

# Support for the School: Option or Obligation?

*Recommended Bible Reading: Revelations 7 or Revelations 13:1-8 or Psalm 48*

## Introduction

This paper was presented by Mr SH Terpstra, the Chairman of the Armadale school board, at a number of Congregational meetings of churches in the metro. It was not presented as a school association meeting because it is not about the role or function of our school or covenantal education. Neither is it about any other aspect of our schools which we can and do have many interesting and important discussions. Instead it elaborates on a Life-View – about **us** and about **our** place in the scheme of things. It shows how fundamental Scriptural truths determine the way we act, how we live and what motivates us.

However, it is done in the context of our schools, as a result of some experiences surrounding the school.

Some recent trends surrounding membership of the School Associations were identified at a meeting between the Albany and Armadale boards, resulting in a decision to address these matters.

Some of these trends are:

- young people who seek (and are often permitted) to do Public Profession of their Faith but who have never shown any support for the School;
- young people with full employment who do not become member of, nor donate significantly to, the School Associations;
- young married couples who do not become members of the Association;
- members who withdraw from the Association when their children no longer attend school;
- members who seek special membership at reduced rates not only for financial reasons coupled to advancing age, but who take the position that because of past support they are "eligible", and it is "their right".
- a never ending battle against arrears.

This raises the following questions:

Why should you become a member or donor of the school if you don't have children? Why not terminate or reduce your level of commitment when your children leave school? As a single member, why should you become a member? These questions are asked on a regular basis, and is likely something you have also considered at some stage in your life.

The overarching question is "Support for the School: Option or Obligation?"; hence the name of this booklet. The following attempts to address this very issue.

## Support for the School: Option or Obligation?

Revelation 13 tells of a vision which appeared to John while he was on Patmos. He saw "...a beast rising up out of the sea, having seven heads and ten horns..." (Rev 13:1 + 2). It looked like a leopard, had feet like a bear, had a mouth like a lion and it had great authority and power.

John describes how he saw the beast using its great power and authority to attack and destroy the work of God. We read that "...all the world ... followed the beast..." (verse 3), that "...he opened his mouth in blasphemy against God..." (verse 6), that "...it was granted to him to make war with the saints and to overcome them..." (verse 7).

Ever since the very beginning when man fell into sin, the great dragon, Satan, is in attack. Throughout the course of history he has worked unceasingly to destroy the works of God. We read of this throughout the whole Bible, and we hear it in the preaching every Sunday. His attacks have come in a great variety of ways and guises, but always their purpose was the same, to destroy the works of God and gain dominion for himself.

And in these last days in which we live these attacks intensify. The great dragon will do everything it can to still destroy Christ's work. The end is near and it will soon be too late for him. Therefore he is doing everything in his power to still overcome.

John reveals the frightening extent of Satan's success. We read "...all who dwell on the earth will worship him..." (verse 8). Is that the end of John's vision? Is there then no outlook for us? Will we and our children also worship the beast? Thankfully John may continue "... all who dwell on the earth will worship him.....**except those whose names have been written in the Book of Life of the Lamb.**"

Glory be to God. He has told us of great tribulations which have been, which are, and which may still be to come. Yet in that He has revealed that for those whom He has called His own there is safety and security. It is true, they are under attack, and the attack is fierce and unrelenting. Yet they are safe for they have their names written in the Book of Life of the Lamb.

There we have it. Safety and security for God's people. Psalm 48 tells us of it. In 1966 Rev Bruning wrote:

*Psalm 48 gives praise to the God of the holy Mount Zion.... And the greatest glory of Zion is that she is so strong and so well protected. For just...*

*Walk around her citadels,  
Count her towers and crenelles,  
See her walls, her strong foundations,... (Ps 48: 4 Book of Praise)*

*...check out her strategic position, the way she has been built, and how her defences have been constructed,... and you will be amazed at her strength, her impregnability, and how safe she is ....*

*You will speak of it with awe, and you will tell the coming generation (Ps 48)*

He concluded:

*How wonderful it is to live safely within her (Bruning:1966, P1).*

In Revelation John also testifies of this. Already before the Lord showed him the Beast empowered by the Dragon to destroy, the revelation referred to above, He had

showed John that He had already made His people safe, that He had already provided security for them. We read in chapter 12 that John saw the woman *...clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a garland of twelve stars (12:1).*

The Church, portrayed as the queen of the heavenly light giving bodies, is standing in direct opposition to the dragon. And her head is the Lamb Who is

*standing on Mount Zion, and with Him 144 000 having His father's name written on their foreheads.... They sang...a new song before the throne, and before the four living creatures, and the elders...and no-one could learn that song except the 144,000 who were redeemed from the earth (Rev 14:1-3).*

And who are those 144,000? They are the fullness of the number of *"those whom (the Father) has given (Christ)"* (John 17: 9) a *"...great multitude which no-one can number, of all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues ...standing before the Lamb, clothed in white robes ..."* (Rev 7:9). They are Zion, the people of God, the twelve tribes of Israel (Rev 7: 5-8). They are the Church.

That is what it is all about. God's work throughout the history of this world in gathering, defending and preserving for Himself by His Spirit and Word, in the unity of true faith, a Church chosen to everlasting life (Lord's day 21: Qu 54).

Since the very beginning God has been busy gathering His people so that they can stand together before His Throne clothed in white robes and sing together His praises, celebrate together the feast of the Lamb.

The miracle of all this is the manner in which He does this. In the very beginning at the time of creation He already incorporated man into this plan. When He, for example, created the angels He created all of them. There are no little baby angels born to dad and mum angels, little angels who grow up to be adult angels and who take their place in the adult angel world. No, from the very beginning their number was complete. But with man it was different. God created only Adam and Eve, and then He made them His co-workers. They would work together with Him to complete His great work of creation. God gave them the mandate to *"...be fruitful and multiply; to fill the earth and subdue it; to have dominion over the fish of the sea etc..."* (Gen 1:28). In giving them this two-fold mandate, daily work and family life, God made them His fellow workers.

We note that it is already here in paradise that God established the nature and structure of His kingdom. He will gather His Church in and through the generations, through the families. The generations will work together with Him as His co-workers to come to the fullness of the number, the 144,000 seen by John, and they will work with Him to fully develop the earth and subdue it.

Then came the fall into sin, and all this was under threat. God's great work of creation was on the brink of destruction. Yet, glory be to God, He did not let go of the work His hand had begun. Instead He came with His plan of salvation in Jesus Christ. He restored the mandate He had given to Adam and Eve, and re-instituted man as His co-worker.

Throughout the Old Testament we read how He continued to gather, defend, and preserve His people in the generations. God sent the water of the flood, separating the believer Noah and his family from the destruction of the world. He called and separated the patriarchs Abram, Isaac and Jacob. Israel was arranged in families, and in tribes. In Abraham all the families of the earth shall be blessed (Gen 12: 3), and the covenant was established "... *between Me and your descendants after you in their generations...*" (Gen 17:7).

Much more can be said about this. Scripture references to support this position are numerous. Suffice it to say that the Bible shows unmistakably that God works in and through the family, through the generations. It is a central theme of His Word.

Equally central is the message that He places these generations in His covenant in the Church. That is the Zion of Psalm 48, the Jerusalem of the Scriptures, the New Jerusalem of John's Revelation. That is the bastion where He provides safety and security for His people under attack. That is where the Spirit and the Word together safeguard, defend, and protect those whom the Father has given the Son, those whom He has called His own, those who bear His seal on their foreheads. That is where the Beast, no matter how powerful he may be, will be defeated.

That too is the reason why our little children are brought into the church. In the Old Testament they were 8 days old. They are only little, and do not know what it is all about. They have no idea that the Lord Himself is giving them His seal, testifying thereby that they are "...*received into the Church of God and set apart from all other peoples and false religions, to be entirely committed to Him...*" (BC Art 34).

Restricting our analysis to the context of our topic this evening, when the parents promise to '*...instruct your child in this doctrine ... and to have him instructed therein to the utmost of your power*' a number of very important things are happening.

In the first place the parents are acknowledging and accepting that they and their little one belong in the church. They confess they do not stand alone, but seek and find their security in the citadel of the church, in the fortress where God's Word is preached, in the protection of His Spirit. They promise to teach their little one this truth.

They acknowledge they cannot do it alone. They are in the church and they need its help to be able to fulfil their vow. When the time comes they will have their child instructed by the Consistory and in school.

We started this paper with reference to Revelation where the Lord tells of the attack on the Church by the Beast. It threatens to destroy everything. Only those who are written in the Book of Life are safe. The parents of that little child know and confess, "Their little one, held to baptism today, has just been sealed with God's covenant promises. He is under attack, but safe in Father's care."

And Father has revealed the nature of that attack, and also how as co-workers with Him, we are to safeguard ourselves and our children. For we read in Ephesians that we "...*do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against*

*powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in heavenly places” (Eph 6:12).*

To combat this we are to “...*take up the whole armour of God... to gird your waist with the truth ... put on the breastplate of righteousness... shod our feet with gospel of peace... take the shield of faith...the helmet of salvation, ... the sword of the Spirit...*” (Eph 6: 11-17).

In other words, we are to equip. Parents promise to equip their little one with the weapons of war. They will do so in the church, surrounded by the mechanisms the church has received for this purpose, supported by their brothers and sisters in every possible way.

Only in that context does their oath to instruct and have their little one instructed in the covenant power and truth have any possibility of being fulfilled. They cannot do it alone. They need the help of the Lord... and He promises to give it in the Church in and through the preaching of His Word and by means of support from the brothers and sisters.

For in the Church witnessing the parental oath, observing the baptism with water, seeing with eyes of faith the working of God's covenant promises, is a church building full of people, brothers and sisters of the parents standing there holding that little child to baptism. Are they free of this event? Does their observing the glorious happening before their eyes leave them free? Can they simply observe, be moved maybe, and then walk away from the service with maybe a tear in their eye and a comment about how beautiful it was to see a child baptised?

Scripture speaks differently. It speaks of the Church as Body of Christ. “*For by One Spirit we were all baptised into one body...*” (1 Corinthians 12:13) And further ...

*For in fact the body is not one member but many.... If the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand , I am not of the body," is it therefore not of the body?... (Verse 14 and 15). But now there are many members, but one body. And the eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you"...(verse 21)*

There we have it. As witnesses we participate in the oath of the parents. We vow to support them to the utmost of our ability in carrying out their vow. We will help them, support them, do whatever we can so they can fulfil their promise (Rom 12: 4-6).

But there is even more. The baptism has just taken place before our eyes in church. That is where God is safeguarding those who have the Father's Name on their forehead. That Church is the Body of Christ. Be it as a hand, or as a foot, or as an eye, each and every single person in the church is called upon to support, to help, and to provide, so that the oath which was just made before them and the miracle of the baptism just witnessed, will be worked in the fullness of time. Then that child too will stand as one of the 144,000 gathered before God's Throne and the Lamb.

As title we chose to put a question. *Support for the School - Option or Obligation?*  
Our Church Order (Art 53) answers:

*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 co-operation of the communion of saints, give their children education (as stipulated by the civil government) which is based on Scripture and Confession.*

With this the CO outlines the responsibility of the consistory in ensuring that the parents fulfil their baptismal vow. At the same time it refers to the role of the communion of saints. While it is a supporting role, it is none the less important. Without it parents cannot fulfil their vow, without it the consistory cannot ensure they do, and without it the communion of saints does not function. As a result there is a chink, a weak spot in the citadel of security by which God safeguards us and our children.

*Support for the School - Option or Obligation?* You will have deduced from the foregoing that it is not an option, a matter of choice. As member of the Church, of the Body of Christ, it is impossible that we do not function as part of that body by giving support in whatever way we can to help each other fulfil our vows.

The Lord is preparing His New Jerusalem for the fullness of His number which He is gathering together in the generations. He is working this in the families in the church, and He gives the school to help in this. It is an essential component of His work.

We can take that a step further. Is support for the school then an obligation, a mandate, an instruction, an order? Undoubtedly it is. However, it is far more than that. It is a privilege, a joy, a work of thankfulness. I suggest we should change the way we think and speak. We so often ask, "Do we have to?" and answer, "Yes, we do". But it's not a matter of having to, a must, a 'do it or else'. No, it's a matter of being allowed to.

Do we really think that God needs us for Him to be able to fulfil His plans? Do we really think that God cannot keep His promises if we don't do our bit? Surely not. In this context Christ's answer to the Pharisees and Sadducees recorded in Matthew 3:9 seems relevant.

*I say to you that God is able to raise up children to Abraham from these stones.*

God doesn't need us. However, He allows us to be co-workers with Him, He gives us the privilege of working with Him, He does us the honour of calling us His friends and of allowing us to work with Him so that we and our children will sit together with the congregation at the wedding feast of the Lamb eternally praising Him for His wonderful works in and through the generations, giving Him eternal thanks that we were allowed to be part of His work of gathering, defending, and preserving His church to salvation. What a glorious and wonderful role He allows us to fill. All of us. To Him be praise.

Cast your mind back to the church service where the little child has just been baptized. There are the parents, thankfully and joyfully holding their child for the baptism and the psalm or hymn which follows. They have sworn an oath, but it does not daunt them for they know that with God's help and with the support of the congregation all will be well. There are the witnesses. They have witnessed the vow made, and in doing so have themselves vowed to be part of it. There they are, grandparents, uncles, aunts, and other relations, members of the church, communicant or not yet communicant members, married and unmarried, singles and those who do not have children, **all** of them pledging their support to the utmost of their power. Each has a role. Every single one of them is important, is part of the vow, and is needed.

And there sits the Consistory, pledging to exercise the office to ensure full support. There sit the deacons. By virtue of their office they promise to support where there is need so that everyone in the church can and will be fully involved as per their vow.

It is a joyous gathering; all are one in their recognition of the rich privilege God has bestowed by making them His co-worker, one in their purpose to carry out this wonderful task.

The following verses from James is a fitting conclusion:

*What does it profit ...if someone says he has faith but does not have the works? Can faith save him? If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food and one of you says to them, "Depart in peace, be warmed and filled", but do not give them things which are needed for the body, what does it profit? Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead. (James 2: 14-16)*

In the context of this paper, what then are the works of faith? Pray for the school, for the care of the aged, for our special children? Yes certainly. But to use the words of James, such prayer without works is meaningless, such prayer without joyful deeds of tangible support to the utmost of your power is of no value.

On the other hand,

*Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered Isaac his son on the altar? Do you see that faith was working together with his works, and by works faith was made perfect. (James 2: 21 & 22).*

We pray:

*Our Father, Who art in Heaven  
Hallowed be Your Name*

Your Name, in which You have expressed all that You have revealed to us about Yourself. Your Name, which we have come to know through and by means of the preaching, and by means of the teaching in the home, in church, and in school.

Then we continue:

*Your Kingdom Come*

Your Kingdom, Father, where we all will be gathered in our families, in our generations, to make up the 144,000 seen by John, singing together Your praises, eternally celebrating together the wedding feast of the Lamb. Your Kingdom, Lord, which You are working today, in which You have allowed us to be Your co-workers.

We pray, ... and we give thanks that we are also allowed to work. **All** of us.