



**FREE REFORMED  
SCHOOL ASSOCIATION**

*My heart I offer to You Lord - promptly and sincerely*

# **A Look at the Church, Home, School Triangle**

Rev PKA de Boer

## Foreword

Harry Kleyn, in his book *My Father's Journey*, writes how in the early 1950s the Free Reformed pioneers who settled in the Armadale region recognised the need to establish reformed schools for the children in the church. He writes: "Every adult Free Reformed Church member was encouraged to be a member of the School Association" (p. 292). It is not hard to understand why. It was so that the children of the church would grow in the knowledge of God and His Word, and to grow in love and faithfulness to Him.

I have heard from Br Jan Eikelboom, who was a School Board member in Albany in the late 1950s, that this was also the noble aim of establishing a school there. Most of those able to contribute financially did so in the awareness that the Reformed education at school was for the cause of God's glory and kingdom.

The church ministers in the 1950s and 1960s strongly encouraged that support in preaching and writings. This is evident, for example, from the autobiography *Levensboek* of Albany's former minister, Rev P van Gorp. Rev K Bruning likewise emphasised the need for church, home, and school to work for this noble purpose. As he said in his paper "Character, Aim and Purpose of the Reformed School" (*Una Sancta*, 18 May 1963), "[the students] are God's children, future builders and fighters in the kingdom of heaven".

The LORD has richly blessed those feeble beginnings and the combined efforts of church, home, and school in promoting this noble aim. He even granted that the governments provide a large part of the finances needed to operate these schools. We now have great schools with outstanding facilities and beautifully kept properties, committed godly staff, and a reformed curriculum developed over several years—all in order that the children would grow in the knowledge of, and love for, the LORD and that they would gain understandings and skill whereby to serve Him so that His name would be praised, and His kingdom established.



We understand the importance of present and future generations not losing sight of this great goal. In order that they may continue to understand the reason why church, home, and school were from the beginning united in pursuing the grand purpose for our reformed schools, the School Board's 'Reformed Education Committee' asked Rev PKA de Boer to write a paper about the principles underpinning this tripartite (church-home-school) purpose and its practical ramifications. We thank him for the thorough effort put into this and are pleased that it can now be published. The paper was discussed by the Committee and has been submitted to the School Board prior to it now being made available on the FRSA's website and elsewhere.

J Numan

FRSA Reformed Education Committee

## Introduction

**“We will not hide them from their children, telling to the generation to come the praises of the LORD”**

**Psalm 78:4**

Reformed believers who have come out on the liberated side of the schism in 1944 have paid a fair amount of attention to the education of their children. The background for this includes how parents promise at the baptism of their children *to instruct your child in this doctrine, as soon as he (she) is able to understand, and to have him (her) instructed therein to the utmost of your power.*<sup>1</sup> Much can be written about the background and context of this commitment. Reference can be made to Deuteronomy 6:7 where the Lord had commanded His people to teach the laws and instructions He had given to their children. This instruction to teach the children is put together with how later the Lord affirms believing parents that His promises are also for their children, Acts 2:32. The conclusion drawn from this is that the parents continue to have a duty to teach their children about these promises.

It is not only the parents who are involved with teaching children. The churches are also involved. This is first shown by how the confessing Church insists that parents vow at the baptism of their children. Moreover, in Deuteronomy 6 the Lord addresses the entire

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<sup>1</sup> *Form for the Baptism of Infants, Book of Praise* (Premier Printing) p. 598



congregation of His people. They are to see to it that this instruction to teach children is carried out. Furthermore, notice that the Lord does not specifically address the parents, but His people as a whole. This is further affirmed when we hear how the children of Israel are taught to sing in Psalm 78:4 that as a nation *We* (plural) *will not hide them* (i.e. the things *our fathers have told us*) *from their children, Telling to the generation to come the praises of the LORD, ...*

In the past the Lord had entrusted the priest, Leviticus 10:11 to teach Israel all His statutes. Even though this does not refer directly to the children, this teaching for all Israel would include the children. The knowledge of His statutes was not to get lost. Likewise in the New Testament age, when the Lord instructs His servants to teach, this would include everyone, both young and old. The churches therefore also realise that they, too, have a task in teaching children.

Thus, it is evident that parents at *home*, and the Lord's people together as *churches*, have a task in the education of children which takes place in *schools*. This shows the combined involvement of *home, church, and school*.

Already at the famous Synod of Dordt 1618-19, in discussion about the need to teach the youth true doctrine, the theologians of Bremen spoke of a threefold involvement of school, church, and home.<sup>2</sup> In the opening words of its concluding decision on this matter the Synod picks up on this by saying; *In order that the Christian youth, onward from their tender age, are diligently instructed in the fundamentals of the true religion ... this threefold way of catechising must take place.*

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<sup>2</sup> *Acta Dordtse Synode, 1618-19* Fifteenth sitting, p. 32

*In the homes by parents, in the schools by schoolmasters and in the churches by preachers, elders, readers or those visiting the sick.*<sup>3</sup> At that time, there was no mention of this being a triangle, but one can well imagine that later this threefold involvement was described in this way.

The foundational basis for this three-fold involvement is clearly how God's Word is to be applied in all areas of life. This Word of God is taught, and its truth upheld, by the Churches where it is proclaimed, confessed, and defended. It is applicable everywhere, in the homes, at work, in the state, at school and so forth. Further attention will now be given to all three, first to the church, then the home and finally the school. This order is somewhat arbitrary<sup>4</sup> and not meant to put the one ahead of the other.

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<sup>3</sup> *Acta Op. Cit.* Seventeenth sitting, p. 41 *Opdat de Christelijke jeugd van hare teedere jaren aan, naarstiglijk in de fundamenten der ware religie onderwezen, ... zoo moet deze drieërlei wijze van catechiseeren waargenomen worden. In de huizen van de ouders; in de scholen van de schoolmeesters; en in de kerken, van de predikanten, ouderlingen, en lezers, of ziekenbezoekers.* My own translation. See also Rev. A. Souman's translation on Reformed News website, <https://www.reformednews.info/2020/04/04/synod-of-dort-from-the-acts/>

<sup>4</sup> The Theologians of Bremen had put it in a different order at the Synod of Dort, first school, then church and finally the home. School was probably put first here because that was the topic under discussion. It may be further suggested that speaking about; school, church, home as a triangle arose from an attempt to indicate that the one is not more important or has greater priority than the other. All three are equally involved in the training of the youth.

## The Church

### **“That the ministry of the gospel and the schools be maintained” Lord’s Day 38**

**A**lthough it is somewhat arbitrary to first give attention to the Church’s involvement when speaking about education for children, it should be kept in mind that the Church is the assembly of the Lord’s people.<sup>5</sup> It is there, in the assembly of His people that the Lord addresses them. Initially the Lord spoke more directly to certain men--Adam, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob--but then, beginning with Moses, the Lord sent men to address this assembly. Through these men, He addressed the congregation. By setting aside and addressing a certain chosen people, He lets all mankind know what this world and this life is all about. Many nations witnessed how the Lord had delivered the children of Israel out of Egyptian slavery. The Lord did not do this in a hidden or secret way. The peoples and nations heard, knew, and trembled.<sup>6</sup>

This continues in the New Testament age where several letters are addressed to Churches in various places. Moreover, in the history of Scripture, there are many examples of where the Lord sends prophets to address His people and after Christ’s resurrection, we are told of how the Lord sent His special disciples as apostles to proclaim the message of salvation.<sup>7</sup>

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5 In Article 27 of the *Belgic Confession*, we confess the Church to be a *holy congregation and assembly ... of believers ...*

6 See, for example, Joshua 10:4 and Daniel 4:34 – 35 ... and there are many more examples.

7 See Matthew 28:18 – 20 and Acts 1:8

Without these messengers, the truth of the Lord God and the purpose of this creation and life would not have been known.<sup>8</sup> In view of all this, we know the preached word to be the instrument which the Lord uses to bring men to true knowledge, faith<sup>9</sup> and eternal life.<sup>10</sup>

It is also there, in the assembly of His people, the Church, that united commitment is made to serve the Lord according to His Word. Think of how the Lord had instructed His people to gather at Mt. Gerizim and Ebal to proclaim the blessings and curses.<sup>11</sup> This was like a communal confession for all the people were to respond by saying *amen*. Think of how Joshua, including his family, in the face of conflict, publicly, in the assembly, persisted in his commitment to serve the Lord alone.<sup>12</sup> Think also of how later the Lord Jesus directed us to confess Him<sup>13</sup> and in Romans 10:9 assurance of salvation is given to those who confess the Lord Jesus. It is there, among the Churches, that confessions are written and preserved. It is understandable that when the Churches, in Lord’s Day 38, confess how the fourth commandment to be kept, that it is to be done not only by maintaining the *ministry of the gospel*, but also that of the *schools*. There is no indication that the schools mentioned here are limited to any specific kinds of schools for the need of all to be able to read Scripture and understand its meaning was well understood. For further detail regarding this matter see the appendix added to this paper.

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8 See Romans 10:14 – 21

9 See Lord’s Day 25 where we confess that faith is worked in us by the *Holy Spirit* through the *preaching of the gospel ...*

10 The preaching of the gospel is the first key for entrance into the kingdom of heaven, see Lord’s Day 31

11 Deuteronomy 11:29, chps. 27 – 28; Joshua 10:30 – 35

12 Joshua 24:15

13 Matthew 10:32

As already mentioned in the introduction, it is there, in the assembly, the Church, that parents publicly commit to carry out their God-given task to bring up the children entrusted to them in the *training and discipline of the Lord*.<sup>14</sup> The Churches, through their leaders, see to it that parents carry out this task. In the *Church Order*, Article 53, we agree that:

*The consistory shall make sure that the parents honour their vows to instruct their children, to the utmost of their power, in the doctrine of the Scriptures as summarised in the confessions, and to have them instructed in the same by the instruction provided by the consistory.*

*In accordance with the same vow, the consistory shall see to it that the parents, to the best of their ability, and with the cooperation of the communion of saints, give their children education (as stipulated by the civil government) which is based on Scripture and Confession.*

Note that the agreement here includes that the consistory sees to it that this instruction and education is based on Scripture as summarised in the Confessions. Again, the Confessions of Scripture as formulated and maintained among the Churches come in view. This shows that the Churches are directly involved with what is being taught and how it is done.

First, before going further into the Church's involvement in the education of children, an aside. This aside concerns the words placed in brackets in *The Church Order of the Australian Churches*, namely, *as stipulated by the civil government*.<sup>15</sup> The Reformed Confessions nowhere suggest that the civil government has a God-given task in the education of children. Article 36 of the *Belgic Confession*, which outlines various task of the civil government, does not mention education or schools. These brackets show that this is intended as an aside. It does make one wonder what the role of the civil government, if any, should be in the education of the children.

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<sup>14</sup> Ephesians 6:4

<sup>15</sup> These words are not included in any previous *Church Order* nor in the *Church Order* of the Canadian Reformed Churches. However, as further shown, some involvement of the civil government has been assumed from the time of the great reformation.

Historically, there was close relation between Church and State. This appears to have started during the days of Constantine who recognised the importance of God's Word for civil life. From his time on, the civil governments of various countries had become, sometimes more and sometimes less, involved in ecclesiastical matters. Thus, when the Great Reformation happened, not only the Churches, but also the civil governments became involved. The two-fold involvement of both Church and state was almost taken for granted. It was not only the civil governments trying to rule what happened among the Churches but also the Churches influencing the civil governments. In various places the Roman Catholic Church put pressure on civil governments by threatening church discipline and at the same time civil governments tried to manipulate the Roman Church's leadership especially through the pope. Once the Great Reformation took hold, much depended on with whom and where the civil government was with regards to this matter. The Roman Church pressured various civil rulers to persecute those of Reformed persuasion. At times and in some places, it also happened that civil governments supported Reformed Churches and disallowed those of Roman Catholic persuasion to hold civil office. It was in this context that in the Netherlands, for example, the Churches addressed the civil government about the need for schools in which schoolmasters who are faithful to the Lord are appointed to teach.

The close relation of Churches to civil government is evident in the early formulations of the *Church Order* regarding schools. F.L. Rutgers notes how the earlier Reformed ecclesiastical assemblies in the Netherlands spoke about the need for lower education because *more than in the Roman Church, there was a need among the Reformed. A Reformed person needed to be able to read the Bible*. However, in the earlier ecclesiastical assemblies, not much definitive was decided about lower education because the Reformed Churches were basically in hiding due to persecution.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Rutgers writes; In 1568 *...werd er ook over de scholen gesproken. Niet veel werd daarover bepaald, want in het land waren de kerken onder het kruis in het buitenland in de verstrooiing*

Thus, at the synod of Reformed Churches in the Netherlands 1568,<sup>17</sup> lower schooling was mentioned, but nothing was decided except that in places where there were schools with Reformed school masters<sup>18</sup> who were experienced in music they were to teach children to sing Psalms.<sup>19</sup> Synod Emden, 1571 continued in much the same way.

When Synod of Dordrecht in 1574 was held, the political situation had changed in the Netherlands. The Reformed Churches were no longer persecuted. Consequently, the *Church Order* Article XXII indicated that for the service of Churches good schools are essential<sup>20</sup> in contrast to harmful schools<sup>21</sup> and that ministers of the classes shall decide where schools and school masters need to be placed. Further, that they shall express the desire for the civil government to appoint school masters and that they pay them an appropriate stipend and, finally, that the ministers (of the Reformed Churches) are to make sure the school masters subscribe to the confessions of faith and submit to discipline... and teach the catechism to the youth.

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17 Keep in mind that it was only 51 years prior to this date (1568), in 1517, that Martin Luther nailed his thesis on the door of the Wittenberg chapel. The *Belgic Confession* had just been written seven years earlier, in 1561 and the *Heidelberg Catechism* was first adopted by a synod five years earlier in 1563. In other words, this was still early times of the great reformation.

18 In this document I use the expression *school masters* as translation of the Dutch *schoolmeesters*. It is not always clear whether this Dutch expression refers to schoolteachers in general or to principals particular. Sometimes the Dutch word *leeraar* is used, which would be *teacher*. The problem of translation may be related to the way schools were set up in the past.

19 Cited after J.L. Rutgers, Cap. II art. 32. *Op plaatsen waar scholen zijn en een Geref. meester, die in de muziek ervaren is, zal hij de kinderen psalmen zingen moeten leeren.* (see website: [kerkrecht.nl](http://www.kerkrecht.nl), under Commentaren, <http://www.kerkrecht.nl/node/1278>).

20 My translation of *goede scholen grotelijks van node zijn*

21 My translation of *kwade scholen*

Those school masters that are not committed in this way are to be dismissed. The Synod of 1578 simplified the formulation by stipulating in Article 47 of its Church Order that *men shall work towards establishing schools everywhere in which children are not only taught in language and arts but are also formally taught in the Christian Catechism and are directed towards the proclamation.*<sup>22</sup> The following synod, Middelburg 1581, made a similar decision in its Article 12 now including both professors and school masters. Synod Gravenhage 1586 in its article 19 stipulates that the consistories are to see to it that there are good schoolmasters who teach, beside other things, Godliness and catechetics.<sup>23</sup> This is all further reinforced at the well-known synod of Dordt, 1618-1619 which included in its *Church Order* article 21 that *the consistories shall see to it that there are good schoolmasters who do not only teach reading, writing and liberal arts, but also teach in the context of Godliness and the Catechism.*<sup>24</sup> Moreover, this synod in Article 54 of this Church Order agreed that the schoolmasters were also to sign a subscription expressing agreement with the Christian Catechism.<sup>25</sup>

When reflecting on this history, it may be suggested that along with the reformation from Roman Catholic heresy, the Churches at their assemblies had given due consideration to teaching

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22 <http://www.kerkrecht.nl/node/4876> My translation of; *Men sal aerbeyden dat overal scholen opgericht worden in denwelcken de kinderen niet alleen in spraken en de konsten, maer oock voornemelick in den christelicken catechismo onderwesen ende totten predicatien gheleydet worden.*

23 <http://www.kerkrecht.nl/node/6073> De Kercken-Raden *sullen alomme toesien datter goede School-Meesters zijn, die niet alleen die kinderen leeren lesen, schrijven, spraeken ende vrije Consten, maer oock die selfde inder Godsalicheyte ende inden Catechismo onderwijzen.*

24 <http://www.kerkrecht.nl/node/4601> De Kercken-Raden *sullen al-omme toe-sien datter goede School-Meesters zijn / die niet alleen de Kinderen leeren lesen / schrijven / spraeken en vrye Consten / maer oock die selfde inder Godsalicheyte en indê Catechismo onderwijzen.*

25 This article refers specifically to schoolmaster and not professor of theology who are included in the previous article 53 along with ministers of the Word.

children, not only to read and write, but also the truth of Scripture as upheld in the Confessions. Even though, at times, it seems to be somewhat taken for granted that the civil government would pay teachers,<sup>26</sup> the task of assuring the faithfulness and the supervision of schoolmasters was consistently given to the Churches.

While during the early years after the great reformation the Reformed Churches understood that there was a need to promote and care for education of the youth,<sup>27</sup> the practical application remained somewhat vague and distorted. This has a lot to do with how the civil government had become directly involved with the Churches.<sup>28</sup> Added to this was the difficulty of strife among the churches, first against the Remonstrants and, later, dealing with the pietist movement and the events that led to the Session 1834, the Doleantie 1886, the Union of 1892 and then the Liberation of 1944. During the earlier struggles the involvement of the state in Church affairs had become a real issue till at least the early to mid-1800's. During these struggles the practical implementation of previous decisions concerning the

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26 This should be understood in the context of how the civil government of that time also was involved, at certain times, in paying ministers of the Word. See J.L. Rutgers, *op. cit.*

27 See further background and explanation as given by F.L. Rutgers, *op. cit. Art. 21 houdt eene bepaling in omtrent de lagere scholen. Hiermede hadden de kerken te maken niet bepaald voor den diens des Woords. Van het begin der Reformatie af zijn de Geref. Kerken bedacht geweest op lager onderwijs. Veel meer dan in de Roomsche kerk was er bij de Gereformeerden behoefte aan. Een Gereformeerde moest de Bijbel kunnen lezen.* Translated into English, this says; *Article 21 makes a determination about junior schools. The Churches had dealt with this matter not in particular for the service of the Word. From the beginning of the Reformation the Churches have given attention to lower education. Much more than in the Roman Church, there was a need among the Reformed. A Reformed person needed to be able to read the Bible.*

28 Initially the Reformed Dutch government involvement with the Churches among was such that upon reflection Donald Oppewal writes in his *The Roots of Calvinistic Day School Movement* (Calvin College Monograph Series, 1963) *In such a context, where the church and state were one, the school had a broad function of enhancing learning in general as well as teaching church doctrine that was state approved.*

education of the youth fell somewhat into the background. The Dutch government did provide for schools with the Bible<sup>29</sup> but due to Church conflicts and schisms, these schools, reflecting a general Reformed outlook<sup>30</sup> remained outside the conflicts among the Churches. Even though the practical implementation of lower schools for the youth fell somewhat into the background, the need to teach them according to what the Lord teaches in Scripture never did. With time the Reformed Churches began to teach the youth God's word as summarised in the Catechism independent from and outside of the schools.

In this context, the writings of Abraham Kuiper gained significant influence. Especially his *Encyclopedia of Sacred Theology, its Principles*<sup>31</sup> where he works at outlining all the areas of knowledge. He begins with putting the Lord God at the centre. This God is known by His Self-revelation in Scripture and all the other areas of knowledge are put in a circle (cyclonically) around the Lord. He put these areas of knowledge around this center something like a color wheel where the colors merge and to some degree overlap. Students after Kuiper started to draw stricter lines between these areas, not only of learning, but of life. In brief, they teach that the Lord has established various separate authorities such as ecclesiastical, civil, educational, medical, etc.<sup>32</sup> and insist that these authorities are to remain within their own bounds.<sup>33</sup>

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29 School met de Bijble

30 "gereformeerde gezindte"

31 A photographic copy of this work can be found on the internet at; <https://archive.org/details/encyclopediaofsa00kuyp/page/n11/mode/2up>

32 See A. Kuiper's paper delivered at the opening of the *Free University of Amsterdam* titled, *Sphere Sovereignty*, available online at; [https://reformationaldl.files.wordpress.com/2019/07/spheresovereignty\\_english.pdf](https://reformationaldl.files.wordpress.com/2019/07/spheresovereignty_english.pdf)

33 It is way beyond this paper to go into all the details of this Philosophy of Cosmological Ideas of H. Dooyeweerd and D.H. Th. Vollenhoven. A helpful introduction to this can be found on line at - <https://www.allofliferedeemed.co.uk/introduction.htm>

That is to say, they are all sovereign in their own spheres. The importance of this insinuation is that ecclesiastical authority is to be kept separate from parental and educational authorities.<sup>34</sup> They all stand on their own; each in their own area of life are directly accountable to the One Lord God.<sup>35</sup> The practical implication is that the Churches have no business making decisions regarding schools; nor does the civil government, which is to maintain order in society.<sup>36</sup> This thinking has and continues to play a role among Reformed Churches when speaking about the relation of Church, Home, and School.<sup>37</sup> It has not always been helpful and led to increased separation of these three.

Regardless of this philosophy and its influence among Reformed Churches, civil governments everywhere, more so than in the past, know of the importance and public benefit for its citizens to be well educated. Today most, if not all, countries throughout the world have compulsory education laws. The Churches also clearly understand from God's Word, not only the importance for children to be educated, but also the content of what is being taught.

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34 Donald Oppewal, *op. cit.* p. 19 quotes P.R. Holtman as a spokesman for the Kuyperian view *The Christian school must not be a child of the churches or live by the grace of the churches, so that it would flourish or decline in the measure that the spiritual life of the church rose and declined. ...The Christian school requires a life-sphere of its own...* and then says about the Christian Reformed Church schools in America after 1892; *Thus the administrative break between the school and the church was made, and the Kuyperian ideal was achieved in theory at least.*

35 In attempts to draw up articles for what a Christian civil government should look like, H. Colijn, *Saevis Tranquillus in Undis, Toelichting op Het Antirevolutionair Beginnelprogramma* (N.V Dagblad en Drukkerij de Standard, suggest, p. 282 that the free school should be the rule and public schools only for filling in. ...*dat de Vrije School regel moet zijn, end at de Openjbare Schoool niet anders mag zijn dan aanvulling.*

36 It would be acknowledged that the civil government has a task in seeing where and how church and school buildings are built etc., and make sure that all safety measures are in place.

37 This is in the background of the Canadian Reformed Church Order which in its Article 58 leaves the matter of school entirely over to the parents. The Free Reformed Church Order similarly gives this task to the parents, but not only. It includes *the cooperation of the communion of saints...*

Because, and here one can only speak in a general way, the civil governments throughout the world give less and less attention to the Lord and what He teaches, the role that the civil government should play in the education of children should be minimised. See further about this in the section concerning schools below.

As for the Churches, it would be good for the Churches to listen to how the Lord instructs children to be taught and to remain directly involved in how this is implemented. Here one can continue to learn from how the Churches, soon after the Great Reformation, made the education of children its business.

To conclude this section, we see that the LORD addresses not just the parents but the entire congregation with the obligation to teach the children (see e.g. Deuteronomy 6 and Psalm 78). He wants the coming generations to have true knowledge, faith and eternal life and to praise and serve Him according to His Word. He brings that about through faithful preaching and faithful instruction of children who have been grafted into the church by baptism. They are to rest from evil works and begin in this life the eternal sabbath. That is why in Lord's Day 38 we confess the need for the preaching and schools to be maintained. The maintenance of those schools is not only the task of the parents but of the entire congregation, to which this commandment is addressed. As we confess in Lord's Day 21, all members of the church are to use their gifts readily and cheerfully for the advantage and salvation of the other members. That includes the children. This task of the reformed church, as a whole, towards the education of the children has been recognised through the centuries. Hence our reformed churches, in Church Order article 53, speak of the cooperation of the communion of saints in providing reformed education at the schools. As God's covenant community we seek to honour and serve the LORD together.

## Home

**“For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the LORD our God will call”  
Acts 2:39**

As shown above, the Lord addresses His people in His assembly or Church. It is there, in Church, that through the preaching of the gospel the kingdom of heaven is opened for them.<sup>38</sup> They are to take the message they hear home. Home is where the family lives and grows. It is there that the Lord’s mandate to *Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion* ... is to be carried out. It is also there that parents carry out their promise to train and discipline their children in the fear of the Lord. When the entire assembly of Israel is directed in Deuteronomy 6 to *teach your children*, they are told to do so *when you sit in the house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down and when you rise up*. That these tasks are carried out at home does not exclude that they learn many things elsewhere. It may be suggested from what we are told in Deuteronomy 4:11 that grandparents are to be involved too.<sup>39</sup>

The context of the Scriptural instruction for parents to train their children is important. Right after the fall into sin, the Lord Himself established the connection between parents and their children when He declared enmity between serpent, that is the devil, and *your* seed on the one hand and the woman and *her* seed on the other.<sup>40</sup> Indeed, here *the seed* of the woman

38 See Lord’s Day 31

39 These Scripture passages certainly do not suggest that only home-schooling should be done.

40 Genesis 3:15

includes and finds its ultimate fulfillment in Christ. He is brought into the world through the generations. When later the Lord established a special bond with Abraham in this context, He included his, *seed*, that is, the *children*.<sup>41</sup> Although mission work, especially in the New Testament age, remains an important means by which the Lord gathers His people together, the primary means continues to run through the generations. This is very clear from how the Lord speaks through the Apostle Peter on Pentecost day telling those who asked what they must do, and he tells them to repent and be baptised (Acts 2:39), *For the promise is to you and to your children* .... The parallel to how the Lord had spoken to Abraham is obvious.<sup>42</sup> The special bond or *covenant* the Lord had made between Abraham and his *descendants* (or *seed*) in the past is now perpetuated through the believers and their *seed*.

It is important to keep this in mind for among most modern-day evangelicals and arminians, the way the Lord works through the generations is either denied or undermined. They suggest and teach that parents have an obligation to draw their children into a bond with the Lord through teaching, convincing and discipline, as if they are not yet His children. While it is true that parents have an obligation to teach their children the commandments and knowledge of the Lord, they are not to do so *in order* to make them into the Lord’s children, but *because* they are the Lord’s children already!<sup>43</sup> They are His children from birth.

41 Genesis 12:1, the promise to make Abram into a nation; Genesis 17:2 the Lord’s promise to multiply Abraham greatly and verse 9 says *And God said to Abraham: “As for you, you shall keep My covenant, you and your descendants after you throughout their generations.*

42 See Genesis 12:7, 15:4, 17:2, 7 especially this last verse where the Lord says; *And I will establish My covenant between Me and you and your descendants after you in their generations, for an everlasting covenant ...*

43 See how J. Calvin writes about this in his *Institutes of the Christian Religion* Book 1, chapter 6, par. 1 and also Book 4 chapter 15 par. 20 where he, in the context of infant baptism asserts that; *Our children, before they are born, God declares that he adopts for his own when he promises that he will be a God to us, and to our seed after us.* More importantly, this is also what we confess in Belgic Confession Article 34, last paragraph, Lord’s Day 27 Q.A. 74, Canons of Dort first Head, Article 17.



They are distinguished from the children of unbelievers. The practical difference here is that among evangelical and arminian Christians the focus is on mission work for both; their children and the outsider. Among the Reformed, there is a different focus, mission work is directed to those who do not know the Lord and have been estranged from Him through various generations and education according to God's Word is for those that are born from members of Christ's flock and thus belong to His flock.

This is where K. Dykstra, or rather, the schools among which he works, miss an important point. In his article, *Church, Home, and School – a two-legged Stool?* to the question, ... *to whom do the children belong: the parents or the state?* He answers by quoting from his school's documentation, saying: *Our schools recognize the fact that the answer to this question is clear – the parents!*<sup>44</sup> However, in fact, our children first of all belong to the Lord. See what the Reformed Churches confess in Lord's Day 1. Belonging to the Lord, they also belong to the Church, see Lord's Day 27 Q&A 74. It is true that they belong to the family in which they are born, but, having been born as citizens of a certain country, they also belong to that country. Seeing that everything, including our children first of all belong to the Lord, no one has any business teaching them whatever they please; not the Church, the parents, the state nor anyone else. All who teach are under divine obligation to teach children with the method and in the truth as the Lord God has revealed it in Scripture.

That this is *how* and *what* parents are to teach their children is further affirmed by the fifth commandment. When the Lord instructs the children of His assembly to *honor* your father and mother, the first meaning of the word used here is *make heavy*.<sup>45</sup> The same Hebrew

<sup>44</sup> Kent Dykstra, *Church, Home, and School - A Two-legged Stool? Reformed Perspective* (Premier Printing), Sept. 2019. See also *Clarion* 2010

<sup>45</sup> In the Hebrew of both Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5 the piel form of כָּבַד is used. According to BDB its first meaning is *heaviness, great, glorious* ... The TWOT gives a similar meaning.

word is frequently used to speak about showing *honor* or *glory* to the Lord. In this context the word *heavy* can be best understood when considering how in the English language *heavy* is used in the context of someone's words being *weighty*. In the context of Scripture, the opposite of this word is being *light* (in weight, that is, trivial) which has as its first meaning, *vain*. The point here, concerning the fifth command, is that the children are to consider their parents to be *heavy* or *weighed down* with the task of passing the blessing of belonging to the Lord onto their children.

Thus, parents are under divine obligation to *bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord*.<sup>46</sup> They are to teach them *the Lord's statutes and His commandments*.<sup>47</sup> However, to conclude from this that it is *primarily* the parents' task to teach their children is going too far.<sup>48</sup> Yes, the parents have an important obligation here. However, Scripture, and therefore rightly so also the Confessions, nowhere speak of any one or any organization given this task in a *primary* way. It is not as if parents own the children and can teach and bring them up in whichever way they determine for themselves. Children of believers belong to the Lord and parents are to take care of them and bring them up as *His* children! Moreover, they do this within the communion of saints which, as we have seen, also has a collective responsibility to assist parents in keeping the vows made at the baptism of their children. They do this by maintaining schools, where possible, so that parents can have their children instructed to the utmost of their power.

<sup>46</sup> Ephesians 6:2

<sup>47</sup> Deuteronomy 6: 2 and 7

<sup>48</sup> By suggesting that teaching children is *primarily* the task of parents, some understandable argue that parents should therefore *home school* and they claim that it may be considered Scriptural wrong to entrust this task to schools. See for example, <https://kerriganskelly.com/2015/02/16/10-reasons-christians-should-homeschool-their-children/>



## Schools

**“For schools to properly teach children, they must direct children to observe things seen in creation with a view to carrying out the task that the Lord God has revealed throughout the ages in Scripture”**

Although schools are mentioned here and there in the history of Scripture revelation,<sup>49</sup> no particular attention is given to them as such. However, Scripture does give attention to kings, rulers, and civil governments. The passage of Romans 13 where the Lord teaches us be *subject to the governing authorities* and tells us that the civil authority is *God's minister* ... shows the government's legitimacy before the Lord. In the past, including among the children of Israel, the civil government concentrated on setting aside some of its citizens to be trained for military service. Such training would include many aspects, not just discipline and knowledge of fighting the enemy as such, but also, in the past, how to train horses, make weaponry, build ramparts, build bridges for troops to cross over and should we not also mention the building of defensive city walls to keep enemies at bay. Should one speak about modern warfare one thinks of weapons, aircrafts, war vehicle maintenance, necessary communications, strategic movements and so forth. One soon starts realising how large, wide, and far-reaching such ability must be. Already in the past, there was spill over from all kinds of military training into daily civil life. The same blacksmith that

<sup>49</sup> See Acts 19:1; 22:3

molded and sharpened the spear and made horseshoes also made the plough and today similar technology is used to build wartime tanks and farm tractors and, likewise, there are similarities between bombers and passenger jets.

The maintenance of peace and execution of justice may be one of the primary tasks of the civil government, but it goes much beyond that: to keep orderliness among the inhabitants. This includes things like drawing up property boundaries, determine the location of roads and in the present age we can add all related things like oversight of money, weights, orderliness in traffic control and so forth. The point right now is that the government needs to, and may, solicit and train capable persons to carry out these tasks. Thus, the civil government rightly, and one can certainly defend that scripturally, by establishing schools and training centers, make that all possible. When in need, a civil government may certainly compel men to be enlisted into armed forces, fire brigades, storm damage cleanup and so forth. This section of this paper is not about the civil government as such, but about the schools. Nevertheless, it is important to first understand the legitimacy of compulsory education. Reformed Churches have never objected to civil compulsion as such. They have accepted compulsory army enlistment and its associated training, road travel laws, paying of taxes and so forth. In short, in all things that do not put them at odds with what the Lord teaches in His Word.

In fact, it may be suggested that Christian schools have as background how from the beginning the Lord mandated mankind to take care of the garden to *tend* (literally *cultivate*) and *keep* (literally *guard*) it.<sup>50</sup> The Lord had created mankind with learning ability to do it.

<sup>50</sup> Thus, in his book, *History of Christian Education*, C.B. Eavy (Moody Press, 1964) understandably argues in his first two chapters that Christian education began when Israel was established as a nation.



As clearly evident from Psalm 8, along with many other Scriptural passages, this task to cultivate and guard continues even after the fall into sin.<sup>51</sup> Initially it was especially among the children of Israel that the Lord taught how to go about this task. Upon giving each family their inheritance in the promised land, they were all instructed regarding such things as when to and not to sow, not with mixed seed,<sup>52</sup> not during the Sabbath years,<sup>53</sup> how to harvest, not going back for the gleanings,<sup>54</sup> care for fruit trees during times of war,<sup>55</sup> care for birds, not to take eggs along with the bird,<sup>56</sup> guarding for dangerous domestic animals by fencing them in,<sup>57</sup> covering wells and pits (holes) that one digs,<sup>58</sup> put a rail around the accessible flat roof of homes<sup>59</sup> and so forth. These were all things that had to be learned and remembered. In short, one may say, that in all these ways the children of Israel were to be God's kingdom. The Levites were involved with teaching it all.<sup>60</sup> The civil rulers: local town elders, judges and later kings were all involved with seeing that these things were implemented. In other words, we are speaking here of learning and knowing how to live as citizens of the Lord's kingdom.

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51 See K. Schilder, *Christus en Cultuur* (available on internet under [https://www.dbnl.org/tekst/schi008chri06\\_01/](https://www.dbnl.org/tekst/schi008chri06_01/))

52 Leviticus 19:19

53 Leviticus 25:3

54 Leviticus 19:9

55 Deuteronomy 20:20

56 Deuteronomy 22:6

57 Exodus 21:28

58 Exodus 21:33

59 Deuteronomy 22:8

60 Deuteronomy 24:8; 31:9-13

As a nation, among the children of Israel, the Lord insisted on a distinction between the Church with its leaders of prophets, priests and Levites and the civil rulers with its kings, judges, and elders. They were not to impinge on each other's authority.<sup>61</sup> Nevertheless, there was clear overlap, so that through the priests sacrifices were made for all kinds of civil offenses and even though judges and kings were not permitted to serve in the temple; they were directly involved with building, repairing, maintaining, and defending it.

Upon completing His work, Christ Jesus sent His disciples, as apostles, to call men of every nation to faith.<sup>62</sup> When turning to the Lord, they were grafted in as citizens of God's kingdom.<sup>63</sup> This kingdom of God is no longer the nation Israel, but now found within various nations.<sup>64</sup> The believers remained citizens of various countries in which they lived. At the same time, they knew themselves to be citizens in the kingdom of God.<sup>65</sup> When heathen rulers turn to the Lord, they submitted themselves to what the Lord taught. They knew that they were no longer the Israel of the past so that, along with the ceremonial laws, the civil laws were no longer applicable as they had been in the past. For example, the stoning of those who blasphemed the Name of the Lord. When through the efforts of the apostles and other missionaries the Lord granted civil rulers to turn to Him, they recognised that much could be learned from the civil laws the Lord had given His people in the past. They also understood that some civil laws have permanent application such as commandments relating to forbidding murder, protecting the life of others

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61 This is apparently the background of A. Kuyper's *sphere sovereignty*.

62 Matthew 28:19

63 Romans 10:16-18, Ephesians 2:11-13, 19

64 1 Peter 2:9

65 See Augustine, *City of God*

and so forth. Thankfully, we may add here how in this context civil governments initiated and persisted on a six-day work week with the first day of the week as the Lord's Day.<sup>66</sup> It is way beyond this paper to go into further detail to look at how various countries in the world today still reflect this thinking in their constitutional make-up. As already mentioned in the section concerning the *Church* one can understand that the Churches initially looked to the civil government to have the will of the Lord taught in their schools.

As also already indicated in the first section, historically for some time the Church and State (civil government) became quite intertwined. The background for this includes that Scripture makes a point of revealing how the Lord had prepared for the ecclesiastical and civil state to be joined together in the person of Melchizedek after whom Christ Jesus is anointed both King and Priest!<sup>67</sup> In Him these offices fully come together. This thinking came to the fore in a renewed way during the Great Reformation when some of the anabaptists would no longer recognise the legitimacy of civil governments for, they argued, that *Christ is now our only King*. Among them the thinking became, Christ is the only Head of Church and the only King of the country (nations).<sup>68</sup> Among the Reformed, the legitimacy of both the ecclesiastical and civil governments continuing in the New Testament age was Scripturally upheld as summed up, for example, in Article 36 of the *Belgic Confession*. Just like all other matters of this life and its various organisations, the Reformed understood the civil government to be subject to the Lord God.

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66 Historically, especially in England, there have been debates to what extent the civil governments have a task to enforce a Sabbath rest where all are compelled to worship the Lord. These arguments especially arose from the context of training men for military service.

67 See Hebrews 7, especially vs. 14.

68 There may have been some influence here of Augustine's City of God which he contrast to the city of wickedness, or Babylon.

Christ is indeed the Head of the Church (thus no Pope) and He is King of kings (thus all civil rulers are subject to Him). The Reformed confess from Scripture that the task for the civil government includes: *...the protection of the church and its ministry in order that the kingdom of Christ may come, the Word of the gospel may be preached everywhere, and God may be honoured and served by everyone, as He requires in his Word*. Thus, the civil government has a continuing task with respect to the Church and its ministry.

As for schools, the civil governments and Churches have at times worked closely together. However, from a civil government perspective, this became very difficult to maintain in view of various divisions and schisms among the churches. From the Churches' perspective, there was concern that children born in it would be taught and influenced by various heresies. This became evident in America, Canada, and Australia when many fled the persecutions of various European countries and places in the British Isles to find freedom to practise the faith according to their own insights and consciences in these new colonies. When these colonies grew into countries and drew up their constitutions, *freedom of religion* was considered essential. Within these countries, civil governments, understanding the need and benefit of education, established schools for various age groups. Initially, because most of those involved in civil government were Christian of some kind, some basic Christian elements were included, such as Bible reading and the Lord's prayer. However, in view of divisions among Churches and upon request from these Churches, these countries permitted Church groups to establish their own schools. These schools remained, to some extent, watched over and supervised by civil governments<sup>69</sup> and at the same time were given

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69 See E.B. Eavy, *op. cit.* chapters 5-7. The civil government wanted to make sure that these schools properly taught all the basic subjects and that it was done in an orderly way.

substantial freedom to teach according to their own consciences and insights. This practice in these newly colonised countries was observed and taken over by some European countries where Churches, under supervision of the state, were likewise permitted to become directly involved with the education of children.

In view of all this, Reformed educators<sup>70</sup> suggest that education of children should focus on living as kingdom children. It is there, in the schools, that children are to learn the necessary tools to carry out the mandate to fill the earth, till, subdue, and have dominion. In this context, apparently initiated by Dr. Abraham Kuyper, the suggestion grew that this task to have dominion and subdue the earth (interpreted as, *developing it*)<sup>71</sup> was and is being carried out by all of mankind even after the fall into sin. A. Kuyper explains this continuing development in the context of *common grace*.<sup>72</sup> His teachings led to the idea that even though there is division between the man of sin and those who believe in the Lord, there is a continuing unity in developmental progress on the earth. Although they came from the lineage of Cain and Lamech, Jubal was *the father of all those who play the harp and flute*, and Tubal-Cain was *an instructor of every craftsman in bronze and iron*.<sup>73</sup> Even though they did not use the things they discovered to serve the Lord, those who do serve Him, could borrow this knowledge,

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70 For example B.K. Kuiper, *On Opmaken en Bouwen* (Eerdmans-Sevensma, 1918).

71 Thus, J. Boersema, *Political-Economic Activity to the Honour of God* (Premier Printing, 1999) writes, p. 25, *that the cultural mandate is equated with development.*

72 Abraham Kuyper, see his three volumes *Gemeene Gratie* (available at <https://www.dbnl.org/titels/titel.php?id=kuyp002geme00>).

See also S.J. Ridderbos, *rondom Het Gemene-Gratie Problem* (J.H. Kok), 1949. See his discussion of C. Van Til pp. 22 ff.

73 Genesis 4:21-22

and use it in more God-serving ways. It was with this kind of reasoning that Abraham Kuyper had emphasised the unity of the Dutch people as a nation while allowing for diversity in faith and faithfulness. This was apparently a further reason why he defended that schools, especially universities, ought to be free from the authority of both the State and the Church.

These views of Kuyper continue to raise a lot of discussion and differences of opinion.<sup>74</sup> It is generally recognised that to maintain this world and give room for the gathering of the Church, in His providence, the Lord does restrain the wickedness of men.<sup>75</sup> In the context of this restraint the Lord allows all of mankind to discover and develop many things He prepared and put into creation. In the context of the fall into sin and how the Lord decides to save some, the question of this life becomes a question of purpose and motivation. Why do we work towards the discovery of melting metal: to build idols or to make ploughs for tilling the earth? Why do we work on making musical instruments: to arouse various sexual passions or to sing praise to the Lord?

It is in the context of these discussions that C. Van Til says that *Man's project is to build the kingdom of God*.<sup>76</sup> An idea that has had more attention in the American Christian educational scene. However, this idea cannot be sustained for it is not mankind who *builds* God's kingdom, only God does that! It would be better to say *...that today man is called to live as citizens of God's kingdom*.<sup>77</sup> The focus for schools then is to teach children to trust the Lord and be subservient to Him in all their endeavors.

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74 Thus, for example, D.L. Kranendonk, *Christian Day Schools, Why and How* (Paedeia Press, 1978) writes, p. 66, *Around the turn of the century, helped by the insights of European Biblical scholars ... saw that one institution should not lord it over another, but that all institutions should operate side by side under the one authority of the Word of God.*

75 See 2 Thessalonians 2:6. It is better to speak here of restraint rather than *common grace*. See also S.J. Ridderbos, *Rondom Het Gemene-Gratie Problem* (J.H. Kok), 1949. See his discussion of C. Van Til pp. 22 ff.

76 Cornelius Van Til *The Dilemma of Education* Presbyterian and Reformed Publ., 1973) p. 32.

77 See Philippians 3:17-21, For further discussion on this matter see See also S.J. Ridderbos, *rondom Het Gemene-Gratie Problem* (J.H. Kok), 1949. His discussion regarding C. Van Til can be found on pp. 22 ff.

This subservience includes a close listening to what the Lord our God says in His Word. Writing about the schools mentioned in Lord's Day 38 some authors refer to how at the time there was concern about *mysticism*. The *mystic* tended to speak or imply that the Lord continues to reveal Himself in *mysterious* or *mystic* ways.<sup>78</sup> They teach that we do not only learn from what can be observed in nature or what we are taught in Scripture, but that we also receive knowledge in a more direct way. While it is true that especially in the past the Lord spoke to His servants and prophets in a direct way and inspired the apostles to write Scripture, now that Scripture is complete, and the Lord has sufficiently made Himself known, no further direct revelation is given. Any claim of special revelation is to be tested to what the Lord reveals in Scripture. See Article 7 of the *Belgic Confession*.

In Article two of the *Belgic Confession* we confess to know God by *two means*. First thing to notice here is that this word *means* is used to maintain from Scripture that the Lord does not normally come to us in a direct way but uses some *means* or *instruments* which He provides. Just like the Lord grants knowledge of plants by men studying them, so the Lord also grants knowledge of Himself by men observing creation and studying His Word. Thus we learn from Scripture, that God can be known by two *means* 1) from Creation; 2) from Scriptural Revelation. However, what we learn from these two *means* is not identical.

It is in Scripture that we are told about this difference. Regarding *knowing God from creation* in Romans 1 the Lord teaches us that all mankind is guilty before Him. No one has an excuse for his sin. No one has an excuse because all mankind can know about the Lord.

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<sup>78</sup> J. J. Knap, *De Heidelbergse Toepasselijk verklaard voor de Gemeente des Heere* (J.B. Wolters, 1912) pp. 391-393.  
Also K. J. Van de Berg, *Genade voor Genade* (Zuijderduijn, no date given).

We read in verse 18: *For since the creation of the world, His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so they are without excuse*. However, this knowledge of God from creation does not lead to salvation. We read further on in that same passage that the Gentiles, who can know God in this way, do not accept this knowledge. Instead, verse 21, *they became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened*. The result is that they exchanged the knowledge of God for worshipping the creature, that is, images of birds, animals, and man. Not only that, but in practice of everyday life they give themselves over to vile passions.

This passage in the letter to the Romans clearly shows that while men can know about the Lord from nature, they never accept that knowledge of God in faith. From the knowledge of God out of creation alone one does not and cannot come to true faith. The most one can conclude from creation, without the testimony of Scripture, is that there is a God who exists and punishes the wicked.

This knowledge of God from creation alone is to be distinguished from knowing about God from creation after having received the light of special revelation. A heathen who has never heard of the Lord God, can only know from what he sees that there is a God, but he does not know who this God is and therefore will never praise Him for the works of His hands. It is from Scripture that we learn to look at creation with believing eyes. Thus, in Psalm 19:1 we read that *The heavens declare the glory of God; And the firmament shows His handiwork*. This Psalm is part of Scriptural revelation. By inspiring the author of this Psalm to sing these words, the Lord opens the eyes of His children to see and understand the works of His hands. Without the Lord Himself pointing this way to look at the skies, earth, mountains and so forth, we would not come to praise Him for this work. Like John Calvin said, we must look through the eyeglasses



of Scripture to read the book of creation.<sup>79</sup> It has become essential to view creation in this way because, after the fall into sin, both the human nature and creation itself is broken.

Because creation is broken on account of sin, one can never draw concrete conclusions about the Lord God from the things seen in creation. In the beginning God made everything to be perfect, but after sin the forces of destruction become a daily reality. For example, today there are storms and natural disasters which destroy life: there is sickness, pain, and death. These things did not belong to the creation in the beginning because everything was perfect. The assumption, “whatever is natural is good” does not stand. Even after being enlightened by the word of God, nature itself does not become a law by which we can determine right from wrong. Any attempt to do so becomes a human interpretation of what is seen. For example, natural law might bring one to the conclusion that it is just as well to put the ailing aging person to death. His life is useless. This kind of conclusion is contrary to God’s direct commandment. Every interpretation of what is seen in nature must be subjected to God’s revealed law. This does not only apply to the natural sciences, but also to the social sciences. And to every other science.<sup>80</sup>

Moreover, on account of sin, our human perception of creation has also become defiled. Upon the fall into sin, man has lost his ability to perceive things in a perfect, that is, a Godly way. He looks at things and ungodly thoughts rises in His mind. After the fall into sin, he is sinful by nature and therefore cannot and does not draw godly conclusion from what he observes around him.

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79 John Calvin, *Institutes* (there are various well-known publication of this work, it is one of the Logos Bible Programs copies that is used for this paper) Book One, Chapter VI Paragraph 1.

80 In a bit of a different context, C. Van Dam, *In the Beginning, Listening to Genesis 1 and 2* (Reformed Heritage Books) 2021, also writes about this, pp. 35 ff.

The Lord makes it clear in the Scriptures that He can only be known as the merciful God in Christ Jesus His Son through Scriptural (or call it *special*) revelation. In Romans 10, through the Apostle Paul, the Lord addresses the question of whether the Israelites had any advantage in being God’s special people. This question has arisen because earlier in this letter the Apostle had shown that while the Gentiles are proven to be guilty because they do not acknowledge nor confess God who can be known from the works of creation, the Israelites who know God from the revelation of His law are also guilty because they did not keep the law. However, they had a great advantage because the Lord made Himself known to them as their God. To them are the promises of forgiveness and salvation. Thus, in verse 15 reference is made to Isaiah 52:7 where he had spoken of how beautiful the feet are *of those who preach the gospel of peace. Who bring glad tidings of good things!* The conclusion of this passage is verse 17 that *faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.* Seeing that only those who believe will be saved (Mark 16:16) it is evident that the knowledge of God from Scripture is essential for salvation.

For schools to properly teach children, they must direct children to observe things seen in creation with a view to carrying out the task that the Lord God has revealed throughout the ages in Scripture.<sup>81</sup> They are not to look for what children may dream of and come up with out of themselves. To sure, there is room for discoveries and inventions of various kinds. The point is that there is no direct in-born or directly infused knowledge. By working with things observed in creation as seen through God’s self-revelation, mankind is to carry out the mandate to have dominion over this world and to be fruitful and multiply and live as citizens of the new eternal kingdom.

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81 See Hebrews 1:4

## The Relation of Church, Home, and School

**“There is a relationship between the Church and Reformed schools because both seek to serve the same Lord and God according to His Word”**

From the above, it should be clear that in the context of all three--Church, Home and School--children of believing parents are to be viewed and received as those who belong to the Lord. This means that in all these areas of life they should be taught and trained in agreement with what the Lord teaches in His Word. The Churches' task includes to preach, teach, uphold, defend, and apply God's Word. Especially in the context of upholding and defending God's Word, Confessions of that Word are written and maintained.

Within Homes, the members of the Churches, as members of Christ, uphold and defend their commitment made to the Lord in the written Confessions as affirmed when making *Public Profession of Faith* by answering positively to the question: *do you wholeheartedly believe the doctrine of the Word of God, summarized in the confessions and taught here in this Christian church? Do you promise by the grace of God steadfastly to continue in this doctrine in life and death, rejecting all heresies and errors conflicting with God's Word?*<sup>82</sup> This includes, as mentioned above, that along with the Churches, the members in their households know that the meaning and application of the fourth commandment includes that we maintain ...*the ministry of the gospel and the schools* ...<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> *Australian Book of Praise*, (Premier Printing) p. 602.

<sup>83</sup> *Heidelberg Catechism* Lord's Day 38. See also the appendix to this paper.

This is further affirmed when parents at the baptism of their children re-affirm the commitment already made at their public profession of faith and now also *promise as father and mother to instruct your child in this doctrine, as soon as he (she) is able to understand, and to have him (her) instructed therein to the utmost of your power.*<sup>84</sup>

Among the Churches it is agreed that both Ministers of the Word and Elders together have the duty and mandate to ... *supervise the doctrine and life of the membership...*<sup>85</sup> Furthermore, among the Australian Churches it is agreed in the *Church Order*, Article 53, that this is to include that *The consistory shall make sure that the parents honour their vows to instruct their children, to the utmost of their power, in the doctrine of the Scriptures as summarised in the confessions, and to have them instructed in the same by the instruction provided by the consistory. In accordance with the same vow, the consistory shall see to it that the parents, to the best of their ability, and with the cooperation of the communion of saints, give their children education (as stipulated by the civil government) which is based on Scripture and Confession.*<sup>86</sup> Thus Consistories, that is ministers and elders, are to make sure that parents are doing this. They are to see to it that parents, as much as possible, that is to *the best of their ability*, have their children educated both in and outside of the home, in agreement with the Word of God as upheld in the Confessions. This would include for consistories to encourage, direct and when necessary, to admonish members, in particular parents, to be busy doing so.

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<sup>84</sup> *Australian Book of Praise*, p. 598.

<sup>85</sup> Quoted from the *Form for Ordination (or Installation) of Ministers of the Word*; *Australian Book of Praise*, p. 619. This is affirmed in the *Form for Ordination of Elders and Deacons*, which says about the mandate for elders that they are; *together with the ministers of the Word, to have supervision over Christ's church that every member may conduct himself properly in doctrine and life ...* *Australian Book of Praise*, p. 625.

<sup>86</sup> *Australian Book of Praise*, p. 656



This does not mean that Consistories become directly involved with establishing and maintaining of schools. Here the further stipulation of the Church Order in Article 30 that the Church assemblies, which includes consistories *...shall deal with no other than ecclesiastical matters...* applies. Consistories do not take over the task of parents.<sup>87</sup> They make sure that parents, as members, carry out their tasks. In various ways, this would include that all Church members, such as single members, childless couples, grandparents, all support and encourage parents to carry out this task. Even though Consistories do not interfere with decisions made at schoolboards regarding hiring of teachers, curriculum and any such matters pertaining to the daily running of the schools, they certainly have a task to address, not only parents, but also teachers, principals, schoolboard members, chairman and so forth concerning their faithful execution of the important tasks given them. This may be compared to how Consistories do not become directly involved in members' businesses and business decisions but address the members about running their business in a faithful and God honoring way. For example, during a home visit consistory members may certainly ask business owners concerning their faithfulness in giving fair return to their employees for the work they do and about how the fourth commandment functions in their business practices. Likewise, consistories may ask a member who serves as principal of the school regarding the faithful running of the school and those members who serve as teachers concerning their teaching. Even though the Churches have *no direct* supervision over the schools, in Reformed communities where the Schools are run through Churches' membership by way of boards and councils consisting of Church members, there is this *indirect* care for the schools.

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87 See, WWJ Van Oene, *With Common Consent* (Premier Printing) see p. 141 and pp. 270 – 273; see also G. Van Rongen, *Decently and in Good Order* (Pro-Ecclesia) p. 51 and p. 74 and others available on internet site: [kerkrecht.nl](http://kerkrecht.nl)

In Reformed circles, such as among the Free Reformed in Australia and the Canadian Reformed in Canada, the Schools may be considered independent associations. They are run by an association through an elected and appointed board. They are subject to local civil government regulations. They are certainly not entirely *free* from Church and State as A. Kuyper had idealised.<sup>88</sup> These school boards do not have any direct say among the Churches but, much like the Churches have *indirect* care for the schools, also the schools remain *indirectly* related to the Churches through their membership of the Church. For example, the school from its side ensures that only members of the Churches are members of its association<sup>89</sup> and only confessing members in good standing among the Churches are hired as staff.<sup>90</sup> The Schools indirectly rely on the Churches to faithfully deal with its members according to their confession and walk of life. Furthermore, in a much more general way the Schools indirectly depend on the Churches to uphold the confession of God's Word in teaching and walk of life. One may say that it filters through the membership and impacts the School.

From this it should be clear that there is a relationship between the Church and Reformed schools because both seek to serve the same Lord and God according to His Word. In practice, this relationship does not consist in the Churches running or ruling the Schools nor vice-versa, but the relationship flows in a more indirect way through the bi-membership of the Churches and Schools. Members of the Christ confess and serve the same LORD God in both the Churches and School associations. Members of Christ are His children in all areas of life, including, at Home, in Church and at School. Hence this triangle, Church, Home, School.

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88 See above, page 5.

89 Free Reformed School Association, *Constitution and Bylaws* 2.1.1

90 *Op.cit.* 4.8



## Conclusion

**“But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light”  
1 Peter 2:9**

The Lord teaches us that He is the highest King who rules over all creation.<sup>91</sup> All glory, power and authority belong to Him. All mankind is under obligation to serve Him in all areas of life. Sadly, after the fall into sin, many deny Him. The Lord leaves many to perish in their wickedness. They suppress any knowledge of Him. The Lord leaves them in their wilful blindness. The Lord in His mercy also decides to save some. He does so in the midst of this broken world. When doing so, He distinguishes and, in some ways, separates them from the wicked<sup>92</sup> while at the same time both the redeemed and wicked continue to grow and live together in this world.<sup>93</sup>

This renewal takes place by the Lord working among His people by teaching them His will through the preaching that takes place in Church and by His people giving parental instruction and discipline in their homes so that education for civil service taught in schools

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91 See, for example Psalm 47:2

92 See Ephesians 2:9 and 1 Peter 2:9

93 See the Lord's parable of the wheat and tares, Matthew 13:25-40. See also 1 Corinthians 5:10

shapes us into faithful citizens of God's kingdom. This takes place in the midst of a broken and crooked world which militates against God's people like an enemy. Church, home, and school (as training for citizenship) are all together to be subservient to the one Lord God. One can perhaps speak of a triangle, each with its specific task. But there is much overlap. It may be better to speak of congruency for we who believe know that there is only ... *one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.*<sup>94</sup>

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94 Ephesians 4: 4 - 6



## Appendix - Lord's Day 38 and the Schools

In Lord's Day 38 we confess regarding the meaning and maintaining of the fourth commandment; *First, that the ministry of the gospel and the schools be maintained ...* At various times it is suggested that the schools mentioned here refer to *theological schools*. As will be shown, *theological schools* for the training of ministers are included, but the question is, does this Lord's Day *only* refer to *theological schools* or is there as a more general reference to all kinds of *schools* here? Does this include lower and day schools?

To answer this question, we first give attention to one of the authors of the *Heidelberg Catechism* who writes in his commentary on the Catechism about Lord's Day 38 that; *In the section of glorification, besides the maintenance of the church services, included is meant the maintenance of schools seeing that without the learning and knowledge of languages and arts, men are not fit to learn, nor are they fit to either maintain pure doctrine or to defend it against heretics. From the schools need to come forth, and should be taken, those who rule the congregation to God's honor and for the salvation of the believers. For that reason, God's flock has continually given attention to schools. Here one thinks of what men read (in Scripture) about the children of the prophets and about the colleges of which Samuel, Elisha and still others maintained.*<sup>95</sup> So it may be suggested that Ursinus first of all had theological training in mind but did not limit schooling to that. He includes the benefit of schooling for leadership among the churches, which would include elders.

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95 Zacharias Ursinus, *het Schatboek der Verklaringen van de Heidelbergse Catechismus* (J.P. Van den Tol) 1978. Vol 2 pp. 346. My translation from Dutch; *In de deel der heerlijkheid wordt, naast de kerkdienst, mede begrepen het onderhoud van scholen, aangezien zonder de geleerdheid en to kennis van talen en kunsten de mensen niet geschikt zijn om te leren, noch de zuiverheid der leer te onderhouden of tegen ketters verdedigd worden kan. Uit de scholen dienen voort te komen, en moeten zij genomen worden, die de de gemeente tot Gods eer en zaligheid de gelovenen zullen regreen. Daarom heeft men onder Gods volk steeds op de scholen gelet. Want hieronder valt alles, wat men leest van de kinderen der profeten en van de colleges, waarover Samuel, Elisa en nog anderen gesteld waren.*

Moreover, when reading Ursinus, it must be kept in mind that in the late 1500's when the *Heidelberg Catechism* was written, there were no schools for the general population as we know it today. Most academic schools were somehow set up, supported and supervised by various churches. At times, civil governments were involved with schooling for more practical purposes such military training, building roads, bridges, blacksmithing for horseshoes, spears, making of shields and other army implements. There were also a few private, mainly humanistic schools, that would focus attention on language training, rhetoric, and philosophy often with view to government, law and the courts. At around this time some schools were also starting to concentrate on the human body and how best to give medical help.

Ursinus goes further than simply speaking about the benefit schools have for the churches even though that was his primary focus. He exposes and lists a number of schools in the past that became breeding places for various heresies. He then asserts that in view of the general benefit of education ... *the godly civil government ought to follow in these steps* (to maintain and support schools). *Because in these recent times experience has shown how much depends on schools which are ruled well in view of upholding the truth through the efforts of learned men, as it were, bringing out of deep thick darkness of wayward ways into the light.*<sup>96</sup> H. Veldkamp also writes of how Ursinus in his commentary writes *about these schools as nurseries for the congregation wherein the youth "in the knowledge and fear of God need to be instructed. He thus obviously thought of the ordinary Christian education and not only of the preparation schools for ministers of the Word.*<sup>97</sup>

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96 Ursinus, *Op. cit.* p.347 Referring to the advantage of the advantage of education ... *behoren godzalig Overheden hun voetstappen na te volgen. Want hoeveel eraan gelegen is, om scholen te bezitten, die goed gereld ware, heeft de ervaring in de laatste tijd voldoende geleerd, aangezien de waarheid door de inspanning van geleerde mannen, als het ware uit zeer dicte duisternis der dwalingen in het licht gebracht en uitgebreid is.*

97 H.V. Veldkamp, *Zondags Kinderen* (T. Wever, no date given) p. 189, *Ursinus schrijft in zijn Schatboek over deze scholen als "planthoven der gemeente" waarin de jeugd "in de kennis en vreeze Gods moet onderwezen worden".*



When checking on various commentaries on the *Heidelberg Catechism* there are quite a number who simply say that the *ministry of the schools* mentioned in this Lord's Day refers to *theological training and schools*. They add no further comment leaving one to wonder if this is meant to be at the exclusion of all other schools.<sup>98</sup> There are others who make a point of mentioning that *other schools* are indeed included.<sup>99</sup> This makes one wonder what the intention of this Lord's Day really is; does it speak only of theological schools, or does it include schools in a more

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98 Thus, J.J. Knap, *De Heidelbergsch Catechismus*, (Wolters, 1912, p. 391, ...*hierbij ook het onderhoud der scholen vermeld, waarmede hij voornamelijk de Hoogeschole vermeld ...* B. Holwerda, *De Dingen die ons van God Geschonken zijn* (Oosterbaan & Lr Cointre, 1944) ... *het onderhoud der scholen; daarmee zijn, zoals ge weet, bedoeld neit de scholen waar onze jongens heengaan, maar de inrichtingen to vorming van dienaren des Woords*. J.G. Feenstra, *Het Eigendom des Heren*, (J.H. Kok, 1952) p. 176, Dr. L. Praamsma *Lerende hen Onderhouden* (J.H. Kok Kampen, 1960) *Met scholen wordt in de eerste plaats gedacht opleidingsscholen voor de domine's*. Besides emphasising how important it is for the churches to have ministers of the Word, he says nothing more about the schools.

99 Thus, Bern Smytegelt, *Des Christen eenige troost in levern en stereven of Verklareing over den Heidelbergschen Catechismus in III predikation* (J. H. Kok, 1747) p. 515 *zorgt voor de scholen, meerdere en mindere, hoogere en lagere in onze landen, maakt ze er zijn, en dat er bekwame mannen zijn, om uwe jeugd en jongelingen te onderwijzen en die jeugd te oefenen in allerlie wettenschappen*. J. Kok, *Schetsen over den Heildelbergschen Catechismus, een handbook voor Predikanten*, (J.H. Kok, 1915) Vol. 2 p. 970 ... *alles nodig is to den dienst, "scholen", Hoogere en lagere, vooral Hoogere hier bedoeld, om tot het "Predikambt" op te leiden*. J. Bavink pp. 695 - 696, *De Heidelbergsche Catechismus in 60 Leerredenen Verklaard* (Kok, Kampen 1913) after paying attention to need for Theological training adds; ...*sluiten wij echter het dusgenaamd Christelijk onderwijs op de lagere scholen er neit buiten ... maar zal kinderen kunnen volgen hetgeen gesproken en verkondigd wordt, men van der jeugt af in de waarheid moet onderwezen zijn* M.I.C. Blok, *Beleden Belofte* (De Vuurbaak, 1969) After referring to *Kampen* as the place for the training of ministers, adds, pp. 348 – 349, *Onze catechism denkt echer ook aan de scholen voor onze kinderen, zoals uit het aangehaalde Schriftbewijs duidelijk blijkt. Onze kinderen moeten onderwezen worden, ook en vooral in de vreze des HEREN; in de godzaligheid...* Rev. Otto Thelemann, *Heidelberg Catechism* Trans to English by M. Peters (Douma, 1959) when writing about this Lord's Day refers to all kinds of schools that must be maintained.

general way. One could perhaps do a larger survey to number the different opinions and give the result to the majority. One could perhaps even add greater weight to the opinion of more prominent theologians. However, that kind of approach is not only unsatisfactory because the question cannot be decided by majority nor by prominence of person. One may even express some hesitation about the conclusion Ursinus gives for the Churches confessions are not the personal prerogative of an individual, not even of the authors, but belong to the churches as a whole. They are confessions of God's Word and therefore any such question should focus on Scripture as its original source. What does the Lord teach us there?

Interestingly, J.H. Feringa first explains how in the past the Jews emphasised the need to rest on the Sabbath day but later, upon hearing Christ, the Christians started to concentrate more on the weekly work done for which the Sabbath rest is given. He asserts that this is reflected in the Catechism when we confess not only the need to *diligently attend the church*, as a good *work of faithfulness*, but also how *all the days of my life I rest from my evil works ...* He focuses here on *leaving or distancing* oneself from carrying out our daily tasks in evil ways. He puts the need for both, the *preaching office* and the *schools* in this context.<sup>100</sup> That is to say, we hear and learn how to *put these evil works* out of our lives to live in God-honouring ways.<sup>101</sup> In a similar way ... K.J. van de Berg writes; *should there be sabbath rest and worship of God, then it follows that churches service or the preaching office should be maintained and consequent to this, also the schools where the*

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100 Also W. Geesink, *Van 's Heeren Ordinantien* (W. Kirkchener 1908, Vol. 1 after first saying that the schools in Lord's Day 38 refers to the training for the ministry Vol. 1 p. 545 further points out how in this Lord's Day we confess that this commandment goes beyond resting on the Sabbath day when saying that *especially on the day of rest, I ...* to speak about how we are to be busy with being the Lord's children all the days of the week and the need for all to be educated.

101 J.H. Feringa, *De Heidelbergsche Catechism in Twee en Vijfig Leerredenen* (Hoeveker en Wormser) 1904, pp. 668-669.



*seed of the church is instructed – in the past, schools for the youth stood much closer to the church than presently – in the Word and truth confessed by the churches. The parents, but also the congregation has the highest interest in that the children are instructed in pure doctrine by receiving Christian instruction. It is the baptised seed that belong to the congregation and must subsequently lead it. The King of the Church, the Head of the congregation demands it.*<sup>102</sup> His point clearly includes that everyone in the congregation of the Lord is duty bound to carry out his task according to God's will.

When reflecting on this, we note that Scripture is very clear that the Lord calls all His people to carry out their tasks as His children. It is also very obvious that the fourth commandment begins with the words; *Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy. Six days you shall labour and do all your work ...* To remember the *Sabbath day* is put in the context of our daily work done during the other six days of the week. All our daily work is to be done to the honour of the Lord God. In that regard, we are all *office-bearers*. Think of how this Scriptural truth is summed up in Lord's Day 49 where we confess the meaning of the third petition, *Your will be done ...* to include, *...that everyone may carry out the duties of his office and calling as willingly and faithfully as the angels in heaven*. Strikingly, the answer of the earlier editions of Lord's Day 38 begin with the words: *First, that the church service or preaching office and schools are maintained.*<sup>103</sup>

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102 K.J. Van de Berg, *Heidelberg Catechismus* ed. K.J. van de Berg and J.J. Timmer (Zwijderduijn) no date given; *Behoort de sabbatrust een eeredienst Gode te zijn dan volgt daaruit dat de kerkdienst of het predikambt moet onderhouden worden en als gevolg hiervan ook de scholen waar het zaad der kerk onderwezen wordt – oudtijds toch stonden de scholen der jeugd veel dicter bij de kerk dan heden – in het Woord en de waarheid door de kerk beleden. De ouders, maar ook de gemeente heeft er het hoogste belang bij, dat de kinderen in de zuiver leer onderwezen worden bij het ontvangen van christelijk onderwijs. Het is 't gedoopte zaad dat tot de gemeente behoort en straks haar leiden moet. De Koning de kerk, het Hoofd der gemeente eischt het.*

103 *Op.cit. Eerstelick, dat den kercken-dienst ofte het Predick-ampt ende zo de Scholen onderhouden warden ...*

Notice that here it refers to the preaching *office*. For, indeed, schools are important for keeping the *preaching office*, but just as important for all other *offices* with which members of the churches may be busy. It is striking that those, generally speaking, who comment in the context of Lord's Day 38 on the general task of working six days conclude that the *schools* referred to here, speak of all kinds of schools. So also K. Schilder, in his sermon on Lord's Day 38, says, *Therefore, this is sabbath work, that we are going to re-establish God's sabbath as fellow-labourers through His grace, so that the new mankind come together so that God again gets His own works renewed to for His own good pleasure. And therefore the church services, the preaching office, and the schools need to be maintained.*<sup>104</sup>

The point being that it is not only in special offices that men need to learn and understand how men need to serve the Lord, but this is just as true for the office of all believers (see also Lord's Day 12 Q & A 32). All believers must learn how to *... rest from evil works ...* while carrying out their office of husband, father, son, farmer, builder, wife, mother, daughter, etc. When adding this, keep in mind how the Lord specifically applies this fourth commandment to the entire household including son, daughter and even male and female servants.

Well, who and how should the intention of this Lord's Day be determined: whether it refers only to *theological schools* or to *schools* in a more general way? In the end it must be the Churches who are busy confessing God's Word that must make this determination. Therefore, one may conclude that it refers to schools in general for in Scripture the Lord clearly calls all His children to serve Him and live to the honour of His Name.

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104 K. Schilder, Zondag 38, *Preken Bundel II*, (put together by J. Varlare; D. Van Houdt; G. Van Rongen) 1935-36. P.34. *Daarom is dit sabbathswerk, dat wij de sabbath Gods gaan herstellen als mede-arbeiders door Zijn genade, dat de nieuwe mensheid samenkomt, dat God opnieuw Zin eigen werken krijgt herseld om zich te verblijden. En daarom moet de kerkdienst, het predikambt, en de scholen onderhouden worden.*



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**FREE REFORMED  
SCHOOL ASSOCIATION**

*My heart I offer to You Lord - promptly and sincerely*