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FORUM

CALVIN SEMINARY

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COVER ESSAY

MISSIONS & THE MISSION OF THE CHRISTIAN SCHOOL

One of the privileges of my professional life over the last decade has been a sustained involvement with Christian day school education. There is a disturbing lament I've heard again and again: "We don't get the support for Christian education that we need from our Christian Reformed Church pastors and councils." I'm even told that some church leaders oppose the idea of separate Christian schools.

What could possibly be the reasons for this? It is important for those of us who, like me, support Christian education, to acknowledge that some of this opposition is well-intentioned, having the interest of God's kingdom at heart. Here's the argument:

Christian schools shelter and isolate our children from the broader world and hinder the church's outreach. They create closed communities in

which we become comfortable with "our kind" and teach them only "our language." We don't get to know those who are lost outside or learn to communicate the gospel to them. Our churches then become enclaves, colonies of the like-minded rather than missionary outposts effectively reaching the world with the good news of the gospel.

Seen in this way, Christian schools are obstacles to the church being mission-minded. When one mixes into this response the added complicating factor of race—"our kind" taking on an even more sinister and evil character—we can understand how the desire to be a more inclusive community might cause someone to think twice about supporting



JOHN BOLT

Professor of Systematic Theology at Calvin Seminary.

Christian day school education. If Christian education is little more than a prop for maintaining an exclusive, ethnically Dutch community, it should be questioned.

Sometimes this line of thought is combined with a stewardship angle where we have to choose between expensive Christian education or missions. But because Christian education is money

// The school is the institutional means by which a community passes on its essential memory and accumulated wisdom to succeeding generations. Teachers are the community's story tellers. //

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COVER ESSAY cont.
BOLT

spent on ourselves, isn't it selfish to put resources into Christian schools rather than into efforts to reach the lost? Here too the racial argument carries weight to the extent that poverty levels intersect with racial lines:

Now, though I happen to

but especially and formally or institutionally through schools. Churches and families also pass on their memories. It is schools that have as their distinct task passing on the public, communally-shaped memory to prepare a new generation for effective, productive, moral citizenship in the larger society.

Now it is no secret that

// The Christian School is not an obstacle to an inclusive, effectively witnessing church, but its essential partner. //

believe that this line of thought is wrong in many ways, I fully honor its moral weight. *We cannot maintain our commitment to Christian education with integrity if the end result means having to choose: Christian education or missions and outreach; Christian education or racial reconciliation; Christian education or an inclusive community committed to reaching the lost and needy.*

But is that the real choice we face in North America today? To address that even briefly in this article, a word or two about the nature and task of the school and about the current state of North American education.

What is the school's job? In a nutshell, the school is the institutional means by which a community passes on its essential memory and accumulated wisdom to succeeding generations. Teachers are the community's story tellers and the memory they help transmit includes the wisdom of rich cultural memory—language, symbols, history, laws, ideals—as well as practical skills such as multiplication tables and using a computer. Wisdom and lessons learned through generations of hard experience are passed on to succeeding ones in school. Not only through schools, of course,

public education in North America is in serious trouble today. (Please note that the remarks that follow are directed in general at public education and not at specific teachers or schools of which there are thankfully still many committed and excellent ones.) I happen to agree with observers who believe that the situation in public education is critical, perhaps even terminal. For those who remain unconvinced I recommend Thomas Sowell's *Inside American Education* or Myron Liebermann's *Public Education: An Autopsy*. (Canadian readers may want to consult Peter Emberly and Waller Newell's *Bankrupt Education: The Decline of Liberal Education*.)

What is the fundamental problem with public education

// If Christian education is little more than a prop for maintaining an exclusive, ethnically Dutch community, it should be questioned. //

today? In my book, *The Christian Story and the Christian School*, I argued that since a common, coherent, unified,

public vision of the social and moral order—an agreed upon communal memory— simply no longer exists in North America, public education cannot survive in its traditional role. Both in the United States and Canada this common memory has been replaced by a pluralism of conflicting multi-cultural memories and relativism is now the significant moral category and tolerance the moral watchword. Nicholas Wolterstorff has come to a similar conclusion: "Moral education cannot succeed in the common public schools of an amoral society" (*In Schooling Christians*, p. 19). What we have now in North America is an upside-down moral universe where many educators are reluctant to pass moral judgment on teenage fornication (even encouraging it through some sex education programs) while they make teenage smoking the grave moral issue of the 1990s. Christians who rightly are concerned about both issues would nonetheless give the former a definitely higher moral priority.

Moral relativism marginalizes Christian moral convictions and excludes them from the public arena or square. Secularism militantly demands a naked public square where religious voices are not heard because secularists want to restrict them to the private realm. In this kind of a world the Christian school boldly

existing as an educational alternative, is an annoying reminder to secularists that there are some parents who are not willing to turn their children over to the moral Molochs of our age. The secular mindset is totalitarian in its orientation and does not like public dissent; the Christian school is a protest against the secular village taking over the education of our children.

Today more and more parents are actively seeking alternatives to public education through home schooling, charter schools, and voucher plans. The Reformed community, thanks to its century-long tradition of superb, effective Christian day school education has a missionary obligation to share the insights and blessings of that work. How ironic that voices in our midst would question the practice of Christian education just as other evangelical Christians in North America are waking up to the need!

We must realize that Christian schools are not just for "our own." Educating children in the fear of the Lord, preparing them as citizens of Christ's kingdom for their task as good citizens in North America, is a positive, constructive and public task. The school is not primarily an agency for overt evangelism; that is the task of the church. But, the world is trying hard to suppress the Christian story and replace it with the darkness of pagan alternatives. When the Christian school does its proper task of passing on the common memory of a Christian tradition of discipleship, learning, and citizenship, it bears witness to the gospel of light. When this is done well, the Christian school is not an obstacle to an inclusive, effectively witnessing church, but its essential partner and the church should enthusiastically support Christian schools and teachers in their missionary task. ■

Henry Zwaanstra, Editor

CHRISTIAN EDUCATION in the Christian Reformed Church



**HENRY
ZWAANSTRA**

Professor of
Historical Theology
at Calvin Seminary.

This issue of the Forum is devoted to Christian education. It seemed right to devote an issue to this important subject. Reformed Christianity and education belong together. They mutually support one another. They should. *As Reformed Christians we believe that our world belongs to God the Creator and that it can be rightly known only as his creation, the place where we in his presence and according to his commission obediently live for him. Education prepares us precisely to do this.* Reformed churches therefore have a vested interest in distinctively Christian education at all levels. This is also true of the Christian Reformed Church.

Christian Elementary Education

Before 1890 Christian schools were parochial schools, owned and operated by Dutch-

speaking congregations and supervised by their consistories. Dutch was the language of the classroom. The religious welfare of the children and their preparation for life in the congregations were the primary motives for founding the schools. These schools did not flourish. They were too Dutch and their interests too narrowly focused on life in the church.

After 1890 Christian education in the Christian Reformed Church changed rapidly and fundamentally. A sign or placard, was often placed above the entry to a school with the words "American Christian School." The schools were no less Christian and Reformed than they were before. But their accent and purpose shifted. *These schools educated children for life in American society and did so in the language of the land. They were also parent owned and operated schools.* The Rev. Klass Kuiper, an immigrant to America in 1891, is generally considered the father of the Christian school movement in the CRC. He once said that if he knew he were going to die tomorrow, he would want to write, so that it would appear in print after his death. "My little children, above all other things be concerned about Christian education." B. J. Bennink, a Christian school teacher and early leader in the Christian school movement in the CRC, said that the ministers and members of the CRC were persuaded by Kuiper to follow the correct line running from the Reformed view of the covenant to Christian schools. Kuiper was convinced that Christian parents were obligated by God to provide

their children Christian nurture and education. Christian school education occupied a strategic place in this education and nurture. In the school the teacher assumed the parents' position, instructing and nurturing the children in the parents' name and place. *Kuiper's belief that education was primarily the responsibility of parents rather than the church or the civil community soon became widely accepted in the CRC.* Societies for Christian education came into existence and schools were established in many places.

Christian Higher Education

Christian college education in the Christian Reformed Church is rooted in the founding of the church's theological school (Calvin Theological Seminary) in 1876. For many years the Theological School had a literary department and a theological department. In 1900 the literary department was expanded to include an academy or highschool. Four years later, the literary department was further expanded to what was called "John Calvin Junior College." In 1921 Calvin College became a four-year degree-granting educational institution.

// Christian education at all levels...is...a good heritage, eminently worth sharing with the larger Christian community... //

After Dr. Abraham Kuyper, leader of the nineteenth-century Calvinist movement in the Netherlands visited America in 1898, advocates for Christian higher education in the CRC increasingly made Calvinism and the principles for Christian living and learning associated with it the basis for founding a college. From the beginning, Calvinism not only gave force and meaning to Calvin College's educational work and scholarship, but it was also the very reason for the school's existence.

In addition to Calvin, the CRC today is affiliated with other Christian institutions of higher education: Reformed Bible College (1939), Dordt College (1955), Trinity Christian College (1959), the Institute for Christian Studies (1967), King's College (1979) and Redeemer Reformed Christian College (1982). These educational institutions have helped the CRC remain intellectually alert and honest. In turn, the CRC has helped these schools remain faithful to God and his Word.

Christian education at all levels in the CRC is by the grace of God a good heritage, eminently worth sharing with the larger Christian community in North America. ■



JOHN COOPER

Professor of Philosophical Theology at Calvin Seminary

A Diverse Educational Community

The time when virtually all Christian school supporters were Christian Reformed and virtually all Christian Reformed people supported Christian schools is passing away, if it isn't already gone. This trend is lamentable if it means that Christian Reformed Church members are losing the vision of God's Kingdom that generated the Christian school movement. It is deplorable if it indicates that some of us would rather spend our resources pursuing the North American life-style.

But the growing diversity in the Christian school community is also an encouraging and edifying development. It is wonderful that people of other denominations and non-Dutch backgrounds wish to support, to enroll their children, and even to teach in "our" schools. Praise God that the vision of educating children for citizenship in his Kingdom is broader than the CRC. Thank the Lord that the cultural and ethnic diversity of the body of Christ and many of our communities is beginning to be repre-

CHRISTIAN EDUCATION: *the old vision for a new community*

sented in some of our schools.

If the Christian school movement is to remain healthy and fruitful in the twenty-first century, we must continue to promote the cause enthusiastically within the CRC as we become a more denominationally and culturally diverse supporting community.

Keeping Perspective

My concern in this article is how to retain the particular perspective which motivated and shaped our Christian school movement as we become a more pluralistic and inclusive community. Are we faced with a dilemma? Do Dutch Reformed ideas conflict with the growth of a diverse constituency? Some of us worry that it will be necessary to "dumb down" our Reformed perspective and capitulate to "generic evangelicalism" in order to keep the numbers up. Others are persuaded that "burning the wooden shoes" requires us to move beyond the mindset of dead male educators with Dutch names like Kuyper, Waterink, Jaarsma, Meeter, Zylstra, Spykman, and Beversluis. And assuming we ought to maintain the distinctive perspective of our tradition's schools, how can this be achieved? Should board members and teachers be required to belong to the CRC or another confessionally Reformed church? And what about parents and children? These are the kinds of questions that arise as Christian schools become increasingly diverse in faculty, student body, and constituency.

I believe it is a mistake to pit an inclusive community and the Reformed vision of Christian education against each other. In fact faithfulness

to the traditional perspective will both move us toward greater denominational and cultural diversity and provide a framework that unites us. The roots of a Christian approach to learning and an inclusive Christian community are the same. We must continue to pursue both.

**God's Kingdom:
The Basis for
Christian Education**

Let me explain. Much that is distinctive and valuable about the kind of Christian schools typically supported by Christian Reformed people has been spawned and nurtured in the tradition of Reformed Christianity associated with the name of Abraham Kuyper. This perspective was brought to North America by Dutch Reformed immigrants and thus has both ethnic and denominational ties. Christian school supporters have mainly been CRC

Holy Scripture. He understood that biblical religion is not merely about salvation from sins and the way to heaven after death. The Christian life is more than personal piety and morality. It is also seeking the Kingdom of God in all of our earthly lives. The sovereign, triune God is at work redeeming his people and the fallen creation, his Kingdom. To be a Christian is to live all of life through Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit in covenantal love and obedience to that God. It is to seek God's glory and do his will in marriage and family, work and recreation, art and science, education and political life, as well as in worship and personal holiness. Following Christ includes the formal education of children to equip them too to seek God's Kingdom on earth as it is in heaven.

The biblical proclamation of God's Kingdom has implications for the content as well as the purpose of education. On one

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members. The CRC officially promotes Christian education and has adopted a Contemporary Testimony, *Our World Belongs to God*, which articulates the vision that supports and guides it.

But the perspective itself is neither ethnically Dutch nor merely Christian Reformed. *Kuyper intended to unpack as fully as possible God's message to all people in all cultures as proclaimed in*

hand Kuyper insisted that God's faithfulness to his creation and to his image in humanity in spite of the fall makes learning and knowing a common human enterprise that cuts across religious and philosophical differences. He recognized that the facts of arithmetic, chemistry, history, and basic morality are common to Christians and non-Christians alike. On the other hand, he realized that the

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EDUCATION... cont.

COOPER

fall and redemption through Jesus Christ affect human knowledge. He pointed out that Christians and non-Christians do not finally understand nature, humanity, history, social, political, and economic life, the arts, morality, and religion in the

of the body of Christ, the church. But Kuyper distinguished between the church as "organism" and "institution." The "organism" is the body of Christ, the community of believers expressing itself in various social forms. It manifests itself in marriage, the family, the pursuit of livelihood, recreational activities, and of course

affirmation of particular doctrines, should anything beyond genuine Christian faith and life be expected? For those providing leadership, an affirmation of an "educational confession" is necessary, a clear statement of basic biblical teaching and its implications for Christian schooling. Board members, teachers, and voting association members should wholeheartedly affirm the biblical vision of God's Kingdom from which the rationale and subject matter of Christian education flow. Perhaps the Nicene Creed combined with a statement such as *Our World Belongs to God* could serve. People of various denominational and cultural backgrounds can readily affirm them. Teachers, whatever their heritage, should be able to affirm this confession and effectively apply it in their teaching. School boards should promote continuing education for teachers so that they can present a Christian perspective in their courses.

lem of funding becomes increasingly pressing in a denominationally and socio-economically diverse community.

Kuyper held that the broader Christian community, not just parents and congregations, is responsible for the education of our children. It is simply wrong when Christian education becomes a luxury that only the upper middle class can afford. Biblical and Reformed teachings about stewardship and social justice enjoin us to work toward providing the

// It is simply wrong when Christian education becomes a luxury that only the upper middle class can afford //

same way. They do not always affirm the same things to be true. In important ways, therefore, a biblical perspective makes a difference to the content of education. This perspective is the hallmark of the Reformed approach to Christian education.

Of course the Christian school movement has reflected its Dutch-American, Christian Reformed background. But today it has many supporters, among them Reformed Nigerians, Christian Reformed Native Americans, Korean Presbyterians, Latin-American Evangelicals, and African-American Baptists, who enthusiastically embrace this biblical vision of God's Kingdom while at the same time gently pointing out the unnecessarily narrow denominational and social cultural applications it has sometimes been given. *We must continue to embrace the biblical world and life view and nurture our children in it as we become an increasingly diverse community.*

education as they take shape in various societies and cultures. The church as "institution"--congregations and denominations--is one centrally important way the church as organism is present in the world. Kuyper located responsibility for education primarily with parents and the broader Christian community, the church as organism, not with the church as institution. *Thus Reformed Christian schools are not "parochial," owned and governed by congregations or a denomination. And so the Christian school movement, though traditionally involving mostly Christian Reformed people, is not an exclusively denominational enterprise.* According to the perspective that nurtured it, Christian education associations are open to and in need of members of the body of Christ from many denominations and cultural backgrounds who share that vision of God's Kingdom.

What should be required of those who send their children? While commitment to the philosophy of the school is highly desirable, shouldn't even children from non-Christian families be admitted provided that the parents agree to their receiving Christian education?

// The broader Christian Community, not just parents and congregations, is responsible for the education of our children //

Stewardship and Justice for all

Finance is a second issue that arises in a diverse Christian school community. Traditionally, Christian Reformed churches have helped member families who need tuition assistance. This is a fine practice and does not conflict with the non-parochial status of the schools. However, some congregations cannot offer much help. And non-Christian Reformed families usually do not receive such assistance from their churches. Thus the prob-

portunity for Christian education for all who want it. An increasingly diverse community will include more who cannot afford it. But it will also include more of those who can help provide it.

Fundraisers must turn to the broader Christian community, renew the vision of education, remind us of our responsibilities, and devise new ways of securing long-term support. We should also pursue Kuyper's view that a truly just government does not discriminate financially against those citizens who wish to exercise their religion freely in the education of their children.

The old vision of Christian education--reformed, refocused, and consistently applied--is still what we need as we become a new, more diverse community. ■

The Body of Christ: A Diverse Community

Kuyper's view of church, school, and Christian community promotes such diversity. To be a Christian is to be a member

What Must be Required

Diversity inevitably raises the question of the level of Christian commitment that should be required for participation in the Christian school community. If not membership in a particular denomination or

WHY CHRISTIAN COLLEGE EDUCATION MATTERS



CORNELIUS PLANTINGA, JR.

Dean of the Chapel at Calvin College

Christian college education brings the whole Christian education project to its climax, and we ought therefore to support it with enthusiasm. I want to argue this without condemning Christians who prayerfully choose secular higher education. I want to argue for Christian higher education, not quarrel over it.

But first a question. *Suppose parents do want Christian higher education for their son or daughter. How much do parents' wishes count? Don't sons and daughters decide for themselves where they'll attend college?*

Yes and no. Of course, sons and daughters get a vote, often the decisive vote, on where they'll go to college. But parents get a vote too, and especially if they are offering money for tuition. Money talks, and one of the things it says is what matters to you. Suppose you say to your child, "Pat, I want to contribute to your college

education, and I'll double the contribution (or I'll make up the difference) if you choose a Christian college." If you say something like this, you get a vote and your child gets an incentive.

More important, if you vote in this way you will also get a chance to explain your vote, which means you will get a chance, once more, to be a witness for Jesus Christ and for his kingdom.

But what will you say when you witness? What's the positive case for a Christian college education?

The case is the same as it is for earlier Christian education, but with higher stakes. The case centers on the fact that Jesus Christ has a very long reach. The Scriptures say that our Lord came "to gather up all things," or "to reconcile all things" to God—including "powers" and "invisible things" (Eph. 1:10; Col. 1:16, 20). His reach extends beyond Bethlehem, beyond Judea and Samaria, beyond even the outermost parts of the earth. The Savior's reach extends to all the provinces of the universe, to every place where the powers have taken their hold, to every place where God's creatures battle "not against enemies of blood and flesh, but against the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil" (Eph. 6:12).

To gain a Christian

"... in a fallen world good and evil often twist and twine around each other so that it's hard to see where one starts and the other leaves off."

education is to learn to identify these powers at the same time as we identify God's good creation, the ways we have corrupted it, and the power of Christ that has come to redeem it. To gain a Christian higher education is to do this with maturity, with the force and subtlety that shape a person's view of the whole world, maybe forever, and that also shape his or her sense of vocation within the world. After all, as a Christian sees it, our vocation is much bigger than our job, and college is therefore much more than job training. That's what raises the stakes. College-age people are ready to settle on a philosophy of life, including a philosophy of good and evil. They are ready to decide how the rest of their life might go—what to do, where to work, whom to serve. To have a shot at getting all this lined up with the kingdom of Christ instead of with the kingdom of "this present darkness," they will need intellectual and spiritual guidance that is powerfully Christian.

Where will they get it?

The main trouble with secular higher education is that it cannot provide a Christian student with the help she needs to form a truthful view of the clash between the kingdoms. In

fact, secular higher education today is full of a kind of moral relativism in which this clash doesn't even matter.

Let me give an example. In the June 27, 1997, issue of *The Chronicle of Higher Education* Kay Haugaard, a professor at Pasadena City College, says that she has been teaching Shirley Jackson's story "The Lottery" for a number of years. This is a story that is set in what appears to be an ordinary American village where people are "warm" and "loving" and "earnest." In this village there is an annual lottery that people conduct with all the seriousness of a ritual. One day the Hutchinson family—father, mother, son Dave, and twelve-year-old daughter Tess—arrive for the annual drawing. And when the father draws a ticket for the whole family, "nothing prepares the first-time reader for what happens next: Everyone, including four-year-old Dave, attacks Tess Hutchinson and stones her to death." The lottery turns out to be a ritual of human sacrifice.

Professor Haugaard then remarks on a recent round of student responses to the story. One student expressed mild surprise that stoning still happened in the U.S. Another said that the story was pretty boring till the end. But, she said, "the sacrifice part was neat." Another student said that he thought the story was

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PLANTINGA

all right, but that he wasn't too excited about it. An elementary school teacher who was taking the class allowed that the ending was pretty surprising, but that, hey, the folks in this town did have their reason for the sacrifice, namely, to make their crops grow. Not one student could get himself to condemn the villagers' action. All took it for granted that some people do things one way, and some another, and who are we to judge? A fifty-year-old nurse in the class reported that she taught a course in multicultural understanding and that in this course she instructs students not to judge any parts of other people's culture.

There it is. That's moral relativism. And Professor Haugaard's report is followed in the same issue of *The Chronicle* by a piece from a Hamilton

-not the culture of Mississippi slavery in the 1850s, not apartheid in South Africa, not the Nazi final solution to the problem of racial differences. Students will not condemn these practices as wrong because to them such condemnation amounts to moral imperialism.

I believe that it would take an unusual Christian student to prevail in such an atmosphere. I don't deny that it can happen. An unusual Christian student would rise to the challenge of trying to figure out exactly what's wrong with moral relativism from a Christian point of view. He would telephone people for help, read books outside of class, and he might even have the courage to try out his conviction in class. His idea would be that you can dare to be a Daniel only if you spend time in the lions' den, and his idea is worth considering.

But I fear it won't do for most Christian students. They will be busy with a hundred other things, and not take the time or spend the effort to sort out the good and evil in what they encounter on campus. They will find it easier to go with the flow. And the flow of life in secular colleges is for relativism, and against objective right and wrong. It's for naturalism (the idea that nature is as high as reality gets) and against supernaturalism. It's for human autonomy and against human obedience to the law of God. *Some professors on secular campuses make it their mission to strip students of religious faith because religious faith is, after all, just another superstition.*

To expect a Christian student to stand strong against these forces without caving in, on the one hand, and without hardening into reactionary anti-intellectualism, on the other hand, is to expect a lot. And if we also want students to work up a Christian philosophy of life

without the help of their professors, we expect even more. Following Paul in Romans 12: 9, our sons and daughters may want very much to hate what is evil and to cling to what is good. *The problem is that in a fallen world good and evil often twist and twine around each other so that it's hard to see where one starts and the other leaves off.* Some of us have spent decades trying to learn to see this at a college level, always supported by a cloud of Christian witnesses. Are we to hope that our nineteen-year-olds will do it in a few years on a secular campus?

I propose a more excellent way. Why not do everything we can to help our college-age sons and daughters learn--with adult power--to form a Christian vision of reality? Why not encourage them to think about psychology with the help of professors who really believe that human beings have been made in the image of God, and therefore possess great freedom and great accountability? Why

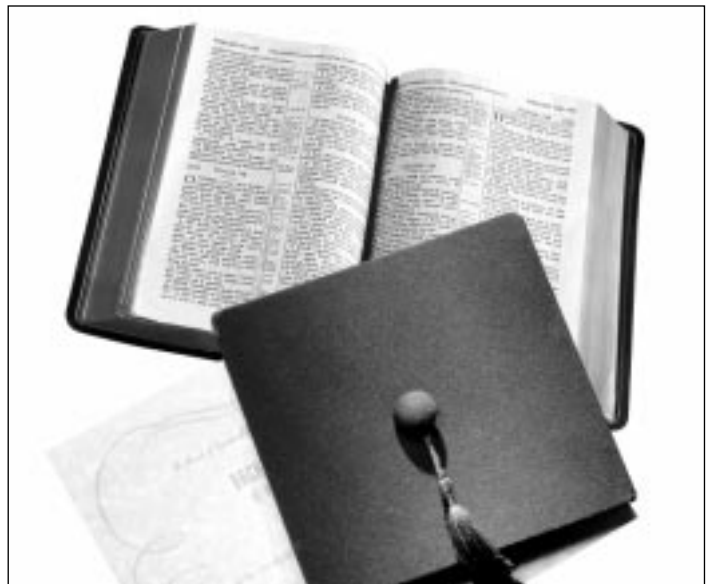
not encourage them to think about literature with the help of professors who really believe that delight in beauty is part of God's shalom, and that literature is not just a power tool to get other people to bend to our wishes? Why not encourage them to think about the irreducible complexity of intracellular systems with the help of professors who really believe that the world right down to the level of the bacterial flagellum bears the fingerprints of God?

A good Christian college gives students a vision of the kingdom of Christ, and educates them to find their place of service within this kingdom. Such a college will help students to resist evil and to embrace goodness. Given our tendency to self-deception, a good Christian college will turn us again and again to the revelation of Scripture that corrects and renews our very idea of good and evil.

Is there anything better for our sons and daughters? ■

//
College-age people are ready to settle on a philosophy of life, including a philosophy of good and evil.
//

College professor, Robert L. Simon, who tells of students who claim personally to dislike what the Nazis were up to, but then add a tolerant question: "But who's to say they were wrong?" Professor Simon remarks that students in his classes in recent years have asked similar questions about apartheid, slavery, and ethnic cleansing. These students take it for granted that we may never even criticize, let alone condemn, the moral views or practices of some other culture-



// **A good Christian College gives students a vision of the kingdom of Christ, and educates them to find their place of service in this kingdom.** //

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WE WILL, GOD HELPING US!

Milton Kuyers



Christian Businessman

In 1978, the Brookfield Christian Reformed Church, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, took a bold step in meeting its corporate responsibility for the Christian day school education of its children. The church agreed to provide the full cost of Christian education for all of the children of the congregation from kindergarten through college.

Why did we do this
as a church?

First, because of the commitment we as a congregation made at the time the children were baptized. In answer to the question, "Will you, the members of this congregation, agree to assist these parents in the training and nurturing of these children in the Christian faith?", we always, all together, answered, "We will, God helping us!" After making this promise, we wondered whether we, as a church, were doing anything at all to meet our commitment, especially as this

// ...we believed that it was right for all members of our church to join together as a covenant community, that all our children could be educated in Christian schools. //

commitment applied to Christian day school education.

Secondly, because we wanted to answer honestly the church visitors' (nearby pastors) question to our council: "Do you, as a council, actively promote Christian day school education in this church?" We had always answered very positively that we did. But we could give little substantive proof that we were doing anything at all as a church to support our answer. Additionally, we began to see the stress that the cost of Christian education caused some of our families when they tried to decide responsibly in the light of Scripture whether their children should attend the Christian school.

And finally, we believed that, if we as a church provided Christian education for all who desired it without requiring any contributions from the parents to cover educational costs, the funds given for this ministry would be income-tax deductible. We believed that the entire church community would benefit from this procedure

because all contributions to this educational ministry would provide tax savings. These savings could then in turn be contributed to the church's education fund, thus making it easier to sustain this fund and ministry. Even if there were no tax benefits, we believed that it was right for all members of our church to join together as a covenant community, so that all of our children could be educated in Christian schools.

How has this system
worked?

In the twenty years the fund has been in existence, it has never had a financial shortfall. Ten years ago the Internal Revenue Service challenged our plan. We successfully answered the challenge. The local IRS office informed us that the statement we prepared supporting our ministry had been reviewed in Washington, D. C. and that our position was upheld. We no longer hear parents complain about the burden Christian day

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Editorial Committee:
Henry Zwaanstra, Editor
Harry Boonstra
John Cooper
Ronald Feenstra
Jeffrey Weima

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school education causes them. Our families now, less stressfully and more objectively, can decide before God and his Word to send their children to Christian schools. Our entire membership -- parents with children in school, parents whose children are not yet in school, grandparents, and unmarried single members -- all together raise the funds necessary to make our commitment to Christian education work.

We praise God for blessing this effort for the past twenty years. We pray that God will continue to bless it in the future. We believe that our way of providing Christian day school education answers the question put to us when our covenant children were baptized. "WE WILL, GOD HELPING US!"