that the command to personal piety and to cultural obedience is also restored, both together as religious vocation. Viewed this way, the missionary mandate of *Matthew* and the cultural mandate of *Genesis* are not two discrete mandates, unrelated, the one pointing to the spiritual and the other to the natural; the one to piety, the other to culture. The missionary mandate is for the sake of covenant and therefore is for the sake of the cultural mandate as restored through Christ.

Of course, God's men and women know that sin must be exposed and overcome through Christ's work and presence and power. The truth, the way, and the life must oppose falsehood and confusion and death. The call to repentance and conversion is rightfully a dominant theme in the dispensation of sin and grace. But after the conversion, after the return to grace, then the command is still to do the world's work until the Lord returns. The gospel is the gospel of the kingdom, of Christ's kingdom. It is the kingdom of the mustard seed, of unpretentious servanthood and discipleship; and it must not become "Christendoms" and "Towers of Babel." But the kingdom is also one of vision, of dominion and of power; for survival at times, but always also for the affirmation and transformation of culture.

The Christian life in Christ's kingdom is covenant life. It must be a life of obedience, of growth, of celebration, of sanctification. Piety and culture, under the signs of both creation and redemption, are the way of worldly holiness. They are the way of religion as a comprehensive life orientation.

## **GOOD CHRISTIAN SCHOOL: THEORY AND PRACTICE**

Believing all this, you think of your children. You hear the words of *Deuteronomy*: Let these things about God and his ways be in your hearts and teach them diligently to your children -- when you lie down and when you rise up, when you sit in your house, and when you walk in the way. But you are a homemaker, a shopkeeper, a farmer, a nurse, a carpenter, a doctor. You say, I don't live in the days of *Deuteronomy*; I live in a complex world, and I need help for this.

You go to your community public school. You say to the principal: Here are my children. I ask you to share my stewardship, my responsibility. Teach them arithmetic, science, poetry, history, physical education, music, art, and all the rest; but do it all, always, under the light and discipline of God's way for them. Will you help me? And the principal replies: You can't be serious. Some of that, much of it, we can do. But that religious part-many of us don't even know what you are talking about; even if we did, the law says we could not begin to do it.

You say to yourself, who then will help me? And together with others, you organize a Christian school. You have considered the great costs. You have looked into the new evangelical ACE schools. You have read books and articles, recent ones, but especially also the old ones, and you have heard many speeches. It has all begun to run in your blood. You know something big is here. The tired slogans and rhetoric do have a life in them. Christian schools are different, and yours must be. Christian schools, you know, *are* based in the covenant. They are products of the covenant, and agents of it. That is to say, they are products of a big religious vision, and agents of that vision.

What it all comes to, you know, is good *Reformed* educational philosophy. What it comes to is a whole series of decisions, each based on a prior commitment. And you make those decisions. You decide on excellent *pedagogy*, the best that college education departments know how to promote, and on excellent graded *course-outlines*, the best that the CSI and Canadian committees can produce. But prior to such concerns, you decide about the best *subjects* all young persons ought to study, subjects the good pedagogy and the good outlines must make alive. Those subject-matter decisions you in turn base on what the school is mainly trying to do, on its *major aims*. But again, those aims in their turn are directly controlled by the nature and needs of the *persons* in the classrooms. Finally (and this backs you down to the starting point in educational philosophy), you decide about the persons, about that nature and those needs, in two ways: descriptively, by letting empirical observation as well as biblical revelation point to what young persons *are* in fact like; and normatively, by letting biblical revelation point to what young persons *ought to be* like. The latter especially, you realize, gets to the heart of Christian educational philosophy. For to ask about the "normative" right along with the "descriptive" when speaking of young persons is to ask the crucial question about human *calling* in the world. It is to ask about practicing the presence of God through piety and culture conjoined. It is to ask about the school's religious vision, and about what the school as *school* should be doing to communicate that vision to the young.

You ponder all that and conclude that the good theory does lead to good *practice*, practice that includes not just having a Christian school but having a *good* Christian school. Some of it you talk about with your principal one day, especially the part about who the learner is and what he or she needs religiously. Christian schooling, you agree, must be founded squarely on a good answer to the religious question, for it is in that answer that the school's *Reformed* distinctiveness must be found.

That distinctiveness, you agree, lies not only in keeping piety and culture together but also, as a direct application of that commitment, in keeping the child and the curriculum together. You decide that Christians in education should reject as abhorrent *either* a child-centered *or* a curriculum-centered approach in educational philosophy. You refuse to get caught up on the pendulum-swing between personality aims and knowledge aims, as is the case in much of secular education. Your school will do right by both the child *and* the curriculum. You will aim at the child's *response* in learning: a vital, participatory, active response. Response to what? To the *encounter* of the school's curriculum, a curriculum of formative, disciplining, liberating arts and sciences. This you believe all young persons need, religiously, in order to *know*, to *choose*, and to *participate* in a responsible life before God in the world.

Which is to say that you will reject the contemporary dilution of good subject matter for whatever utilitarian or psychological or *pietistic* reasons. You will reject such dilution because



you believe all young persons, "slow" as well as "fast" learners, need history and literature and math and science and geography and biography and art and music and physical education, as well as the "basic skills" that go along with them. They need such subjects for *religious* reasons; the same reasons that require Bible and church history and doctrinal studies. They need them religiously, *first*, because such subjects most directly and productively present the wide range and variety and complexity of human existence; and, *second*, because those subjects most directly and productively promote the major aims of Christian education, namely, growth in *intellectual* insight and understanding, growth in *moral* awareness and choosing, and growth in *creative* self-expression and action.

On the other hand, you will reject the contemporary swing toward authoritarian imposition of subject matter upon young persons in the name of "discipline" or "basic education." As practiced in some public schools under the new accountability pressures or in some evangelical Christian schools in a revival of plain old-fashioned catechizing, such bald subject-matter "conditioning" violates both human personality and good subject matter teaching fully as much as educational permissiveness does. Christian learning theory, you believe, holds that if good subject matter is not *well* taught it is wasted. Worse, it becomes a burden for all but the self-motivated, creating in many a dislike for such studies and in some the conditions for dropping out of Christian education, either by leaving school or by a passive or hostile presence year after year. Christian theory of learning holds that the learner must be active and interested and motivated to learn. Teaching must be suited to the learner's *way* of learning, *rate* of learning, and developmental *readiness* for this or that concept or skill or inquiry. You insist that young persons in Christian classrooms must be seen to be God's image-bearers. As image-bearers, they are sinful with a profound need for compassionate correction but also are sanctified with a profound need for compassionate encouragement. You conclude that good subject matter teaching requires continuing concern for the *child*, which is to say, continuing concern for good learning theory. Exactly because of its supreme importance, subject matter must be well taught -- not for its own sake but for no other reason than for the learner's sake.

Rejecting all one-sided aberrations and believing in a kind of equal ultimacy of the child and the curriculum (albeit the latter for the sake of the former), you conclude that the way in Christian education is *closure*, closure between the encountering curriculum and the responding learner. To achieve such closure requires professional expertise of the highest order, and the grace of God. It must be striven for. It is the Christian way of good schooling.

This encounter-response model of educational *closure* between the child and the curriculum is, you suspect, not unlike that other closure of encounter and response in the existential covenant between God and his sons and daughters. For we were created to be encountered by God in all of reality, and to respond to him within all the variety and dimensions of our existence. In such *whole* education, combining objective and subjective ultimacy, you suspect further, may lie the developmental secret also of *whole* religion, religion in which the subjective depth of piety and the objective range of culture together promote Christian sanctification.

Viewed in that perspective, you agree that nothing matters in Christian schooling but the kingdom, but because of the kingdom, the whole range of a school's curriculum does matter, all along the way. It matters precisely because a school must give young image-bearers more to be Christian with.

More to be Christian with. That, you agree, just about says it all about your school. Understood that way, the school is like the stable in C.S. Lewis' Narnia story. The stable is ordinary, commonplace, a bit mucky even. But when you get inside, all is different. Something wonderful happens: the walls are down; all is aglow and bright with the golden light of Aslan himself. Open vistas beckon as far as you can see. And always, there is a voice inviting and urging: Come in further, come up higher.

Christian education is like that. On the outside it is ordinary and routine: lunches, tuition, meetings, papers, lessons to plan -- sometimes looking mainly like a refuge for sub-culture survival. But inside it is not the same. The walls are down: openings lead outward as far as you can see. And it's all golden and bright with the presence of Christ himself. And you hear the voice urging and beckoning: Let the children come. Let them come in further, come up higher. For of such is the kingdom: a kingdom not of the world in the midst of the world.