

## A Word of Explanation

In a series of editorials, published in The Standard Bearer in 1944, Herman Hoeksema refuted an argument against the establishment of Protestant Reformed Christian Schools that he described as follows: "We have no moral right to organize our own school movement and to establish our own schools as Protestant Reformed people, until we have done our utmost, and exhausted every means at our command, to improve the existing schools." If the refutation of this argument were the only benefit of these articles, there would be no purpose in reprinting the articles, for this argument is not found among us.

But these articles will reward our reading of them in other ways. They caution us against a foolish, rash forcing of our own schools, when they are not possible. They encourage us to use, and co-operate in, the best Christian schools available to us, when our own are impossible. And they call us to our covenant obligation, to strive to have Protestant Reformed Christian Schools, to the utmost of our power, not so much because of the evils in the existing schools, but because of the distinctive doctrine of the Protestant Reformed churches--doctrine that bears powerfully on the Christian education of our children.

We do well to listen to Hoeksema, in these articles.

- Rev. David Engelsma

\*\*\*\*\*

### IV. AS TO OUR MORAL OBLIGATION

by

Herman Hoeksema

Of all the arguments and would-be arguments the opponents of the movement for schools of our own wherever possible, adduce for their position, that concerning the moral obligation to the existing schools is the weakest of all.

As far as I can see, it is in this argument that they reveal that they are not interested in school education of our children along strictly Protestant Reformed lines. They do not admit the necessity of Protestant Reformed instruction also in the schools. They cannot see that the school has anything to do with Protestant Reformed principles. That the principles adopted by the Christian Reformed Churches, because of which adoption and consequent action against us we have become separated, are so serious that

2.

they affect the basis of education, they do not see. Whatever may separate us as churches, in the sphere of education we may unite again, which means that we can safely submit our children to the influence of a Christian Reformed education in the schools.

That the opposing brethren are not Protestant Reformed, I do not state here at all.

That they are not interested in strictly Protestant Reformed instruction for our children and youth also in and through the medium of the school, and that, therefore, they do not see the seriousness of the difference and separation caused by the "Three Points" with respect to education,—this, as I see it, is the clear implication of their argument of our moral obligation to the existing schools.

Consider the argument for a moment.

*It runs as follows: We have no moral right to organize our own school movement and to establish our own schools as Protestant Reformed people, until we have done our utmost, and exhausted every means at our command, to improve the existing schools.*

According to this argument, let it be noted, we not only have a moral obligation to the existing Christian schools, but this obligation makes it impossible for us in the meantime to establish our own schools, or even to make preparations for the establishment of our own schools. Until the situation has proved to be absolutely hopeless, we must continue to cooperate, and refrain from organizing our own school societies. And until the hopelessness of the attempt has become quite plain, our children must continue to attend the existing schools.

Now, I deny this entire argument.

I deny that, apart from the question whether the existing schools can be improved or not, a Protestant Reformed group of people does not have the moral right to establish schools of their own, or that there can possibly rest upon them any moral obligation to the existing schools that must restrain them from organizing their own movement.

Why may not the Protestant Reformed people, pray, have their own system of education from top to bottom, something for which the undersigned has argued almost from the very beginning of our separate existence as churches?

What moral obligation to any existing schools could restrain them from striving for this ideal, at least?

But to this I hope to come back later.

The point I want to make now is that, apart from all other considerations, the above argument of the opponents of the movement to establish schools of our own wherever possible tacitly denies that our Protestant Reformed principles have any real significance for school education, and proceeds on the assumption that a Protestant Reformed school education is not necessary.

Cooperation as long as possible, is their slogan.

But what does this cooperation mean, as far as we, Protestant Reformed people, are concerned?

It means that we may, perhaps, protest against certain evils found in the existing schools, such as the singing of Arminian hymns, the introduction of plays and drama, the teaching of evolutionistic conceptions, or of grossly Arminian tenets, encouragement of movie attendance, etc. Perhaps, if we are strong enough, we may even demand that the doctrine of common grace shall not be taught or mentioned in the particular school with which we cooperate and to which our children are sent. We may request that the "Three Points" shall be carefully avoided.

But granted that all this might be done, and might be done successfully, which in by far the majority of cases would be impossible, this would surely be the limit of the influence we might exert on the existing schools.

It is plain that we could not possibly ask that the instruction in the existing schools shall follow Protestant Reformed lines.

And this is impossible, not merely because we are usually but few in number, and must suffer defeat if the matter were brought to a vote, but because we have no right to make such a demand. It would be contrary to the idea of cooperation.

This is quite important.

It means not only that in Biblical instruction all questions concerning particular and common grace, concerning total depravity and the ability or inability of man to do any good before God, must be carefully avoided; but it also implies that the same attitude of neutrality be assumed in the instruction in many other subjects that pertain to our view of the world, history, civil government, the unions, and other matters.

It should be quite plain from all this, that the opponents of the movement to establish schools of our own, by their argument as to our moral obligation to cooperate with the existing schools, do not care for, are not interested in, and do not see the need of specific Protestant Reformed education for our children.

4.

This is the very least that can be said.

At the very best they consider the schools institutions that may be satisfied with some general Christian instruction.

As soon as we are not satisfied with this, but look upon the school as a matter of specific principle, the sole conclusion anyone can possibly draw is that we must establish our own schools.

The contention of those that oppose the movement to establish our own schools is that such a movement is morally wrong, as long as we have not done all that is in our power to keep and support and improve the existing schools. In other words, they claim that we are morally obliged: 1. To join an existing school society, and to support an existing Christian school, wherever there is one; 2. To remain member of that society, and continue to support that existing school, even in cases where it is possible and preferable to organize a separate society; 3. To continue to send our children to that school, even though we know that they do not receive the education they should receive, and though it is possible to provide for them the education that is in harmony with our own convictions.

Now, I have never read or heard any sound argument in support of this contention. As far as I know it is a mere contention. We are simply told that this is our moral obligation, but on what basis this obligation rests, by what principles it is motivated, or by what moral standard or rules it is governed, has never been demonstrated. And I am afraid that, if the brethren that make this contention, would attempt to prove it, they would discover that this would be quite impossible.

That a man has a moral obligation in respect to a society of which he is a member, and as long as he is a member of it, we all grant. His obligation rests in his membership. But that he must remain a member of such a society, even if he can serve more effectively the *cause* represented by that society by establishing a separate society,—that would seem incapable of being proved. And we deny it most emphatically.

That Christian parents are morally obligated to provide a Christian school education for their children, and, therefore, to work to the utmost of their power for the cause of Christian instruction, may be taken for granted among us. But that parents are morally obliged to support and further this cause only through concrete, existing societies and schools, even when they can more effectively advance this cause by organizing their own schools,—that has never been demonstrated and is incapable of proof.

Suppose that in a certain place the only existing school was Lutheran. And suppose that in the same place there were a small

number of Reformed families, too small to establish their own Christian school. Suppose further for the time being these Reformed parents sent their children to this Lutheran school, in order to provide for them a Christian education "to the utmost of their power." And, finally, suppose that this number of Reformed families gradually increased, and became strong enough to organize their own society. Would they now be morally obliged to continue to send their children to the Lutheran school, and make the best of it?

You say, perhaps, that this is different, because we have no parochial or denominational, but free Christian schools.

Nominally, this is true; actually however, the existing schools are Christian Reformed, even though they are supported by societies. They are entirely controlled by the Christian Reformed Church, and based on Christian Reformed principles. Where do the Protestant Reformed people have any influence, except in as far as they can let their voice be heard in a few local societies? The Union of Christian Schools is wholly controlled by Christian Reformed leaders; the Christian Home and School Magazine is a Christian Reformed publication; and, last but not least, the normal training of prospective teachers is furnished by a department of Calvin, and is, therefore, officially under the control of the Christian Reformed Church. And what is a school really but a staff of teachers?

Do not misunderstand me. I do not blame the Christian Reformed people for making their school education conform to their own convictions. I merely state a fact, and a very patent one. And I claim that their principles are not ours, and that, although I believe that our parents should send their children to the existing Christian schools where there is no other possibility, rather than send them to the public schools, they cannot possibly have the moral obligation to do so wherever they are strong enough to establish their own schools, and to educate their children in harmony with their own convictions. On the contrary, I maintain that it is their sacred obligation to take the latter course, wherever possible.

And I am sure that no Christian Reformed man or group can blame us for taking this course.

We do not even have to point to certain evils existing in the Christian schools as we know them, as if they must be the reason why we should organize our own movement. This has been done too much, I think, with the result that the main issue has been lost sight of. If the situation were such that we could work on a common basis, and were fundamentally agreed as to what our children should be taught, but that, in spite of this fundamental agreement that there were certain evils to be fought and removed, I would agree that we must attempt our utmost to remove these evils.

But this is not the case.

6.

There is a fundamental difference between the Christian Reformed and the Protestant Reformed Churches since 1924; and this fundamental difference, as officially expressed in the "Three Points," profoundly affects the education in the schools. And this is the reason why we should have our own schools wherever possible, in order that our children may be "brought up in the aforesaid doctrine," and that we may cause or help them to be brought up in that doctrine to the utmost of our power.

But let us try to analyze this question of our moral obligation a little more in detail.

It may not be superfluous, first of all, to ask the general question: what is meant by moral obligation, and what is our moral obligation in regard to the education of our children in the schools?

Surely, it must be agreed that moral obligation consists in obedience to the will of God both in respect to our relation to Him, and to our relation to our fellowmen. If one talks to me about my moral obligation in a certain case, he must be able to point out to me that what he considers my moral obligation is the will of God. If he cannot do this, he should refrain from insisting on it.

Now, with respect to education, what is the primary relation in which the will of God must be known and obeyed, and concerning which we may, therefore, speak of moral obligation?

The answer is plain: *it is the relation of parents to their children.*

Education is the duty of parents.

On this we are all agreed.

And the moral obligation of the parents is rather clearly expressed in Deut. 6:4-7: "Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God is one Lord. And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might. And these words which I command thee this day shall be in thine heart: And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up."

One dare not say that this injunction was given to Israel of the old dispensation, and that it was concerned with the Old Testament law.

For the very form of this injunction is such that it applies to the people of God of all times. Still the Lord our God is one Lord, and still it is our "part" of the covenant of God to love

the Lord our God with all our heart, and with all our mind, and with all our soul, and with all our power. And, therefore, it is still our moral obligation as parents to teach these words to our children, when we sit in our house, or walk by the way, when we lie down, and when we rise up.

Besides, this is the same injunction as comes to parents in the New Testament: "bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord." Eph. 6:4.

This is the moral obligation of which we are reminded in the Form for the Administration of Baptism. There, too, we are reminded that our "part" in the covenant is, "that we cleave to this one God, Father, Son and Holy Ghost; that we trust in him, and love him with all our hearts, with all our souls, with all our mind, and with all our strength; that we forsake the world, crucify our old nature, and walk in a new and holy life."

And we are made to assume this moral obligation with respect to the education of our children, when we are required to answer affirmatively two questions. The first is this: "Whether you acknowledge the doctrine which is contained in the Old and New Testament, and in the articles of the Christian faith, and which is taught here in this Christian Church, to be the true and perfect doctrine of salvation?" And the second follows: "Whether you promise and intend to see these children, when come to the years of discretion, instructed and brought up in the aforesaid doctrine, or help or cause them to be instructed therein, to the utmost of your power?"

Don't overlook that little but significant phrase: "here in this Christian Church," in the first of these two questions. Our fathers inserted that phrase quite intentionally. In fact, in the past there has been a rather heated controversy about these words, and repeated attempts were made, either to eliminate them, or to ascribe to them a meaning different from their intended significance. But in spite of it all they were retained.

And they mean just what they state.

When in a Protestant Reformed Church a child is baptized, the whole congregation confesses, and the parents of the children that are presented for baptism expressly state, that they believe the doctrine of the Protestant Reformed Churches to be the true and perfect doctrine of salvation.

And it is in that connection that the second of these two questions must be read: the parents, in answering this question affirmatively, promise that they will bring up their children in the "aforesaid," that is, in the Protestant Reformed, doctrine, and that they will help or cause them to be instructed in that doctrine to the utmost of their power!

8.

This, then, is our primary and most sacred moral obligation with respect to the education of our children.

On this we are all agreed.

And as we speak of our moral obligation to the existing schools, this primary and basic obligation must constantly be borne in mind.

I take it for granted that all our readers, even those that thus far have revealed little or no enthusiasm for a school of our own, and among these even those who definitely opposed it especially by the "moral obligation" argument, will have to agree with me, that our obligation to the existing schools and school societies can be none other than, and is rooted in, the obligation of the parents with regard to the education of their children.

These school societies are, with respect to the instruction of our children, only a means to an end.

If parents were in a position to give their children all the education they need, personally at home, there would be no need of these societies. In fact, in that case it would be their sacred calling to provide such instruction themselves. Apart from the Church to which the ministry of the Word is entrusted, they are the only responsible party before God with respect to this instruction.

Or even, if all could afford to employ a private tutor to educate their children, the school society might be discarded.

However, this is impossible.

Parents lack the time and ability to give their children a complete education according to the requirements and demands of modern life. And they lack the means to employ private teachers. Hence, they band together, organize societies, in order that together and with united efforts they may accomplish what individually they are not able to do. And these societies establish schools, determine the character of the education their children shall receive, and employ the teachers that shall furnish such education as the parents determine that their children shall have.

It should be plain then, that the moral obligation of these societies can be none other than that of the parents individually.

Nor can the obligation of the parent to the society of which he is a member be any other than to cooperate and put forth all his efforts to fulfill his obligation with respect to the education of his children.

That obligation, as we have seen, is that he shall instruct them "in the aforesaid" doctrine to "the utmost of his power," or "help or cause them to be instructed therein."



This latter phrase includes the instruction they receive in the school.

This part of the obligation he fulfills through the means of the school society.

For the parent that is Protestant Reformed, this obligation, which he solemnly and very definitely assumes by covenant-vow before God and the Church, means that he will work to the utmost of his power, also through the school society, to provide for his children an education that is in harmony with Protestant Reformed doctrines and principles.

It follows, then, that this is his moral obligation with respect to the society of which he is a member.

He must seek the good of that society.

That surely is his moral obligation.

And because the society exists for the purpose of so serious a matter as the education of covenant children, he certainly has the moral obligation to seek the very best for it.

Hence, he must work to the utmost of his power to make the society an efficient means unto the end of providing a Protestant Reformed education for his children and the children of his fellow members.

Other obligations he may have toward the society and toward the school certainly follow from and are subservient to this one fundamental obligation. With a view to this great calling he pays his dues and school tuition, he takes part in the activities of the society, watches over the school and over the appointment of teachers.

All his effort must be directed to that one end: that the society may be a means to help him to instruct his children in "the aforesaid doctrine to the utmost of his power."

---

Is it possible for the Protestant Reformed parent to do this through the existing schools and school-societies?

*Yes*, if there is no opportunity for him to send his children to a school of Protestant Reformed parents, or

10.

to organize a society for the establishment of such a school. In that case he meets his assumed obligation with a view to the education of his children in the "aforesaid doctrine" *to the utmost of his power*, by sending his children to one of the existing Christian schools, or to a Lutheran school, if necessary, to the best school he can find, and by supplementing and correcting such instruction at home in as far as it may be necessary.

No parent dare send his children to the public school on the pretext that the existing schools are not Protestant Reformed.

And in that case he has the moral obligation to work to the utmost of his power for the good of the society to which he belongs, and of the school to which he sends his children. And as far as cooperation on the basis of the constitution of such a society permits him, he will try to make that society and school a means to instruct his children according to Protestant Reformed principles.

But the above question must be answered with and unqualified *No* if he is strong enough, has the means and the opportunity, to establish a school of his own choice in cooperation with other Protestant Reformed parents.

For in that case he does not "help or cause them to be instructed in the aforesaid doctrine *to the utmost of his power*".

He is satisfied with the line of least resistance.

For he knows very well that, whatever efforts he may put forth *to improve* the school to which he sends his children, it is a foregone conclusion that he can never make it the means to instruct his children according to the Protestant Reformed conception of the truth.

He may remove certain evils, protest against the presentation of all kinds of drama and moving pictures in the schools, against the singing of a few Arminian hymns, or even against the direct inculcation of the theory of common grace, perhaps; but he will never be able to make the school a means for the instruction of the children along Protestant Reformed lines.

This is impossible, first of all, because his influence is very limited. The Christian Reformed parents control the existing schools. They permit the Protestant Reformed parent to send his children to their schools, and to support their cause financially; but for the rest they pay very little attention to him as soon as he insists on positive, Reformed principles. This I could easily prove, if it should be required.

But this is impossible, especially, because of the very principle of cooperation. By joining an existing society he waives the right to insist on positive, Protestant Reformed education. He has no right to demand such education of the existing schools.

And if he had the right, it would be physically impossible to realize it, even in any local school where he might be represented in substantial numbers of members, for the simple reason that the whole school system, as to teachers, books, propoganda, etc. is under Christian Reformed control.

Nor can an instance be mentioned where this was ever attempted even by those who insist that it is our moral obligation to cooperate with the existing schools as long as possible.

Hence, I maintain, that in such cases, i.e., wherever there are a sufficient number of Protestant Reformed parents, and they have the means and power, their sacred moral obligation with respect to the existing societies is to leave them, and to establish societies and schools of their own, where they may instruct their children "in the aforesaid doctrine to the utmost of their power."

---

And why, pray, should they not do this?

There is nothing separatistic in a movement to establish our own school.

Is not, after all, a Christian school a strictly local affair? Does not each school society exist by itself? It is true that there is a Union of Christian Schools, and that many local schools, perhaps most of them, are members of this union. But this does not bring all the schools under one board, or unite them into one body. Each society has authority in its own domain and is strictly autonomous. The Christian school is a local matter.

But if this is so, what would be more natural, in places where there are a sufficient number of Protestant Reformed parents, than to band together, organize their own local society, and establish their own local schools, where their children can be instructed along Protestant Reformed lines?

There is then, absolutely no reason why, for instance, in a city like Grand Rapids, where some six hundred families are found belonging to the four Protestant Reformed Churches in that city, we should not have two or three schools of our own.

12.

By establishing such schools we would simply fulfill our obligation before God.

We would only be doing what the Christian Reformed people have done before us.

We would do the very same thing the Reformed (Gereformeerde) people in the Netherlands did years ago, when they separated from the existing Christian school, and established schools of their own.

We would do no harm to the existing schools in any sense. They can very well get along without us, as far as the financial support of their schools is concerned.

And we could be of real influence by doing so.

As matters stand now, we have no influence at all. We are divided. We are scattered over several societies and schools. We have no power. We cannot let our voices be heard. We develop nothing. And we deliver our children to Christian Reformed schools and teachers to instruct them according to their view.

If, however, we would unite as one people, loving the cause of definite Christian instruction according to "the aforesaid doctrine", and strive for the realization of the ideal to establish and complete our own system of education, higher and lower, we could, with God's blessing, be a power for good even for the existing schools and for the cause of Christian instruction in general.

From whatever angle one considers this matter, therefore, the conclusion is always that it is our moral obligation, both with respect to our children before God, and with respect to the Christian School Movement, that we organize our own societies, and establish our own schools.

Those who harp on our "moral obligation" as an argument against a separate school movement, have no ground to stand on.