Make your criticisms known to your children, and the ill will you feel toward these people. Don't hide your feelings toward them, and don't honor them at least for their office's and work's sake. This too, is most effective in producing unspiritual young people. It will encourage the same critical spirit in them. It will cultivate a low view of the church, and the members of the church, and make it easy for them to leave the church later on. And this is what usually happens. Once out of the church and separated from the means of grace and the preaching of the truth, they are fair game'" (Standard Bearer, Vol. LX, No. 1, Oct. 1, 1983, p. 19). If dad and mother are critical of the Christian school and teacher, be assured that the children will be more critical still and will see no need for a Christian school education for their own children.

As parents and teachers let us labor together as allies in the cause of Christian instruction. Our children, the Lord's heritage, demand no less. Let us labor together in mutual honor and respect for one another. Let us labor together assisting one another in the rearing of our children. Let us labor together in a true spirit of humility, unity, brotherly love, and likemindedness. Let us together seek God's grace for that, confessing that it is God's work! By His grace alone can we fulfill the awesome responsibility He has placed upon us. May God be with us and help us as parents and teachers. May God save the covenant children and glorify His name through them.

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Preserving Our Heritage

by Rev. C. Hanko

This article is the text of the keynote speech given at the Protestant Reformed Teachers' Institute Convention held at the Hope Protestant Reformed Christian School, November, 1983. Rev. C. Hanko is a minister emeritus of the Protestant Reformed Churches of America.

First of all, I wish to express my appreciation to you for the privilege of being your keynote speaker at this convention. That in itself is a privilege. But what is even more of a privilege is the fact that we have here a cross-section of our churches. I am not merely addressing a local group, but representatives of many of our churches. Still more, you represent that very important element of our churches to whom is entrusted our covenant youth, to shape and to form them for their places and callings in our churches in the future.
Therefore your subject is well chosen. Nothing is of greater significance to us than the heritage God has entrusted to us, particularly as Protestant Reformed Churches. Nor is there a higher calling than to be instrumental in instructing the covenant youth that will be taking our places in the future. There is no better way to preserve our heritage than by passing it on to the future generations now growing up in our churches.

I wish to divide my speech into three parts. First, I wish to consider our heritage. Then, the preservation of that heritage in our Christian schools. And finally, the teacher's calling in preserving that heritage.

OUR HERITAGE

Our heritage can well be summed up in the words of Jude's epistle, "The faith that was once delivered unto the saints" Jude, verse 3. The faith that Jude refers to is the objective truth of the Scriptures as it lives in the hearts of God's people throughout the ages. It is the faith of Adam, of Noah, of Abraham, David, Isaiah, Peter, John, of all the apostles, and of all the martyrs who gave their lives for that faith. It is, in one word, the faith of our fathers living still, in spite of dungeon, fire, and sword. To that faith we have vowed to be faithful even unto death.

More specifically, this faith is summed up in our Apostolic Creed and in the Five Points of Calvinism.

But even more specific than that is the truth of God's Word as it has been entrusted to us as Protestant Reformed Churches. In a time when much of the preaching has become man-centered we are called to maintain a God-centered gospel. While many churches are sacrificing their distinctiveness as denominations to join with other denominations or to become "community" churches, our calling becomes even greater to maintain the truth as we are privileged to confess and to cherish it. If the time should come that we are no longer interested in maintaining our distinctive calling as churches, we will no longer have any right of existence.

When we say that we have a distinctive truth entrusted to us, we do not mean to say, as our enemies sometimes accuse us, that we have a monopoly on the truth. But we do maintain that ever since 1924 we have been charged with maintaining the truth of God's sovereignty, a charge that was confirmed and became even more emphatic in 1953. We can regard that truth from three aspects:

First, we are called to maintain the truth of God's sovereign grace. This grace, according to the five points of Calvinism, is always saving,
and therefore only for the elect. This we maintain over against a general, well-meant offer of salvation, which in recent years has come to mean that God loves all men and presents His gospel with the intent that all men should accept it, believe and be saved.

Second, closely related to the truth of God’s sovereign grace is the truth of the antithesis. Already in 1924 when the synod of the Christian Reformed Church adopted the Three Points of common grace, they warned of the danger of worldly-mindedness and compromise with the world if this theory would be brought to its logical conclusion. History proved that there were indeed just reasons for such a warning. Many churches have given up their position of isolation and separation from the world and now seek what they call contact, that is a more intimate relationship with the world round about them. The light is being dimmed, the truth is suppressed in order to make themselves more appealing to the world. Worldly amusements and associations are officially approved and condoned. We have a calling, more emphatic than ever, to maintain the antithesis between church and world, between light and darkness as it is so plainly taught in the Scriptures (II Cor. 6:14-18). “Come ye out from among them, and be ye separate.”

Last, but certainly not least, the truth of God’s covenant is entrusted to us as we are privileged to confess it in our Protestant Reformed Churches. The truth of God’s covenant has always been considered a peculiar heritage of the Reformed Churches and, accordingly, has always been strongly emphasized. Yet also that truth has been corrupted to mean nothing more than a contract or agreement between God and man. Particularly Rev. Herman Hoeksema, following the principles laid down by some soundly Reformed theologians of the past, has developed the truth of God’s covenant as a relationship of friendship between God and His people in Christ. This truth of God’s covenant plainly permeates all of Scripture from Genesis to Revelation and spreads an entirely new light on the blessed relationship between God and His church in Christ Jesus. This covenant relationship is just as basic, if not more so, as the truth of predestination. Both become a source of inexpressible comfort to those who love and cherish the Word of God.

At this point we do well to pause a moment to consider the fact that doctrine and walk always go hand in hand. There is actually no such thing as practical preaching or instruction apart from doctrine. This lies in the very nature of the case. Scripture is given to us by our God to instruct us in all godliness, to show us the way that we should go. And
Scripture does this by unfolding to us the truth which alone can make us free. It is from that vantage point that Scripture teaches us to “Take fast hold of instruction; let her not go: keep her for she is thy life” Proverbs 4:13. History proves that when a church departs from sound doctrine, often to cater to the weaker element in the church, it also introduces a spirit of worldly-mindedness among its members.

The truth of the Scriptures, the faith of our fathers is our heritage that is so important to us, that we must consider it worth dying for, yes, certainly worth maintaining and defending with all our power.

PRESERVATION OF THIS HERITAGE IN OUR CHRISTIAN SCHOOLS

It is this conviction which gave rise to our own Protestant Reformed Christian Schools. It became evident already in the Janssen controversy in the early twenties that common grace is more than a mere theory. It is a world and life view, as Prof. Janssen showed when he introduced the higher criticism of the German theologians into his teachings on the basis that also this was a fruit of God’s common grace. As a result he questioned the secondary authors of Scripture and even the miracles. This also became evident when Calvin College began to deny Genesis 1 by teaching long periods of creation instead of the six days of twenty-four hours. The church spoke of labor unions as “neutral organizations,” sought a harmony between “Jerusalem and Athens,” denying the antithesis and introducing a compromise with the world.

First in Redlands, California, then in Michigan, later in South Holland, Edgerton, Iowa, and Loveland our schools arose. Lynden was later. But in 1953 our schools went through a period of stress on account of those who were trying to introduce into our churches the conditional theology of the Liberated Churches of the Netherlands. It is rather significant that these same people no longer felt the need for our own schools and even worked against them. In Redlands our school ceased to exist for a time. Many of our schools lost students, so that it was difficult to survive. In Adams one-half of the student body was suddenly withdrawn so that the school was able to continue only through the strong support of our people, young and old alike. It has always been our strong contention that there must be perfect harmony in the instruction of the church, the home, and the school.

The question has been raised, what is the difference in character of the instruction of the church and of the school? The first difference that cannot be ignored is the fact that the catechetical instruction belongs to the church institute, and is therefore official ministry of the
Word by the consistory, while the school is an extension of the home, and therefore belongs to the organic life of the church or to the office of believers. From this follows that the emphasis (and I would stress the word emphasis) of the church falls on the doctrine, while the emphasis of the school falls on the application of that doctrine to every sphere of life. Parents promise, when they make their baptismal vows, that they will bring up their children in the aforesaid doctrine, that is, the doctrine taught in this Christian Church, to the utmost of their power. In either case, whether in the church or in the school, the calling is to labor "that the man of God may be perfect (complete), thoroughly furnished unto all good works" (II Tim. 3:17).

This man of God lives in covenant relationship with the living God as God's friend-servant. He is born again according to the image of Christ to serve in his God-given place with all his gifts and talents in the home, in the church, and in the midst of this present evil world. He holds the threefold office of prophet, priest, and king to devote himself to God, seeking always the kingdom of heaven and antithetically opposing all the forces of evil round about him. In his own way and in his own capacity he also is instrumental toward the coming of God's kingdom and the eternal glory of His Name.

God has created all things as an organism. All things are interrelated. A tree, for example, cannot exist apart from the soil in which it grows and from the air and sunshine on which it thrives. This tree is also related to all other trees, even to the cattle that find shelter under its branches and the birds that nestle among its leaves. The tree is especially related to man, for whom it is created. This interrelationship of all things becomes evident, for example, when we try to take pictures of a mountain peak or of autumn leaves. Usually we are disappointed when we see the picture, because that particular scene has been separated from the environment and does not hold the same beauty any more. Man as king of the earthly creation must not only see the inter-relationship among all things, but must also see his peculiar place and calling in the midst of God's universe. He is called to replenish the earth and to subdue it to the glory of his God.

Each child is more than a mere number, another member of his class. He is an individual who is born at his God-given time, in his own place, from his own parents, in a particular church, with his own character, personality, abilities, talents, etc. He is a "man of God" who is called to devote himself with his whole being to God as God's priest, to proclaim God's praises as God's prophet, and to rule over his own domain as king to the glory of God. His first calling is not to make a
success for himself in this world, nor to make a name for himself, nor to get out of this life all that he can for his own enjoyment. He must be taught to keep his priorities straight. For in the great Day of days he must give account of what he has done with God's life entrusted to him, God's time, God's family, God's church, God's gifts and talents entrusted to him for serving God's cause and kingdom. The task of the school is to equip the man of God for that calling throughout his life here on earth.

Let me add that much has been done by our own school teachers to prepare material for instruction from a strictly Protestant Reformed aspect. Workshops, teachers' institutes and conferences have served a good purpose among us, which should not be minimized.

THE PECULIAR CALLING OF THE TEACHER
IN MAINTAINING OUR HERITAGE

Allow me to point out, first of all, that teaching is not a mere job, but is one of the most important functions, a profession. Teaching the covenant seed of the church is an even greater privilege and responsibility. God entrusts to you the "man of God," who must be equipped as an individual for his calling here below. Each of you may well remember some particular teacher in your early training who had a tremendous influence on you, either for good or for bad. You are preparing future fathers and mothers, leaders in the church, even in the last days of the coming of the Son of Man. This is a full-time task, demanding all your time and effort. You must not only prepare lessons day by day to remain an enthusiastic teacher, but you must have time for research, for reading, for developing yourself in the subjects you teach or in some other field. If you do not do that your teaching will become stale, lifeless, a bore for yourself and for your pupils.

To fulfill your God-given calling you yourself must be fully equipped. The truth of Scripture, and more specifically, the doctrine as taught in our churches must be thoroughly understood, must be your strongest conviction, and must be part and parcel of your soul. I would emphasize that the beautiful truth of God's covenant as the relationship of friendship between God and us, as it so thoroughly permeates the Scriptures, must fill your soul with excitement for God, for His cause, His Name, and His glory in all that you say and do.

In the classroom the teacher must radiate the light of God's Word in every action, in every spoken word, in every course that is taught. It is true that there are subjects in which this is brought out much more
than in others. There are the formal subjects that simply do not allow for this emphasis. Take, for example, arithmetic. Even though the Christian views all things in the light of God's Word, it still remains a fact that 2 plus 2 are 4 in the Christian school as well as in the public school. A believer does see the harmony and beauty, the intolerant logic of figures, yet that actually has nothing to do with teaching a course in arithmetic, no more than does the symbolism of figures. This same fact applies to such subjects as spelling, grammar, languages, logic, etc.

But there are subjects like history, philosophy, and science that simply cannot be taught properly except on the sound basis of the Word of God. Here is where we part even sharply from those who maintain the theory of common grace. It is simply impossible to teach in the classroom without maintaining or denying the theory of common grace, even though the term may never be used. Much work has already been done to prepare material, such as textbooks and workbooks on a sound Scriptural basis, but we all realize that there is still much to be done. We still need a good philosophy course based on the Word of God, as well as a thorough psychology course that can serve us in teaching the covenant seed of the church. For we must never lose sight of the fact that each individual child is placed under us as God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto those good works which God has before ordained that we should walk in them (Eph. 2:10).

As a workmanship of God each child is a masterpiece, handmade, as it were, as he comes forth from the hand of the Almighty, All-wise Covenant God. That is true of the child that learns readily, but that is also true of the slow or special child. That is true of the child who behaves in class, but also of the problem child. Each truly covenant child is a born-again believer in Christ, formed and shaped by the sovereign Craftsman for his or her own place in life according to God's sovereign purpose. God has ordained the child, his place in the church, as well as the purpose that child must serve here below. We must bear in mind, that many of the first shall be last, and many of the last first. One that is esteemed in our eyes as a slow learner or without many talents may still serve a very important place in the church as one of God's jewels. God's thoughts are higher than our thoughts and His ways than our ways.

This reminds us of the tremendous responsibility God has placed upon us. Children are very observant, far more than we often think. A child knows the teacher almost better than he knows himself; knows his
moods, his feelings, knows whether he is prepared or not. The impressions we make upon the child are lasting. Children even tend to imitate those whom they like and admire. Each of us is daily confronted with the question whether we are good examples to the children we teach. Do we say to them even by our actions, live as I live, think as I think, speak as I do, mold your life after the pattern that I set before you day by day? Can we say as Paul did, "Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Jesus. . . . Brethren, be followers together of me" (Phil. 2:13, 14, 17).

Each child under our instruction must learn to say, "For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain." No covenant child must regard this life as an end in itself, but rather as a preparation for our real and full life in eternity. Christ is the reason for his life. Christ is his sole Possessor. He belongs to his faithful Savior Jesus Christ. Therefore Christ is the purpose, the only goal in his life. We do not hold a double standard, one for children and another for us adults. In our lives and with all our being we are friend-servants devoted to the living God. And who is capable of these things?

This may sound very idealistic. Our first reaction may well be, who can ever attain to that high goal in our lives? Yet we cannot deny that this is the truth of the Scriptures. And those same Scriptures direct us to much prayer and supplication, living lives of prayer for guidance before the face of Jehovah, our Almighty, Unchangeable, ever faithful covenant God.

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