

Reformed schools - joint responsibility for a glorious purpose

We have reason to be grateful to God that our Free Reformed forebears, back in the 1950s and 1960s, established the John Calvin Schools. Grateful, too, for the example they set us as church, home and school combined efforts to ensure that the children in the church would grow up to know and love, honour and serve their LORD. They knew that since those children belonged to the LORD, they were not to have two types of seed sown into their minds: a godly seed at home and a godless seed at a state school. So, while our forefathers struggled to establish homes and provide for the daily needs of their families, many saw it as a joint responsibility—whether or not they had children—to promote Reformed education and to sacrifice a good portion of their hard-earned money to establish and maintain Reformed schools for the children.

Today, unlike in those early pioneering days, the financial sacrifices are proportionately not as great, for we are now blessed to receive significant government subsidy. But our interest in, and dedication to, Reformed schools remains because we recognise that it is not just about helping with money, it's about a mutual commitment to promote the cause of the LORD and of His kingdom. It's about pursuing, together, the grand Scriptural vision of what God is doing in and through the children of the church, a picture that our forebears were taught to see again around the time of the Liberation. They learnt that the underlying position of the covenant, and the church as God's covenant community, meant that the school—a gift from God for the cause of His glory and kingdom—was the responsibility of the whole congregation as Family of God.



Hence they showed a vital interest in supporting the John Calvin School. School Association membership was not limited to parents with school-age children. Younger people and older members without children, too, saw it as their task to provide for and promote this endeavour. Were they not together on their way to the New Jerusalem? And weren't the children to be taught to know, love and serve the LORD and to walk in the joy of covenant fellowship with Him? Weren't they to grow up to confess Christ's kingship and to fight against sin, the devil and the world? Wasn't the Lord Jesus thereby establishing His kingdom over against the kingdom of Satan? If that, and more, was the glorious goal of educating the church's children for kingdom service, shouldn't everyone be keen to support it?

Our migrant ministers – Rev P van Gorp, Rev G van Rongen, Rev K Bruning – certainly thought so; they were strong advocates of the reformed school, encouraging all those who could to be members. As Rev Bruning said, the Word of God calls us to support the school. [i] Likewise, Rev van Gorp (minister in Albany from 1955 to 1964) relates how in his sermons he so frequently stressed the need for all church members to support it. [ii]

And church members heeded their ministers. Harry Kleyn, in a biography of his father, writes: *"In December 1954, a School Association was formed with a membership fee set at one pound a week. Every adult member was encouraged to be a member of the School Association"*. His father was earning about twelve pounds a week so that a commitment of a pound a week to both church and school represented about 16% of his salary – a huge commitment at that time when immigrants struggled to establish themselves in Australia. Yet, he writes, no one complained; indeed, all were happy to contribute because they saw it as a necessity. [iii]

Prof. J Kamphuis (snr) points out that those who think of the Reformed school as something which concerns only the parents of the school children have become individualistic in their thinking. We have said that the LORD has given us, together—as communion of saints, as Christ's body—the mandate to nurture the children of the church in His ways. Hence, he says, it is not a matter of choice; it is a matter of working together for the common goal of educating the children in such a way that they too will direct their lives in the service of their God. [iv]



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I thought that perhaps the idea that the school is the responsibility of the whole church community was a uniquely Australian immigrant view carried over from the Church Liberation of 1944 in the Netherlands, and by and large was not supported by our brothers and sisters in Canada. And perhaps, in various provinces, that is so. However, not long ago I came across the following from Prof. J Geertsema (Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary) published some 30 years ago. He, too, emphasises the communal task of all those able, to support the schools. He writes feelingly about our joint responsibility, saying:

“Recently I attended a membership meeting of one of our school societies. One of the points on the agenda was the budget... Looking around at that meeting, I saw a number of older members who have no children at home anymore. It was good to see these older members there... They care for the school education

of the youth of the church. They see the plight of the parents with children, and continue to place their shoulders under the load with their brothers and sisters...

Allow me to make a few remarks here on one aspect of the biblical concept of the covenant in connection with Reformed school education. The covenant aspect is very important in leading us in our life, also regarding the schools. We confess that the youth of the church belong to the covenant. They belong to the Lord Who says also to them: I claim you for My own. I put My seal on you. That is why we have our Reformed schools, set up for covenant children.

Covenant means people, community, for in the covenant we find two parties: God and His people. The apostle Paul, for example, speaks of the church, the community of believers in Christ, as a household, a family of God. Therefore, when we say covenant we say family, brothers and sisters, who are there to help and support each other. It is a joy to see the covenant at work at such a school meeting: brothers and sisters in all membership categories come together to discuss matters pertaining to the school of God’s covenant children: the youth of the church(es). Those who do not have children in school anymore maintain their membership, gladly contributing to the cause of covenant children. They accept their responsibility and calling to support their brothers and sisters in the Family of God.”



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Although the education of the children is first a parental responsibility, it extends to others in church. Prof. Geertsema remarks that...

"it was my responsibility before the God of my children to give them and have them receive a faithful covenantal education, not only at home, and in the church, but also in school, to the utmost of my ability. I owed it to them. But also the other children in the church belong to God's covenant. As their brother, I am also responsible for them and their parents."

Such joint responsibility does not ignore financial commitment. He says,

"For a number of years, I contributed ... for my own children first of all, but together with other members of the societies, and in that way I gave support for other parents and children at the same time."

To be sure, the sacrifices many Canadian brothers and sisters make is considerably higher than what we pay. Nevertheless, the principle of sharing the load for the same noble purpose remains. Prof. Geertsema adds:

"If I now were to stop supporting the others in the Family, since my children do not need this education anymore, I would be covenantally unfaithful to them, parents and children. There would be with me a lack of care for my brothers and sisters, parents and children, with whom I belong to the same church and covenant..."

How can I, before God's face, look the others straight in the face when I would quit being a member and not helping them out? How could I justify before our God in heaven, before whom I live and who places me in the covenant and church beside the others, that I would forsake them? No, I could not justify this before the LORD, who so faithfully cared for me and

my children during the past twenty and more years. No, I do not want to forsake my brothers and sisters in the church whom God gave me as my fellow Family members and who during those years set their shoulders with me under the task and calling to provide Reformed education to the children of the church. Therefore, I gladly continue my membership and contribute my fees with which I can support the others in the fulfilment of their task and calling and so lighten their "burden" somewhat."

Prof. Geertsema concludes:

"The reader will understand that continued membership is for me a matter of obedient love to our Father in heaven and of faithfulness and reliability toward my brothers and sisters in the Family. God is pleased when His children love Him and care for each other. He has promised to bless this. He tells me too that if I do not love Him and do not show my loving care for the other members of the Family, He will get angry with me and could take His blessings away from me. I trust Him. I believe that His Word is true. What God has given in His grace, I cheerfully, in thankfulness, share with my brothers and sisters, small and great." [v]

Let us keep our eyes on the glorious privilege of together—church, home and school—promoting the great cause of the LORD, by nurturing the children through distinctly Reformed education. May all the teaching prepare them so that in everything God's name is honoured and His kingdom is established as, with the blessing of the LORD, we help direct the coming generations to live in thankful subjection to Christ their King and Redeemer.

Jelte Numan

[i] Rev K Bruning, "Character, Aim and Purpose of the Reformed School", Una Sancta, 18 May 1963. Republished (translated by J Bruning) in Volume 45, No. 20.

[ii] P van Gurp, in his autobiography Levensboek, 2020.

[iii] Harry Kleyn, My Father's Journey, IngramSpark, Australia, 2022, p. 292.

[iv] J Kamphuis, "Gemeenschap-in-dienst" in Een Uitgemaakte Zaak, van den Berg, Kampen, 1987.

[v] J Geertsema, Clarion, Vol. 40 No. 10, May 1991.

