

also train them in godliness and in the catechism.” Every schoolteacher was required to subscribe to the Three Forms of Unity, and no one was to be hired as a teacher who was not a member in good standing in the Reformed church. To ensure that faithful instruction was being given, it was made the duty of the ministers and elders periodically to visit the schools.

The Protestant Reformed Churches share this interest in and concern for Christian education. This can be demonstrated. Our concern for Christian education comes out in our official creed, the Heidelberg Catechism, Lord’s Day 38. Lord’s Day 38 contains the Heidelberg Catechism’s explanation of the Fourth Commandment, “Remember the Sabbath Day, to keep it holy.” Question 103 asks: “What doth God require in the fourth commandment?” The answer begins: “First, that the ministry of the gospel *and the schools* be maintained” Clearly, these schools are the Christian day-schools, the schools established and maintained by the parents of the congregations. One of the prescribed questions put to each consistory at the annual church visitation is: “Does the consistory see to it that the parents send their children to the Christian school?” Article 41 of the Church Order prescribes that one of the questions asked of the delegates from each church at the conclusion of the classis meetings shall be: “Are the poor and the Christian schools cared for?”

Article 21 of the Church Order reads: “The consistories shall see to it that there are good Christian schools in which the parents have their children instructed according to the demands of the covenant.” Recently, our churches were involved in controversy, painful controversy, over the meaning and application of Article 21. We may hope that that controversy has sharpened our understanding of our calling, especially our calling as officebearers, and strengthened our resolve to carry it out.

Article 21 concerns the duty of consistories and officebearers in promoting the “good Christian schools.” Although Article 21 concerns the duty of the denomination’s consistories and officebearers, it has important implications for the denomination’s seminary. That ought to be obvious, if from nothing else, from the fact that the seminary is called to train future officebearers, ministers of the gospel, whose calling will be one day as members and presidents of consistories to promote the “good Christian schools.”

The “Good Christian Schools”

The “good Christian schools” of Church Order, Article 21 are, first of all, *schools*. Article 21 calls for the promotion of schools in the classic and historic sense of the word. This is simply the only kind of school that Article 21 could possibly have been referring to at the time at which it was written, no alternative to the traditional school being then available. This does justice to the language of Article 21, for these are schools in which parents *have* their children instructed, have them instructed by others, by the schoolmasters to whom reference was made in the earlier versions of the article. Besides, reference is made in the article to schools in which “parents” have their children instructed, parents in the plural, parents who have banded together in order jointly to establish and maintain these schools.

That Article 21 refers to schools in the traditional sense of the word is confirmed by the questions of Article 41 of the Church Order: “Are the poor and Christian schools cared for?” And this is confirmed by the questions for church visitation: “Does the consistory see to it that the parents *send* their children to the Christian school?” The parents send their children away to attend these schools. Clearly, the “good Christian schools” of Article 21 are the schools established by the community of believers, inasmuch as the children of believing parents belong to the covenant and church of God.