



Our Own Schools, Too Protective?



**ADAPTED BY REV. DEN HOLLANDER
FROM A SPEECH HE GAVE TO BYFORD
JCS CATCHMENT MEETING – MAY 2017**

Well Brothers and sisters, it is a great honour that I may also say a few words in this context. I have been speaking in many different contexts, this is number 11, so it's about time that I leave because I am wearing out my welcome! However this is a very special opportunity as I am not able to be at a celebration of the 60th anniversary of the Free Reformed School Association.

I started my professional life as a teacher and I've never ever regretted that I started in that way, although I did make a career change and am still teaching. I have been teaching for 50 years plus, so it's wonderful that I may also speak in this context of an annual general meeting of a school Council. When I chose to speak about: "our own schools: too protective?", I thought it was a nice title and I passed it on to the school Council and it was tossed around by a few people and I sensed that there was some anxiety about the topic because, yes, what's the answer to that question? Is he going to say 'yes' or is he going to say 'no'?! That's really the pickle that we are all in, and perhaps

I am in it most of all. Well, I know that some say 'yes', but I say 'no'. So please settle down your suspicions, your anxieties, and indeed this is a question that comes back all the time; whether our own schools are too protective or not, whether our children are raised in a too sheltered way, which some people feel is the case. They go to the Christian school for 12 years and they have little exposure to the real world. And after those 12 years they are plunged into that real world, so some people feel that they are raised in a school that is too protective, and then they come up with all sorts of suggestions and solutions to overcome that problem. However, as I said, I do not believe that our own schools are too protective.

"Why do we need our own schools?"

First of all, the question that needs to be answered is: why do we have our own schools? The answer is very well known, and we have heard it already a few times here tonight; as a covenant community we help parents with their task in bringing up covenant children. That, in a nutshell, is the reason why we set up those schools. And the whole covenant community takes part in it. Not only the parents whose own children are in the school, but also the grandparents and the great grandparents, as well as singles and young people who have gone through the school; it's a community affair.

"It's a community affair"

As a matter of fact, I preach quite often in the United Reformed churches in Canada, and when there is a baptism then the whole congregation also is being asked a question

about the upbringing of this particular child that is being raised in the midst of the congregation. Then the congregation promises also with their "I do" that they will support these parents in the upbringing of the children, and that is also again translated into the support for the school. So as a covenant community we help the parents with their task in bringing up covenant children.

Now this may sound like a platitude and yet also from my 50 years of experience I know that this needs to be repeated, not just at every school meeting but very, very regularly, and





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every new generation of parents sending their children need to be spoken to about these very basic principles for having our own schools. Then also the element of protection needs to be addressed, are our own schools too protective?

“Are our own schools too protective?”

Well, protective of what? We need to protect our schools and our children in the schools of the scriptures and confessions. We need to be protective of those, and they need to be protective of the reformed life and world view. So in other words, already tonight we have heard a few of the general principles of the general ideas that we derive from Deuteronomy 6 and Psalm 78, and the beautiful article in the latest Una-Sancta, but we need to give this hands and feet, we need to give this meaning, contents. We cannot stay at general principles and we need to apply these principles to the work at school. We need to apply the scriptures and the confessions in the instruction of history, of geography, of science. We need to apply also and especially to the world and life view that the children take along after 12 years of education. They need to go into the world with a solid clear understanding of a reformed view of the world and of life, and of the reformed philosophy of education as well. We need to be protective because our teaching indeed has to be confessional, covenantal and antithetical. But we need to give that hands and feet, we need to give that meaning and contents, and the confessions indeed need to start functioning so that by the time the students have finished school they are able to connect Article 2 with their biology,

they are able to connect the articles about the ana-baptists with church history, they are able to connect the authority of the scriptures to the views about evolution, just to mention a few things. And not only as a theory, but that needs to be well rooted and grounded in the hearts and minds of our children.

Then the question is: why do we need to be protective of all that? Because they are our children, they are covenant children, they are covenant children who need protection.

“They are our children, they are covenant children, they are covenant children who need protection”

They are conceived and born in sin, as we also just heard this past Sunday, and that means that they need to be protected against themselves, they need to know what that sin is all about and how that translates into the life of themselves, of their community, of the world in which they live. They are also inclined to all sorts of temptations and inclinations, and they need to again know clearly what that means in the world in which we live today, in a society that they are facing today. So we need to protect them in order to prepare these children for a life in service of the Lord. And there we have a few introductory remarks.

Then what is the basis and purpose of the school? Well the basis of our school is that the children of the covenant are educated from the riches of their place and promises

in the covenant. So the riches of that position that they have needs to be articulated in, and applied to their position before the Lord and in that covenant community in the midst of the church, but also needs to be applied by the children in the midst of society. They need to be educated for that future place, they need to be equipped for that future task, they need to be encouraged to live the life of a covenant child in that future society, community and world in which they will end up. And they have to do that as holy children. So throughout these 12 years they need to understand very concretely, very succinctly, very clearly in their hearts and minds what it means to be holy, what it means to be royal children. Thankfully we are still living in a time in which we can use and illustrate the life of royalty in order to equip our young people, our children, to know that Prince William, Harry, Charles or Andrew in the past, were raised not in that cocoon of Buckingham Palace, but they were raised in order to apply themselves and equip themselves and employ themselves in the future as royalty. And to do that as people that stand out in the midst of this society by their competence, by their abilities, by their training - they are well equipped. I also know from our own royal family in the Netherlands what that meant. Willem Alexander has just recently had an interview about his upbringing, and from that interview you can understand very well that his entire upbringing and education was geared toward his future position as crown-prince and king! And it is very helpful if you realise that our covenant children are holy, set aside to be royal children. Therefore, we as parents



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and teachers and ministers and elders, need to instil in them the true sense of holiness and royalty in order to equip them for that special place for which they have been set apart by the Lord to live in this society, to seek His kingdom and to build His church.

So, having our own schools... that is not just with a purpose in itself, that is not just for our children to be different as we say then, very vaguely. But it is in order that they are different for a purpose, they are different with a principle, they are different with a status, they are different in the way they have been raised... indeed to the glory of GOD. We are not just raising them to keep the group pure, even though purity is very important. But their holiness, their royalty, their purity is in order that they are able to live a life in which they remain undefiled from the world. And I tell you that this is a tremendous

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challenge. Therefore indeed, it would be totally irresponsible to plunge them into this world unprepared.

But then as parents and teachers we need to be prepared in ourselves to know how we ourselves keep ourselves undefiled from the world. So what are the influences? What are we exposed to? What do we indeed observe as that defilement of the world, in order that we may educate and equip our children and

encourage them to live that holy life in purity in this society? So we prepare them for their place as Christians in today's society, on the basis of their covenantal position. That is the purpose of having our school (which still is somewhat a general purpose) but we need to focus very concretely on that future position in society, where they are to stand out and to live for the Lord, be holy and royal in their behaviour.

So, in those preparatory years of schooling, the children need to receive a sound knowledge and understanding of the Bible, of the confessions, of the history of the world, but also and especially the history of the church. Because the mighty deeds of God that Psalm 78 speaks about or that we should share with them according to Deuteronomy 6, those mighty deeds of God took place in the midst of the world. When you read the history of Israel in the book of Samuel, of Kings, or with the prophets, then you see that all the actions that they are engaged in are also including the world around them and how they interact with that world, what position they have in the world, how they trade with the world, how they allow that world also to influence them. So the history of the world and the history of the church are very much interrelated, intertwined. I have been a history teacher myself, I have also of course taught a lot of church history, and in either subject you very much need to emphasise when you teach world history, what the place of the church was in that particular era, in that particular society, in that particular event. It always needs to be

integrated. Or, when you are teaching church history, it's very important to also set it in the setting, in the context, in the time, in which part of history it took place. So children in that way need to be equipped to understand how the church of today has its place in society, what the pitfalls are, and what the temptations and the inclinations are, but also what the promises and obligations are for covenant people and a covenantal church to live in the midst of the world. And for that they need to be prepared.

Covenant and faith permeate all aspects and fields of life. We say it so easily and we mean it all very seriously, but it's a huge statement, and it's a tremendous task if you realise that needs to be kept in mind and done consciously all the time. The children need to learn to believe. As a catechism teacher that stood out in my teaching every week again - they need to learn to believe. So we don't just present it to them, we don't just display it to them, but we call them to interact with it, to respond to it all the time. They need to learn to believe, they need to learn to work with the knowledge that they receive in all the various subjects, but particularly in the instruction in the scriptures and the confessions.

“We help equip and encourage them to serve their God and Maker under the Lordship of Jesus Christ”

And they need to know as a result of that: what is the attitude as child of God in



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the world. So the purpose would not be missionary, and that's where the people have said 'yes' to that question 'too protective', because they want to use the school as a missionary institute, or for evangelical purposes, or for that view of a person's future task in the world that he needs to be able to reach out and to evangelise. Well, that of course is again part and parcel of all the different aspects of our lives and that's included as well, but our school is not in the first place a missionary school. It is also not with the intention that we send out our children into the world to change the culture or the society, but rather to help them, equip them, encourage them, to serve their God and Maker under the Lordship of Jesus Christ in all of life. So that's the basis and purpose of our schools.

It's an incredible blessing that we definitely may not take for granted.

Then when you look at 60 years of the John Calvin Schools and take the balance of all those 60 years, then of course in this year of celebration and commemoration we need to, and have to, give great thanks and praise to God for the many blessings, the riches that the Lord has bestowed during the 60 years. Noting with gratitude what has been built in those years: primary schools in different places, and the John Calvin Christian College - which especially for a person like myself coming into this country for the first time, seeing the facilities here and in Armadale and elsewhere, seeing what the Lord has

given over those years, you stand in awe. It's amazing, its tremendous, the organization, the administration, the education, the whole facility in all its different facets, it's an incredible blessing that we definitely may not take for granted. You have a pedagogic centre as well, and you have teacher training that is in place for the continuous training of teachers, or in preparation for teaching. These are the matters that we have on our balance after 60 years.

But there may be a downside to it.

The education, which is protective as I have said, which is done in a protective institution and setting, that education that was protective can lead to a situation that is insufficiently in touch with the reality of today's society, and that's what I stress here tonight. Because I have been a teacher too for 12 years, actively in all the grades of the schools including a number of years in high school, and there are some concerns there. Sometimes it is for good reasons that people wonder whether perhaps they are too sheltered and too protective. We need to be proactive and prevent this impression from ever coming about again. Our children must be sufficiently in touch with the reality of today's society, in touch with the sense of being influenced, being instructed, equipped to discern, to test the spirits, to know what this society is all about. The spiritual upbringing may have been entrusted to the school too much as well. It is definitely a concern that I have had throughout my teaching career and as well as a minister;

that sense of 'they're well taken care of, well provided for, they're well educated in the school'. And the distance between parents and children, parents and teachers, parents and school, is a distance that grows instead of staying very close. A Principal has mentioned already that it's going to be his priority to get to know the parents, because he needs to reach the parents in order to engage them in the education of the children. He needs to motivate and stimulate the parents to know what's being done at the school, in order that the education remains to be the extension of the home, the extension in assistance to the parents at home. That needs to be foremost in our mind. We are not setting this all up and taking care of it with millions of dollars in order for us to sit at home and say: "it's all well and good". 'No,' there is an obligation and a responsibility, also for the parents, and then ultimately a responsibility towards the students.

The reasons why there is that complaint, why there is that inclination to speak about sheltered upbringing, is because in the reality, in the experience, our students have shown a delayed sense of independence and responsible attitude as Christians who are adequately prepared for the place in a secular and non-Christian society and culture. In the churches the elders speak about it, the ministers speak about it, we are all concerned about that vacuum that takes place in the age group of 18 – 25. They go to school until they are 18 years old, most of them make profession of faith as if that is part of the graduation process, and then they leave



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school. They either go into the workforce, or to university, or college, or TAFE. And then they fall into a hole, they fall into a vacuum, which has been a concern for years and years, and today we need to address that head on. The teachers, the parents, the society, need to address this aspect of students who are held responsible for their deeds, for their thoughts, for their words from Grade 1 and up. One of the main riches of covenantal life, brothers and sisters, is the fact that the Lord holds us responsible. We cannot just label our children as covenant children and think: "wow, beautiful position". And it is... royal children... great, they are! But it comes with a responsibility, an obligation, and this element needs to be stressed more than it is. Particularly their responsibility as covenant people, a royalty in the midst of society. They need to become more and more responsible and able to adequately take their place in society and know how to conduct themselves in the midst of a non-Christian culture. And so that vacuum should not happen, resulting in that identity crisis in which people ask themselves; "who are we?". Because that's what many of them end up asking themselves: "who are we?" Yes, generally speaking covenant children, beautiful! Yes, we are children of the Lord, wonderful! We sing about it, we express our thankfulness for it, and we praise the Lord for it, and yet there is and has been an identity crisis.

That identity crisis has led to a lack of sanctification. **You hear it** in every congregation, you hear it in every country, the behaviors of our young people in drinking, in

dancing, in drugs, in all the worldly practices that they engage in, which they finally are allowed for themselves to try out, and to fall into, and to become addicted to, and to fall victim to. This needs to be prevented. During the 12 years that they are educated in the school, that lack of sanctification and that sense of covenant automatism needs to be overcome by a covenantal call for responsibility, which is not just about making profession of faith in the church which 'is adequate and sufficient'. But that profession of faith should be standing out in their whole life. It's not enough to go to the Free Reformed Church of Australia somewhere, having attended the Free Reformed School Society somewhere, and then to step into this world where the challenges cannot be met. They need to be responsible in their Christian walk, and for that they need to be prepared, equipped, educated and encouraged.

So our own schools are protective for a purpose.

So our own schools are protective for a purpose. Reformed education must be used as a means and not as a purpose. It's not just to satisfy your good, your spiritual, your religious feelings. It's not because; "I have made that vow to have them instructed in to the utmost of my power, and so we set up that school and we pay for it and its all hunky dory," no! It's for a purpose that we have it. The school must be the training grounds, the barracks, the field, the exercise field, rather than a social bunker, a shelter if you want, a natural shelter where they are safe

and we are at peace and everything is fine and good. Just as the children should not be raised in a cocoon at home. I have addressed that question in another speech here in the Byford Congregation. But the image of raising our children in a cocoon, you know, having houses without windows, having churches without doors and windows, that's what children will experience as a cocoon. And that will be a raising of our children in a bunker. But our churches and homes need to have doors and windows. Also the school should have windows open to the world, making the children aware of the spiritual warfare that is raging. And for that warfare they are in the barracks, and they need to be exercising, and they need to be prepared knowing the armour of faith, in order to be able to face the enemy, in order to be able to interact with the enemy in the gate. They need to be prepared to make an account, to give an account of the hope that is in them. So our schools need to really keep its focus not only on the internal purity of the group, but also on the armour of faith and the position of the church in the world.

Reformed education of course is a tremendously rich heritage, but a heritage may not just be treasured and cherished in and of itself as an heirloom that we have on the mantelpiece, but our heritage must be used actively. We are standing in a history of reformed education, we are standing in a history of reformed churches, there has been reformed political action and social action, there has been reformed outreach in the midst of this world. And that heritage needs to be



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handed over to our children as well, for which they need to be equipped to use it well and to be excited about it, and to be incited for it.

So our schools, being covenantal, need to indeed bind our home and our school together, so that parents and teachers cooperate and work together and are working together on one page. And that's where my concern often has been as well, that feeling of giving it over to the teachers and being happy and content at home. That feeling also means that we are not on the same page, that the education that the teachers are working on so well and so hard is not at the same level as the education that is given at home. Parents and teachers need to be on the same page. Today parents and teachers need to get together to speak about the use of the internet, they need to speak together about the entertainment that we choose for our children, that we prefer to instill in our children, what we can accept and what we cannot accept. What is coming to our teenagers, what is coming to our students in various uncontrolled ways without parents or teachers being aware of it? We need to become aware of it, we need to speak about it together, we need to know how both teachers and parents are together monitoring the use of the iPhones of our children. We need to know together as teachers and parents how we should lead our children in the organisation of parties, and the parameters and the concrete things that they do in the parties, and how they prepare for the parties. We need to speak about that together, so that we can instill in them that Christian spirit, that Christian holiness, that

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Christian attitude, in the way they entertain themselves, in the way they organise themselves, in the way they use their gadgets, and in the way they access the internet. The protection that we seek must be a protection that we seek together, in the same way, in the same spirit, on the same page.

And that is then for the teachers indeed a task that we lay upon them, and that is a tremendously heavy task. But it should also be assured and ensured that the teachers know that at home they do the same thing. And thereto there have been concerns that all the reformed education and good work that the teachers do is undone by an attitude at home that is not Christian, by a use of the TV at home that is not responsible, by an admission at home to the internet that is not the same as in the school, or the use of Netflix that is not in line with the principles that the teachers instill at school. We need to speak about that so that the work of the teachers is not undone at home or that the work of the home is in line and on the same page as the teachers.

So we are protective indeed, for a purpose. We need to do this together for that purpose, protecting our children from that influence of the world, but also preparing these children for that position in the world. As it was

mentioned earlier, that needs to be done to the glory of God, and that needs to be done in accordance with God's Word. So we need to discuss these matters together and cannot just presume that we are all on the same page, because we are not. So reformed covenantal education today, brothers and sisters, is indeed done in the awareness that Christians are in the world but not of the world. The emphasis perhaps has been too often and too much on that last part; we are not of the world, no, but we are in the world!

“God's salvation affects peoples whole being and their whole life, and a life in communion with God is what we aim for with our children”

And because we are in the world: we'd better be prepared for the world; we'd better know the world; we better have an understanding of the world and discern the spirits and test whether they are of God, and not just have homes or churches or schools without windows and doors. God's salvation affects peoples whole being and their whole life, and a life in communion with God is what we aim for with our children. That means that of course the children, baptized as they are in the name of the triune God, need to know their Father and His good creation, and they need to know the Son because they have come to know and learn about their sins in a very concrete, in a very pointed, in a very articulate way. And they must be aware that at home and at school, just as in the church,



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we are in the workshop of the Holy Spirit. And that the work of the Holy Spirit, by His spirit and word, is a very real activity in the home and in the school as well. For without communion with God it is impossible to exist, or to know, or to work, or to produce, or to employ ourselves. That needs to be trained and instilled and employed throughout the time that we raise our children.

So, knowing what we have, and treasuring what the Lord gives, and having learned all that we have over the past 60 years, we need to indeed place that under the light of God's Word and all of life, and equip our children. Equip our students with the application, equip them with the armour of faith, equip them with the ability to use it and to integrate their faith in this world. Having their opinion, having their understanding honed and improved and sharpened, so that they know the spirit of our age, so that they know the spiritual warfare that is raging, so that they know how the spirits in the air are seen in the music of today, can be recognized in the fashion of today, are evident in the entertainment market of today. And they need to indeed at the same time, positively and constructively, become active members in the community, not only in their daily profession

but also in their political engagement in their social activities.

“The Bible, the confessions, and covenantal education should educate, equip and encourage the students to stand in the spiritual warfare”

We need to give our children also a vision for today, a vision in the society. We cannot just suffice with focusing on that covenant and those promises and those obligations, and keep that all very clinical without a concrete application. We need to send those children into this world with a task, that they are going to be kingdom children, royal children who are having a vision in this world and would engage themselves in ARPA, and would engage themselves in community work, would engage themselves also in outreach, and all sorts of other activities which are Christian, and for which they are prepared, and for which they are incited. So a reformed life in service to God and the neighbour in today's society encompasses all of life. Hence the school should lay a sound and scholarly basis for a reformed view of this world, culture, and society. Our students who go to university,

and that's just one example, need not and should not feel embarrassed when they are confronted with the evolution theory. But in the barracks they should be trained to know the spirits of evolution, the teachings of evolution. They should also know the answers very well so that when they are put on the spot and they are confronted with that false philosophy, that they have their answers ready in a scholarly and academic way, well trained over the course of 12 years. Because these are the reasons why people have that complaint of a too sheltered upbringing. They are 'not prepared for those moments' they say, and therefore they 'need' to go to a public school or a state school first for 2 years. No! In that protective environment of the school they need to know all the Q's and all the clues and all the answers for the situation that they will be facing in university or TAFE or in society. In short, the Bible, the confessions, and covenantal education should educate, equip and encourage the students to stand in the spiritual warfare for the battle of which they need to be trained adequately and efficiently and comprehensively.

