

Perspectives

IN COVENANT EDUCATION

Chapel

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Statement of Purpose

Perspectives in Covenant Education is a journal regulated and published quarterly, in November, February, May, and August by the Protestant Reformed Teachers' Institute. The purpose of this magazine, in most general terms, is to advance the cause of distinctively Christian education as it is conceived in the Protestant Reformed community. More specifically, the magazine is intended to serve as an encouragement and an inducement toward individual scholarship, and a medium for the development of distinctive principles and methods of teaching. The journal is meant to be a vehicle of communication, not only within the profession, but within the Protestant Reformed community and within the Christian community in general.

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Contents

Editorial

Radical Chapels **4**

by Tom Bergman

Feature

The Purpose of Chapel **7**

by Rev. Douglas Kuiper

Contributions

The Cosmic Character of the
Covenant **11**

by Prof. David J. Engelsma

Promoting Ethical, Christian
Communications in Your
Classroom **21**

by Joel Minderhoud

Book Reviews

Dr. Oma **33**

reviewed by Lois Kregel

Twilight **35**

reviewed by Tom Bergman

Radical Chapels

Tom Bergman

The journal *Christian School Education*, which is published by the Association of Christian Schools International (ACSI), used the theme “Christian Schools: Fulfilling the Great Commandment and the Great Commission” for its 2008-2009 volume year. Several of the articles in those issues reminded me of how radically different is our approach to Christian education. What distinguishes our kind of Christian education should be evident in our teaching and studying, our fellowship and play, and our programs and chapels. Yes, even our chapels should be radical—“radical” in the sense of “to the root”—that is, oriented toward the covenant of God, which is a root principle for how we treat the children of believing parents.

One of the issues in *Christian School Education* (CSE) last year was entitled “Making Disciples in the Christian School.” Some of the articles were called “The Christian School and the Great Commission” by Dr. Glen Schultz, a Christian school headmaster and associate pastor; and “Making Disciples: A Matter of the Heart” by Dr. Donovan Graham of Covenant College in Georgia. Such titles led me to anticipate arguments promoting the idea of using Christian schools as tools for evangelizing and converting the children.

Thankfully, I can say that the articles I read were not as bad as that. However, there were tendencies toward phrases and topics such as “student in grade two comes to faith in Christ” and the more worrisome claim that “community—or more fully stated, persons-in-relationship—is the central, organizing concept of theological construction.”¹ Elsewhere we find “teachers are in the business of

1 Derek J. Keenan, “Christian Schools: Fulfilling the Commands of Christ,” *CSE* 12(1), 4.

making disciples” and “redemption in a broken world” and “attempt to change the world from what it is to what it should be.”²

Statements like these indicate either that certain terms are being used differently than the way we are accustomed to using them, or that the focus of these ACSI writers is radically different than our Reformed perspective. To me the phrase “making disciples” speaks of the initial, one-time change of a heart of stone into a heart of flesh, something only the sovereign, gracious God can do. Dr. Graham apparently uses the words “disciple making” to refer to the continual instruction and growth of those who are already in Christ. In light of his intended meaning, Graham makes some valid and useful points. It is exactly because of our compassion as disciples of Christ that we discipline students and set high expectations for them. He also encourages Christian teachers to place confidence in the Holy Spirit when our mistakes and inadequacies seem overwhelming.

While Graham is also quite candid about his “redeem the world for Christ” bias, it is Schultz who is closer to the target. He reminds us that the great commission of Matthew 28:19, 20 has to do with more than evangelism and missions. The words “teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you” includes the very essence of Christian education of the young people entrusted to us. His related warning that “too many Christians have bought into the lie that there is some knowledge that is spiritually neutral” was appropriately selected as a pull-out quote.³

However, what should be more clearly stated in CSE’s theme and emphasis is a more proper understanding of who our students are. Holding to the promises of God’s covenant and learning from the unfolding revelation of these promises in Holy Scripture, we believe that God often works in generations. God uses believing parents to be the instructors of the elect children among them. Therefore, the teachers *in loco parentis* treat these students as members in Christ. They are disciples of Jesus Christ. They possess eternal salvation. It would be more accurate to say that Christian schools are not in the business of making disciples. Rather, we take the little disciples of Jesus into our classrooms and teach these children of the Father more about how to love and fear him according to the Bible in every subject in the curriculum.

This is a *radix* (Latin: a root) for us. As a fundamental principle of our schools

2 Donovan L. Graham, “Making Disciples: A Matter of the Heart,” *CSE* 12(3), 8, 9.

3 Glen Schultz, “The Christian School and the Great Commission,” *CSE* 12(1), 12, 13.

it should flow out into our chapel exercises, too. The prayers, the speeches, the singing (tunes and lyrics included)—all of the worship there—should be in harmony with God’s steadfast faithfulness to the elect.

We would not want chapels that leave the students wondering if we view them as disciples of Christ or if we merely want them to be. We want unambiguous chapels in which children of light hear that they are children of light and why they should walk as children of light.

We would not want chapels that fire up the students to redeem the world for Christ or further the kingdom of God. We want chapels that help to equip them as victors now for life and work in the kingdom that Christ has already redeemed in principle.

We would not want chapels that focus primarily on winning disciples to Christ. We want chapels that nurture, admonish, encourage, refresh, and invigorate students who are already counted as followers of Christ.

We would not want chapels that tell the students only that they ought to follow the “first and great” commandment. We want chapels that also tell them *why* they ought to love God with heart, soul, mind, and strength—out of gratitude for God’s covenant faithfulness.

Yes, it would be good if God used chapel-time worship in our schools to help to bring someone to conversion, but our chapels must concentrate on the radical, the root, our reason for existence—worshiping with the students and teaching our younger fellow believers to grow in their knowledge of and covenant fellowship with Jehovah God.

The Purpose of Chapel

Rev. Douglas Kuiper

Chapel is a routine part of the life of our schools. Whether weekly, monthly, or less frequently, the students and faculty are required to gather for chapel.

Why? What is chapel's purpose, particularly in Protestant Reformed schools?

Being conscious of this purpose will enable the teacher or outside speaker to plan the chapel accordingly.

Chapel's purpose: following from the nature and purpose of the Christian day school

Scripture does not tell us in so many words what the purpose of chapel is. We must discover this purpose by observation and on the basis of Scriptural principles.

What happens at chapel is a clue in our search to know chapel's purpose. At chapel, the entire school—students and faculty—gathers for prayer, singing, reading of Scripture, and spiritual meditation on the truths of Scripture. In some way, chapel manifests our covenant relationship with God.

Why the school gathers in chapel follows from the nature and purpose of our Protestant Reformed day schools. Our schools are extensions of the home, established as an aid to covenant parents, whom God requires to raise their children in Jehovah's fear.

The command to raise our children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord comes to parents primarily. Fulfilling this obligation requires us to address the spiritual needs of our children's *minds*, teaching them a host of subjects—mathematics, history, science, and others—on the basis of the Scriptures. We are also to address the spiritual needs of the child's *heart*—teaching them to be pious, and to show love toward God and the neighbor in all of life.

Wherever possible, Protestant Reformed parents band together to fulfill this obligation. We do so for a practical reason: a broad liberal arts education, based on the Scriptures, and with a view to the spiritual/mental/ psychological growth

of covenant children, is a demanding task—one which is beyond the ability of many parents today to fulfill. And we do so for a principle reason: as members of God's covenant and Christ's church, we work together to carry out our God-given calling because we have the same goal, because we recognize that certain fellow members of the covenant are gifted and equipped to teach better than we, and because we thus manifest the unity of the body of Christ. The statements made above are based on Scripture passages such as Genesis 18:19, Deuteronomy 6:7, Psalm 78:1-8, and I Corinthians 12.

Chapel's purpose: communal instruction and communal worship

If chapel's purpose follows from the purpose of the school, and if the school's purpose is to instruct our children in Jehovah's fear, then such instruction is the first purpose of chapel.

In the classroom, this instruction is tailored to individual students according to age. In chapel, the instruction is communal—it is given to the entire school body. This communal instruction recognizes that students of all ages have certain spiritual needs in common: to learn how rightly to show respect for authority, how rightly to show kindness and love for fellow students, how rightly to fight pride and to manifest humility in a school setting, how to relate to others in a godly way, etc. Perhaps God has sent a heavy trial into the lives of some of the students, which affects their school life; at chapel, the students can be taught how to bear each other's burdens.

The instruction given at chapel is aimed at the hearts and souls of the covenant children, more than at their minds. That is, chapel is not an opportunity for communal instruction in the liberal arts. Perhaps an outside speaker comes to give a science demonstration which will be of interest to the whole school, so that the whole school assembles. There is a place for such in our schools. But such an assembly is not chapel. Chapel is an opportunity to open up the Scriptures with a view to the spiritual growth of the students in godliness.

The second purpose of chapel is the communal worship by the school of our triune, covenant God, in whom we are united.

In indicating this to be a purpose of chapel, I do not suggest that chapel is an aspect of the church's official, public worship. Chapel is under the supervision, not of any local consistory, but of the school board, which functions on behalf of the parents who maintain the school association. Chapel is communal worship of

God, being an extension of private, family worship.

Perhaps we think too seldom of our calling to worship God privately as families. God requires covenant families to pray together, read and meditate on God's Word together, and sing together. In giving the Lord's Prayer, Christ not only taught his church how to pray in public worship, but also taught individual believers how to pray privately. In commanding the church to sing God-glorifying songs (Eph. 5:19 and Col. 3:16) God regulates what his children sing in all of life, not only in the church's worship service. And Psalm 1:2 indicates that the godly man, delighting in God's law, meditates on it privately, day and night. God's Word requires individual worship. But in a covenant family, the father not only encourages his wife and children to engage in individual worship; he also gathers the family together to worship as a unit. To do this is an aspect of the duty of parents toward children.

As an extension of the home, our good Christian day schools properly implement the calling to worship. Every day, in each classroom, time is spent in prayer, singing, and the reading and explanation of Scripture. The teacher must see it to be his or her calling to lead the class in prayer, singing, and meditation on the Word, because God requires families to worship and the school is an extension of the home.

But communal worship by the whole school in chapel is also fitting, for the whole student body and the entire faculty and staff are members of the body of Christ. The communal worship in chapel manifests the spiritual unity of the school.

Chapel's purpose: implications

That chapel's purpose is communal instruction and worship implies that the school should gather for this purpose regularly and frequently. This does not mean we must regularly bring in an outside speaker, invite an outside audience of parents and grandparents, and have a classroom prepare a special number—all of which seem to be part of “chapel” for us. Faith Christian School in Randolph holds “chapel” four times a year in the church sanctuary; but the students gather weekly, without inviting outsiders, to be led by the principal in singing and prayer, and briefly to hear any appropriate admonitions. Such regular and frequent gatherings are also communal instruction and worship.

The content of any given chapel must be governed by this purpose. Particularly, the songs sung at chapel must be chosen carefully. Of course, our Psalter is an aid in this regard; as members of the Protestant Reformed Churches, we

understand that the Psalter numbers, being versifications of Scripture, are God-glorifying and appropriate for our singing. When on rare occasion some numbers are sung in chapel which are not Psalter numbers—as at a special Christmas chapel, or when a choir presents a number—these songs must be God-glorifying, have solid content, be appropriate for worship, and serve the purpose of instruction. Also the speech given at a chapel must be governed by this purpose. Let the speaker bring the Scriptures, whether in one passage or several passages, to bear on the needs of the students.

What implication does chapel's purpose have in selecting a speaker? Those who best know the students and their particular needs are best suited to speak at chapel. Pastors know the needs of children generally; and in places such as Randolph, where the pastor is the pastor of all the students, the pastor might well know the needs of children specifically. Parents also know the spiritual needs of children, and thus could speak at chapel. Especially in larger schools, attended by children of various congregations, when an outside speaker is asked to present the speech, he should be made familiar with some of the particular needs of that school's student body.

But especially I have in mind *teachers*. Chapel is not the worship of the church institute; it is the extension of family worship. The Christian teacher, as partaker of Christ's anointing, is *able* to open up the Scriptures; the teacher, as standing in the place of the parents, has *authority* to open up the Scriptures to these children; and the teacher, as knowing the students and student body, is in a *unique position* to apply the Scriptures directly to the immediate spiritual needs of the children. Still distinct in my memory, and the memories of others with whom I have spoken, are chapels given by *teachers*. Why? I believe the answer is that, knowing the students in the school setting better than anyone else, the teacher is best equipped to drive a point home to the spiritual edification of the students.

Finally, that chapel has this purpose implies that chapel is an opportunity to teach children how to receive instruction from God's Word, and how to worship. Before chapel, the students can be reminded that they must attend chapel to worship and receive instruction. After chapel, the teacher does well to lead the class in discussing and applying the main points of the chapel speech—much like what happens on Sunday evenings in my home, when we gather for “sermon review.”

May our understanding of chapel's purpose spur teachers on in their calling to teach our children in Jehovah's fear. And may the Spirit impress on our children the need to receive such instruction, and to worship, to his glory.

The Cosmic Character of the Covenant¹

Prof. David J. Engelsma

Introduction

The good Christian school, that is, a Protestant Reformed Christian school, particularly Hope Protestant Reformed Christian School, is based on the covenant of God with his elect people in Jesus Christ. The covenant promise, both in the Old Testament and in the New Testament, applies to the children of believers: I will be your God *and the God of your children* (Gen. 17:7; Acts 2:39). God realizes his promise to our children in the way of the parents' instructing their children, and seeing to the instruction of their children, in his word and in the light of his word. Therefore, God said to Abraham, "I know him [Abraham], that he will command his children...and they shall keep the way of the LORD...that the LORD may bring upon Abraham that which he has spoken of him" (Gen. 18:19). In the covenant with believing parents, there is a demand to the parents: "Bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord" (Eph. 6:4).

The distinctively godly and Christian instruction of our children is covenantal. As a duty of the parents and other lovers of the covenant of God, it is our part in the covenant: the service of God that friend-servants in the bond of the covenant are required, and privileged, to render to God, their sovereign. As the effectual means God uses to fulfill his promise, to be the God of our children, instruction of the children with the accompanying discipline is the covenant promise in operation—divine covenant power.

Regarding the instruction given by the Christian school, the question is, "How is the instruction given to the children in science, mathematics, history,

1 This is the text of a speech given at a meeting of the Parents and Teachers Association of the Hope Protestant Reformed Christian School, Walker, Michigan on October 8, 2009. At the request of the staff of *Perspectives*, the speech is published in this magazine.

geography, literature, and the other courses of a liberal arts education related to the covenant?” Instruction in the history and doctrines of the Bible is obviously related to the covenant. So also, no doubt, is instruction in church history related directly to the covenant. But what about the other subjects, which, of course, are the bulk of the curriculum of the Christian school?

The danger is that parents, children, and even teachers see no real connection between these subjects and the covenant. Then their attitude is that Bible is the only truly important subject. They demand, learn, and teach the other subjects merely because this is necessary if the students are to get along in twenty-first century America, and make a living.

In the end, this attitude jeopardizes the very existence of the Christian school. The only reason for the Christian school is to avoid the evils of the state schools (which is not to minimize this great benefit of the Christian school).

I propose that instruction in all the subjects of the curriculum, not only Bible and church history, is related to the covenant because the covenant is cosmic in nature.

The Idea

The word “cosmic” literally means “pertaining to the reality of the *world*,” or “*universe*.” The covenant of God with believing parents and their children is vast. It extends to, and encompasses, the world, that is, the universe of the heaven and the earth that God made in the beginning, according to Genesis 1:1: “In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.”

The English word “cosmic” derives from the Greek word “*kosmos*.” The Holy Spirit used this word in the New Testament sometimes to refer to all nations of men, but at other times to refer to the entire creation of heaven and earth that God made in the beginning. The much quoted but little understood John 3:16 reads, “God so loved the world,” where the Greek for “world” is “*kosmos*” (in the accusative case), referring to the universe, whose creation is described in Genesis 1. God loves this world. Although those who believe in Jesus Christ, according to their eternal election by God, are specially the objects of the divine love, the creation shares in this love of God.

Repeatedly, the New Testament uses the word “*kosmos*” in the phrase, “before the foundation of the world,” for example, Ephesians 1:4: “According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world.” That is, God chose us before he created the universe.

And Romans 1:20 teaches that God reveals the truth of himself “from the creation of the world” (Greek: *kosmos*).

When I contend that the covenant has a cosmic character, I am denying, first, that the covenant only includes people. Second, I am denying that the covenant of God with us, his chosen people, only concerns our salvation. And, third, I am denying that our calling in the covenant is exclusively that we learn the Bible and what the Bible teaches about the salvation of our souls and about the salvation of the church.

That the covenant has a cosmic character means, positively, that God’s covenant includes the creation, the universe, which God loves and which Christ has redeemed by the same cross that redeemed us. Therefore, we have a calling—a *covenant* calling—to know the creation and all the creatures in it.

It should be evident already how the cosmic character of the covenant applies to Christian education in the Christian school.

The Bible teaches the cosmic character of the covenant.

The Biblical Basis

The very first explicit mention of the covenant in the Bible expresses that the covenant is cosmic in character, including not only all nations, but also the earth itself and the various animals and other creatures that inhabit the earth. This is the announcement of the covenant with Noah in Genesis 6-9, particularly, Genesis 9:8-17.

The covenant that God revealed to and established with Noah was not a covenant of common grace, different from the covenant of grace in Jesus Christ and destined to end when Christ returns, as is the popular, prevailing view among Reformed churches, theologians, and Christian schoolteachers. Among its other grievous faults, this view of the covenant with Noah is a serious failure to recognize the cosmic character of the covenant of grace in Jesus Christ.

The covenant with Noah was an “everlasting covenant” (Gen. 9:16).

It was an early, magnificent manifestation to the church in a wicked world of the covenant of God’s one and only sin-overcoming, redeeming, sanctifying, and world-renewing grace—his grace in the cross, resurrection, and Spirit of Jesus Christ.

The very first revelation of the covenant of grace in Christ that explicitly mentions the covenant emphasized that the embrace of the covenant is very wide, extending to the creation, particularly the earth and its various creatures, and not

only to elect humans.

In keeping with this important revelation of the covenant very early in the history of redemption, again and again the Old Testament looks forward to the fulfillment of the covenant of God with his people as promising a glorious future for the creation and for non-rational creatures. Psalm 96:11-13 calls on the heavens to rejoice, the earth to be glad, the sea to roar in happy anticipation, the field to be joyful, and the trees to rejoice at the prospect of the coming of Jehovah.

In an important prophecy of the last things, Isaiah 65:17 promises that Jehovah will “create new heavens and a new earth.” Verse 25 of this same prophecy predicts a coming world in which “the wolf and the lamb shall feed together, and the lion shall eat straw like the bullock,” which is glad tidings for lambs and zebras.

The New Testament picks up on the original announcement to Noah of the cosmic covenant, confirms the cosmic covenant, and more clearly and fully reveals the truth of it. In a most remarkable passage, Romans 8:19-22, in the midst of his proclamation of the eschatological hope of the children of God the apostle teaches that the non-rational creation, or universe of heaven and earth, with all the various creatures it contains—plants, animals, and more—will one day share in the glorious liberty of the children of God. The creation will be delivered from its present vanity, due to the bondage of the corruption of death inflicted on the creation by the Creator on account of the transgression of Adam. So intense is creation’s hope for its future deliverance in the day of Christ that it is groaning. This is the noise we Reformed people hear in the earthquakes, the thunderous storms of wind and water, the floods, and the other catastrophes of a creation in travail. The glorious liberty of the children of God in the Day of Christ will be the perfection of the covenant, and creation will share in that perfection.

Just how this will happen, that is, that creation will be delivered from corruption into the freedom of the glory of the elect church, II Peter 3 makes known. At his coming, Christ will utterly destroy the present form of the creation: “The heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up” (v. 10). But only the form of creation, not the essence, will be destroyed. The essence of the creation God made in the beginning remains. Out of that essence, the atoms, we might say, or some even smaller particles, Christ will renew the creation, so that there will be “new heavens and new earth” (v. 13). Righteousness will be at home in the new world (v. 13), whereas now it is a stranger—an unwanted, and even hated, stranger in the world.

The reforming and renewing of the creation will be on a large scale what the resurrection of our dead and decayed body will be on a smaller scale.

Why this will be, *why* creation will share in the final realization of the covenant, Paul tells us in Colossians 1:13-20. In his eternal counsel, the triune God planned “all things” for Jesus Christ and his church. “It pleased the Father that in [Christ] should all fullness dwell” and through the blood of the cross to reconcile all things unto himself” (vv. 19, 20). “All things” are “things in earth [and] things in heaven” (v. 20). Accordingly, Colossians 1 says that God created “all things... in heaven and...in earth...for him” (v. 16), that is, for Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior, the head and mediator of the covenant.

“All things” in Colossians 1 are not exclusively people. They are the created world, the universe, the “*kosmos*.”

God did not appoint Jesus only as Savior of the church, his “body” (v. 18). He appointed him also as Lord and Savior of “all things.”

This world is not only “my Father’s world,” as the hymn puts it, by virtue of creation. It is also my Lord Jesus’ world by virtue of the counsel of God, by virtue of Jesus’ redemption of the world by his death, and by virtue of his sovereign lordship over the world as the one risen from the dead and seated at God’s right hand.

Therefore, God promises believers and their children the inheritance and possession of the world. We often overlook this aspect of the covenant promise, concentrating rather on future sinlessness, deliverance from sin and death, enjoyment of eternal life, and “going to heaven.” But the Bible is clear and emphatic. “The meek...shall inherit the earth” (Matt. 5:5). In Romans 4:13, the apostle reminds those who, as true children of Abraham, are justified by faith alone that the promise to father Abraham was that he “should be heir of the world” (Greek: *kosmos*). This is the fullness of the covenant promise also to Abraham’s seed.

Our Home

The explanation of the Bible’s teaching of the cosmic character of the covenant is, first, that God planned Jesus Christ as our covenant Savior and the entire creation as our covenant home and work-place. The universe is included in the covenant, not independently of the church, but as the church’s dwelling-place with God in Christ and as the sphere of labor for the church. To be human (and we will forever be human, more truly and fully human in the renewed world than we can be now) is to need a home and to desire to work. One day elect believ-

ers and their covenant children will *live* with Christ and *reign* with Christ (Rev. 20:4). Both living and reigning require a *place*. This place will be the universe, the “*kosmos*.”

Second, it was always God’s purpose with the creation, to glorify himself in the creation and by the creation through a king and his subjects, who will rule over the creation and enjoy the creation *under God and for God*. The whole creation must be the kingdom of God.

Third, God will not give up, and lose, this vast and marvelous universe—his handiwork—annihilate it, and take the church to a new, ethereal realm called heaven. But God will glorify himself in the world he made in the beginning, every creature serving Christ and the elect church, the elect church serving Christ, and Christ serving God. To him then will be “all things” and the glory, forever (Rom. 11:36).

The cosmic character of the covenant has application to the instruction of the good Christian school.

Common Grace

We reject, and are called of God to reject, root and branch, the theory of a covenant of common grace as the basis of the instruction of the Christian school. This theory is ruinous of genuinely Christian education and rearing of the children of the covenant, as history now demonstrates. It has utterly destroyed Abraham Kuyper’s Free University in Amsterdam, doctrinally, spiritually, and morally. Its destruction of Reformed, indeed, Christian, education at Calvin College in Grand Rapids, Michigan is far advanced. The science department of this once glorious institution of Reformed higher learning has recently informed all of western Michigan, and the world, by means of the *Grand Rapids Press* that the foundation of all its instruction, especially that of the biology department, is the evolutionary theory of Charles Darwin. What this necessarily implies concerning unbelieving denial of Holy Scripture in Genesis 1-11, concerning the loss of fundamental Christian doctrines taught in Genesis 1-11, and in the end concerning the denial of Jesus Christ, I have spelled out in a booklet, “Genesis 1-11: Myth or History?” to which I refer the interested reader.²

Yoked together with the world by the theory of common grace, to which it,

2 David J. Engelsma, “Genesis 1-11: Myth or History?” (Byron Center, MI: Byron Center Protestant Reformed Evangelism Society, 2002).

like its parent, the Christian Reformed Church, is committed, heart and soul, this same Calvin College presently finds itself carried along with the latest perverse item on the world's agenda of lawlessness. A very vocal and evidently powerful group of faculty oppose (again publicly on the pages of the *Grand Rapids Press*) a rule that they not advocate homosexual activity and relations in their classrooms to their students. That is, a number of faculty are so bold, and so apostate, as to advertise that they approve, defend, and promote sodomy. And the Christian Reformed Church exercises no discipline upon these corrupters of covenant youth.

The Free University in Amsterdam and Calvin College in Grand Rapids are evidence that the philosophy of common grace renders a Christian school helpless before the mighty, relentless pressures of the ungodly world. Indeed, the notion of common grace is a malignant power, *in Christian education*, promoting the conformity to the ungodly world that the apostle urgently warns against in Romans 12:2: "Be not conformed to this world."

Wherever it is embraced and practiced, the theory of common grace militates against, and destroys, the antithesis (that is, God-established, spiritual separation and warfare) between church and ungodly world, between believer and unbeliever, and between holy children of believers and unholy children of unbelievers. And the antithesis is fundamental to the preservation of church and saints. It is fundamental particularly to the continuation of the covenant of God in our generations.

We have this, above all, against the theory of common grace as the basis of the instruction of the Christian school: It leaves out Jesus Christ and the covenant of grace, which is founded on Christ, centers on Christ, and ends in Christ. Jesus Christ has no place in the covenant of common grace.

Our Right to the Universe

The basis of the instruction concerning the created world and all it contains—concerning "all things"—in our Protestant Reformed Christian schools is the cosmic covenant of God with Jesus Christ and, thus, with believers and their children. Because the covenant is cosmic, the Christian school legitimately, and rightly, teaches about everything—everything in subjection to the Lord Christ, everything in the light of Holy Scripture, his inspired and lordly word.

We must teach this to the children and young people in our schools. We must not only teach them that God's covenant is with *them*, as children of believers. But we must also teach them that the covenant with them is cosmic in charac-

ter. And we must teach them that this is the reason why they may and ought to learn about the “*kosmos*,” the universe that God made in the beginning and now upholds and governs by *the Lord Jesus Christ* (Heb. 1:1-3).

Because the universe, particularly the earth and all that it contains, is ours in the covenant, we Reformed believers and our children have a perfect right to all of it. We have the right to live in the earthly creation, the right to explore it, the right to use it, and the right to enjoy it. I refer not only to the air we breathe, the space we take up, the time we progress with, the water we drink, and the food we eat, but also to all the ordinances, institutions, and aspects of earthly life: marriage and family; labor; scientific laws and discoveries; music; and much more. “All [things] are yours” (I Cor. 3:22).

The godless, though they presently inhabit and even dominate the earthly creation that belongs to Christ and us, and will soon force us out of the little space we now occupy on the earth, are intruders in our inheritance. We can endure them. Ere long they will be banished from God’s world forever.

The Covenant Mandate

In light of the cosmic covenant, we have a calling with regard to the creation. God gives us a covenant mandate. The mandate is not that we flee from creation as much as possible, or have as little to do with it as we can. The Christian life is not “world-flight,” nor is “world-flight” the meaning of the antithesis. I Timothy 4:1ff condemns “world-flight,” with its notion that material, created reality is evil, as the doctrine of devils.

Neither is it our mandate to “Christianize” the culture which the ungodly impose on the earthly creation and fashion out of creation’s resources. Nowhere does the Holy Spirit bind this impossible task upon New Testament Christians, much less upon the church. He calls us to hate the “world” of ungodly humans and their depraved “things” (I John 2:15-17) and to separate ourselves from the dominant way of life of the wicked (II Cor. 6:14-18). But he never commands us to “Christianize” it. The grandiose, but ridiculous, call to “Christianize” the culture of ungodly, unbelieving, and unholy men and women is a commandment of men. It has never been done. It is not being done now. It never will be done. It is not the will of God that it be done. God’s will concerning the culture of the great Babylon of this wicked world is that it be destroyed. Revelation 18 foretells the destruction. And once again the call goes out to the saints, “Come out of her, my people” (Rev. 18:4).

Rather, God calls us to know the creation, the various creatures, and creation's laws, order, and harmony as the revelation of the wisdom, power, and goodness of God. In Calvin's phrase, creation is the theater of God's glory: "a dazzling theater...[of] the glory of God."³ The main purpose of knowing creation, according to Calvin, is that we see "God's inestimable wisdom, power, justice and goodness"⁴ shining in every creature.

This is the main purpose of our schools.

The main purpose of our Protestant Reformed Christian schools, as of all good Christian schools, is not that our children can make a living one day (although the schools do prepare them for life in twenty-first century North America), or that they please and fulfill themselves by their studies (and there are keen pleasures in learning and gratifying fulfillment in academic studies). But the main purpose of the schools is that the children of the covenant come to know the wonderful works of God in creation and history.

It is also our calling, in light of the cosmic covenant, that we use the creation to honor the Lord Jesus, who made it, for whom it was made, and whose it is, and to promote his kingdom. Our children carry out this calling by a holy life, in which consciously they strive to bring all into subjection to Jesus Christ. Reformed Christians form their own culture—a truly Christian culture—in the midst of and in antithetical opposition to the culture of the world of the ungodly. Basic to this godly and Christian culture is a worldview that sees Jesus Christ as Lord of all.⁵

And, then, the calling of one who believes the cosmic covenant is that he, or she, praise God for his wonderful world. Praise of the triune God, the creator, may be the personal confession of a learned Reformed mathematician, or historian, or doctor, or biologist. What an opportunity the Reformed biologist had (but cravenly, shamefully squandered) to praise God the creator by confessing the truth and authority of Genesis 1 and 2, rather than infidel Charles Darwin by confessing *The Origin of Species*, when the *Grand Rapids Press* recently asked about the basis of the science department at Calvin College!

3 John Calvin, *Institutes*, 1.5.8.

4 Calvin, *Institutes*, 1.14.21.

5 On the subject of worldview and culture, see my "The Reformed Worldview on Behalf of a Godly Culture" (Jenison, MI: Faith Protestant Reformed Evangelism Society/Grandville, MI: Grandville Protestant Reformed Evangelism Society, 2005).

By no means is it only, or even chiefly, the calling of the learned to praise God for his wonderful works in creation and providence. Also the high school graduate is called to praise God, as he marvels at the stars, stands amazed at the complexity and order of his own body, and traces a little of the ways of God in his own life.

Above all, the calling to praise God for his wonderful world, on the part both of the learned and the less learned, requires lively participation in the worship of the true church. This is the church where the truth of creation, as revealed in Genesis 1 and 2, is confessed, where the cosmic covenant of grace in Christ is preached, and where the psalms, which praise God for the universe, are sung.

Educating for Eternity

Motivating instruction in our good Christian schools is the hope that the knowledge our children receive of the creation in our schools—*genuine* knowledge, worked by the Holy Spirit, which sees the world as God's handiwork—will in some, important way carry over into the renewed world in the day of Christ. Our schools educate for *eternity*, not for time only. Our children and grandchildren are the kings and queens, by covenant grace, who one day will bring their glory and honor into the new world (Rev. 21:24). I remain firmly convinced of what I have written in *Reformed Education: The Christian School as Demand of the Covenant*:

First, our goal in the rearing of the covenant child is that child's praise of God *in eternity*. This is not sufficiently remembered. But it is expressed in the prayer after baptism in the Form for the Administration of Baptism: "they may be piously and religiously educated...to the end that they may *eternally* praise and magnify thee..." Our children's praise of God in eternity is related to and realized through our rearing of them, also in the Christian school. I will not speculate on this, but I maintain that Christian education, in the schools, is serviceable for the child's life and reign with Christ in the new world. No genuinely Christian education is wasted, or lost.

Implied is the teacher's inability to see all of the fruit of his labor in this life. Like the husbandman, he must have long patience for the precious fruit. In education we live and work by faith in the unseen things that are eternal.

This eternal aspect of the goal ought to be the motivation of the parent and the teacher. If we are mightily moved by the pleasure we now have in “stalwart sons and daughters fair,” what pleasure will we someday have when that which does not now appear shall appear fully in our children and students?⁶

6 David J. Engelsma, *Reformed Education: The Christian School as Demand of the Covenant*, rev. ed. (Grandville, MI: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 2000), 87.

Contribution

Promoting Ethical, Christian Communication in Your Classroom

Joel Minderhoud

Communication is an inherent aspect of human life. God created us as communicators—with fellow man and with God. The goal of communication, as with all things, is to glorify God’s name.

Sin, however, has corrupted our communication. Apart from grace man does not have fellowship or communication with God. By nature we use communication to kill and to destroy rather than to build up and to love. Overall, apart from grace, communication is now directed towards sin in every way, shape, and form. Now man, in his sinful totally depraved nature, abuses the good gift of communication and uses it to degrade and blaspheme God’s holy name rather than to glorify that name.

Our covenant young people are sinners as are we. By nature, we and they are inclined towards all sin—including corrupt communication. However, by God’s grace, his Spirit works in us and in our children so we and they begin to hate our

sin, including corrupt communication, and begin to use this gift toward the glory of God and the up-building of his church.

Consequently, we as teachers, who stand for a few short hours each day in the place of parents (*in loco parentis*), with their authority and on their behalf, are called by them, and consequently by God, to train these covenant children—children with whom God has established his covenant, for whom Christ died and shed His blood, and in whom the Holy Spirit dwells. These covenant children we must instruct in the proper use of communication—whether in the classroom (in our content areas) or in the hallway or playground.

Understand, colleagues, we do not solely teach the covenant children some content in the classroom. But our task and calling includes more, much more. Now, we focus on one additional aspect to our work beyond the primary and chief work of instructing them in content-knowledge (let us not forget that we are primarily teachers of some academic subject and material). We must teach them how to use God's good gift of communication. Every teacher has this calling. Therefore, all teachers must take heed to this instruction. We must teach our students, directly and indirectly, how to be ethical, Christian communicators.

Definitions

It is important from the outset to explain what is meant by *ethical, Christian* communication. Communication is a gift from God and must be used ethically—that is, in a correct and right way that abides by the basic principles of Scripture. Scripture teaches that above all else, communication must be truthful and honest.

Ethical communication also involves understanding what communication really is and for what purpose God gave us this good gift. Communication is God's good gift that is to be used to enhance our friendship with each other and with our God. Communication then, is fundamental and basic to the covenant—to the bonds of Christian friendship that we have with one another through Jesus Christ, and ultimately, which we have with God through Jesus Christ. Therefore, ethical communication involves respecting the speaker and the listener. No listener may tune out a speaker who is trying to convey ideas and truths which ultimately foster and develop covenant bonds of friendship. No speaker ought to disrespect the intelligence and listening ability of his audience. Therefore, all speech that is not truthful, honest, and respectful to either the audience or speaker is unethical—it does not rightly use the good gift nor show a proper at-

titude and understanding of the gift.

Communication must also be Christian. Really, since communication must be ethical—that is, used in the proper manner and for the proper goal for which God created it—then it is redundant to say that it must be Christian. Ethical communication implies that it is to be Christian. Nevertheless, it is worth mentioning some of the Christian characteristics that must characterize our communication. Since we share in the anointing of Christ, we as prophets must speak the truth of God’s Word. Our communication must be Christ-like and filled with the fruit of the Spirit. Heidelberg Catechism Q&A 112 sums up the characteristics of Christian communication well. Here we learn that Christian communication must:

- Not bear false witness or falsify another man’s words
- Not backbite or slander
- Not judge or join in judging any man rashly or unheard
- Avoid all sorts of lies and deceit as the proper works of the devil
- Love the truth, speak the truth, confess the truth
- Defend and promote the honor and good character of my neighbor

Our Calling

It is the high calling of teachers to instruct the covenant seed in all areas of knowledge in the light of Scripture. Involved in that calling is the teaching of ethical, Christian communication. How shall we do this?

Whether we realize it or not, we teach the covenant youth how to communicate throughout the day by our *example*. As teachers, to whom the students look for leadership and guidance, we must strive most diligently to lead them in the area of communication by a godly example. Probably more effective than we can ever imagine is the proper godly example. This is true in the classroom as it is in all aspects of our life—in the home, in the workplace, in the world. Our actions speak loudly and are a grand witness.

We must use our tongues with kindness (not with sarcasm), with politeness (showing each other due respect as fellow covenant children), without hurtful come-backs and with respect to our fellow teachers, addressing them by proper names, and so with our students as we speak with them and as we address them.

Secondly, besides teaching the children how to communicate by our example, we also all actively teach proper communication. We do so when:

- a.) We work with students in the classroom setting in which the student must

learn how to properly respond to us and to his classmate in the formal classroom discussions.

- b.) We work with students in the classroom setting in which the student interacts with his classmates in informal ways.
- c.) We work with students in the hallways, playgrounds, athletic fields, bus routes, etc.

Therefore, it is of great importance that we take the opportunity to consider *how* we can teach *all* our students in *all* of our classes regarding proper communication.

In order to do this, I want to highlight three areas where communication is corrupted and focus on how we can direct students to proper communication starting with these three areas. Really, ethical, Christian communication can be accomplished if we all would learn and abide by three important principles: Honesty, Listening, and Building Up. If every time we communicate we remember to strive to make our communication *honest*, if we strive to faithfully *listen*, and if we make it our goal to use communication to *build up* then we will have a fantastic beginning to ethical, Christian communication. Remember these three: Honesty, Listening, and Building Up.

1. HONESTY—Ethical Argumentation

Proper communication must be ethical—that is, truthful, honest, and directed for the proper end. Much of today’s communication is unethical, that is, misrepresentative at least, and plain dishonest at worst. Advertising and political propaganda are among the greatest offenders. But even our family, school, and church communication can be unethical. What I mean particularly when I say that our communication can be unethical is that it is not truthful. Besides the outright lies that are spoken in a variety of settings, communication is littered with other unethical techniques such as misrepresentations and fallacy-based arguments. These are all forms of unethical communication. Because they are so prevalent in society today, we might not even consciously consider them to be unethical—we consider these to be normal. Nevertheless, these forms of unethical communication abound and are harmful to proper communication.

Consider the following examples that illustrate the point.

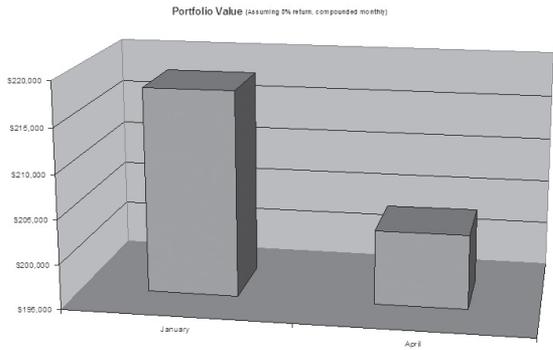
Misrepresentations

Misrepresentations are deceptive techniques used often in the business community, whether intentionally or unintentionally, to influence the perception of

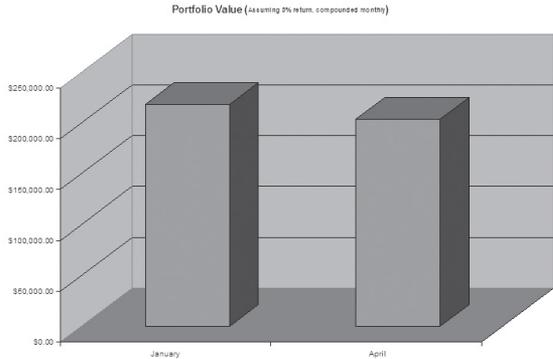
the listener. This is an unethical use of communication as it does not present the truth of the matter. In particular, mass media perverts data to communicate what they want the reader to believe with unethical graphs and charts. The following is one example, borrowed from Mr. Bergman's collection, which clearly illustrates the unethical kinds of charts that are used in the business community.

Suppose you invest money for retirement. Suppose you typically make a contribution just before Tax Day (April 15). The following chart was found in an investment company's brochure that illustrates how much more money could be earned in interest if the investor would have invested the money on January 2, rather than April 14 for a 20-year period.

This graph is unethical. It is not scaled properly. Visually, it communicates that the January investor would have approximately three times the earnings (300%) than the April investor (because the January bar graph is 3 times taller than the April graph).



The ethical version—the graph the investment firm should have used. The January investor would have approximately 1.07 times the earnings (7% increase, \$218,070 compared to \$203,289). When graphed from \$0.00, the visual effect of the portfolio differences is minimal.



Fallacies in argumentation

A fallacy is a plausible argument that uses false or invalid inferences. Essentially fallacies are arguments built upon incorrect or faulty reasoning. Fallacious

arguments abound and for that reason we and our covenant children must be equipped to identify such faulty reasoning and to avoid using it. Three different kinds of fallacies are illustrated below; however, there are many other kinds of fallacies that are commonly used in argumentation. The commonness of such fallacious arguments is made clear in the following examples.

a.) **Popular Appeal:** This type of fallacy relies on popular support, tradition, or common belief rather than logical argumentation.

i. “All the other teachers let us have candy in the classroom!”

ii. “Every other school has closed for swine flu. We should close school, too.”

These examples illustrate that the speaker is not interested in proving his point on the basis of proper premises and logical argumentation, but appeals to popular opinion or common practice to “prove” his point. This is unethical.

b.) **False Dilemma:** This fallacious argument presents options that are not necessarily a logical result of an argument or fails to recognize that other viable options exist.

i. “I’ve got three tests tomorrow. You need to switch our Chemistry test or I’m going to fail it.”

ii. “Mr. Chairman, many of my Chemistry students just cannot get their labs done in a typical class period and their grades are suffering because of it. We either need to switch to block scheduling or I’m going to have to stop giving labs.”

These examples illustrate that the speaker tries to “prove” his position by giving the audience options which are both undesirable, while ignoring other potential options. This is an unethical mode of argumentation, yet highly effective. For example, a principal may not want to go in the direction of block-scheduling, but neither does he want the science department to stop doing hands-on laboratory exercises. If the principal does not recognize the unethical false dilemma scenario, he may be convinced to act on one of the undesirable options. Unfortunately, this mode of argumentation is often employed, and worse yet, is often successful.

c.) **Beg the Question:** This kind of fallacy requires the listener to accept arguments that are not supplied. The speaker assumes that if you answer his rhetorical questions in the way he implies they should be answered, then the speaker doesn’t have to prove his argument.

i. “Do you know how many tests I’ve got tomorrow? Do you know how busy we are? You can’t expect us to get this assignment done tomorrow!”

This unethical form of argumentation also abounds. Busy or not, the student

is utilizing a common, but nevertheless, unethical form of argumentation. The student needs to prove his or her case, rather than beg the question.

Students must be trained to see these subtle, yet unethical, forms of communication. Not only must they be trained to find them, they must also be trained not to participate in that kind of unethical communication. If we fail to properly train the covenant youth in this area we run the risk of a generation that grows up easily swayed by fallacious arguments, or perhaps worse, who utilizes such unethical argumentation in family, school, or congregational life.

Improvements or Activities

- a.) Students must be taught to “cite their sources” and “provide proof or evidence” for their arguments. Whether in class discussions or in papers and reports it is essential that they be trained to do so. Even in kindergarten and the early grades this can be done. When discussing matters, push students to provide reasoning or explain where they received information. Even if their “childish” answer is “Dad said so,” they are being taught that they must justify their answer. This must be done around the clock and in all classes. This is not merely a research paper task. In homework and on tests the answer is not what ultimately counts. What must be emphasized is “how did you get there,” or “what proof do you have to make that statement,” and are they logically connected.
- b.) Students must be trained to see the unethical techniques of modern media and the advertising industry. They must be taught to see these and never to use them in their own work. I appreciate the efforts of Mr. Bergman and Mr. Kalsbeek in their classrooms in this regard.
- c.) Regarding fallacies, the same is true. Students must be shown fallacious arguments and be trained not to use such unethical argumentation. It would be beneficial for our students to make oral presentations or written papers that are persuasive or that debate a particular topic. Making a presentation for or against a particular viewpoint is an important skill to practice each year. It requires that a student dig deeply into a particular issue and try to make convincing arguments. Trying to make convincing arguments while avoiding the many common fallacies is very difficult. Students need to learn to see this. Already in the very early grades teachers can try to get their students to “explain” or convince the class about something. The presentation does not have to be deep or lengthy—but students should be encouraged to logically prove

their point.

The main point here is that ethical, Christian communication must always seek to be HONEST. When trying to convince others of something, we may not employ *any* means to win them over, but must be straight-forward and honest, seeking to convince them by honest, truthful, logical argumentation.

2. LISTENING—Developing Listening Skills

Communication is a two-way street. One must speak and another must listen. If either fails in their calling, then, at best communication becomes hindered and at worst communication ceases.

Listening is a vitally important skill to learn and to develop. It is so because all of life requires good listening skills—from family and church life, to learning in school, or to working in the work place. Research conducted around twenty years ago indicated that approximately 90% of our waking hours are spent communicating—and of that time approximately 45% of the time involves listening, while 30% is spent talking, 16% reading and 9% writing. Today those numbers are probably greatly changed considering the use of modern technology—texting and Facebook, for example, probably increased the amount of so-called writing and reading. Nevertheless, a large part of our communication time is still spent in the role of listener, so we need to be sure that we are capable listeners or we will hinder good communication (how often are the frustrations in a marriage a result of poor communication—especially the failure of a spouse to properly listen). Finally, the most convincing argument for the improvement of listening skills is that listening skills are important to develop because of the way our language skills develop. A child's communication skills develop in this order: listening, speaking, reading, and then writing. Therefore, fundamental to *all* of our communication skills is the ability to *listen*. We and our students need to develop this foundational skill more.

As teachers we recognize that many errors and mistakes in the school are a result of poor listening. Whether in the laboratory, on assignments, or in classroom behavior, the student either does not listen in the purest sense of the word, or reasons ahead and makes false conclusions about what was said (or imagined to have been said). Therefore we do well to help our students improve their listening skills. To help us improve our listening skills and the listening skills of our students, it is valuable to consider and contrast some of the characteristics of good and poor listeners.

Characteristics of Good Listeners

- Patient—doesn't quit after a few sentences from speaker but remains attentive
- Listens for generalizations, trends, applications, interpretations—not simply facts
- Doesn't interrupt

Characteristics of Poor Listeners

- Quick to find fault with speaker—blames personality or delivery of speaker
- Listens only for facts (trees) not for generalizations and applications (forest)
- Lacks experience—short attention span (affected by TV, computer, cell phone, etc.)
- Leans on crutch of outlines:
 - Research shows that poor listeners try to “outline” a speech while listening even when the speech is not given in that particular format, while good listeners adjust how they listen to the kind of speech they are given.
 - Secondly, my experience tells me, and it seems to follow from the research, that good listening practices are not always promoted by outlined presentations. For example, when given an outline, a poor listener focuses his energy on trying to fill in some spaces in the outline or listens for obscure facts. Or the poor listener assumes that the bulleted points on the PowerPoint presentation are the *only* important details that they need to know. Over the years I've tried a few different forms of PowerPoint presentations, and invariably, the presentations in which I have bulleted points of my lecture, the students busily copy down the bulleted point, but do not listen satisfactorily to the concept that is being developed. As soon as the bulleted point appears, twenty-some heads take their eyes off me and bury their faces in their notebooks and stare up at the bulleted phrase of words. The students tend not to listen as closely to the other important points made in a lecture/speech/sermon when presented with a detailed outline. So I ask you to consider the following: Does the common technique of presenting information to students with PowerPoint presentations in which various bulleted points or ideas are written out in outline form promote good listening skills? Do we show disrespect for the student, the listener, when we assume they *need* the PowerPoint slides which do not enhance or *aid* our presentation but merely *are* our presentation? We

ought to examine the classroom techniques that we use—do they promote listening skills?

Therefore, to improve our own personal listening skills, I recommend the following:

- Respect the speaker (The speaker has something to say—give him a chance)
- Withhold criticism (Don't cut off the speaker, and don't plan your rebuttal while he speaks)
- Eliminate distractions (avoid candy and pop in classroom; maintain good posture in church and school)

Some things we can do as teachers to improve the listening skills of our students are:

- Limit our repetitions
- Prepare short, well-organized, clear lectures
- Introduce listening checkpoints in lecture: “What is my point so far?”
- Eliminate distractions: classroom management is the *key* to successful listening.

The main point here is that ethical, Christian communication must always be characterized by careful LISTENING. Communication requires a faithful listener. To that end, we as teachers must strive to promote good listening skills in our classrooms.

3. BUILDING UP—Promoting Christian Communication

Proper communication must be—above all else—Christian. Not only must it involve listening and employ ethical argumentation, it must also be permeated by Christian virtues. The Heidelberg Catechism teaches us that we must promote the good name of our neighbor. We must not be profane or blasphemous, but we must speak with love. We must speak the truth and we must *confess* the truth. Whatsoever things are true, honest, just, pure, lovely, and of good report...these things we must think upon and speak about.

Because our covenant children battle with their old sinful natures we find a wide variety of sinful communication in our schools: “*Fatty, Fatty, two-by-four, can't get through the bathroom door*” and other put-downs, boasting, angry speech, ridicule, mockery, lies, slander, gossip, backbiting, false accusations and the like can be found in our schools. Many opportunities arise in which we can address the class or the individual as the situations may necessitate regarding these sins. We must be vigilant. We must discipline and correct these sinful

expressions of the heart. Here particularly our playground duty comes to light. We must be on the playground and be vigilant. But there are also plenty of interactions in the classroom in which non-Christian communication rears its ugly head. We all recognize this if we reflect on the kinds of things that are said in the classroom from time to time. This is of no surprise to us as we all know our own battle with our sinful flesh in this area. Those of us with children know that this struggle is not unique to the school—it happens within the walls of our own homes. Nevertheless, we are called by God, and equipped by the Holy Spirit, to fight this battle with sin. May God give us and our children grace to fight against this particular sin. And may God give us grace as parents and teachers to have the courage and wisdom to discipline such a wicked use of the good gift of communication.

It is also very important to emphasize that our covenant children do have the new life of Christ in them. Therefore, though they do fall into sin, they also begin to use communication rightly. We must not be merely negative and on guard for their sin. We must also look for and expect a godly use of communication. We must be quick to encourage and acknowledge the good communication that comes from their mouth. May we never view them as a bunch of sinful heathens, but treat them as God's covenant children who are equipped by the Holy Spirit to properly communicate.

One particular area of communication that can often be misused is the area of humor. Humor is a good gift from God. There are appropriate things to laugh about. Sometimes there are things about ourselves that are worthy of a good laugh. Sometimes, we are offended, however, by humorous comments that were directed at us. Unfortunately, sometimes the source of our offense lies in our own pride. We are so proud that we cannot laugh at our own foibles. Therefore, I don't propose to do away with humor.

Nevertheless, as it is with all things, humor is often misused. Humor is unfortunately a tool that often is used to “murder” our fellow saints. Jonny, jealous of Suzie, finds opportunities to “knock her down a step” and does so with a joke or a so-called humorous comment. When Suzie is offended, Jonny *hides behind the humor*. By using humor, Jonny tries to back out of trouble by responding to Suzie, “I was just joking.” And Suzie is automatically the loser in this situation because she either suffers the pain of the put-down or she speaks up and is told that she doesn't know how to take a joke. This is the teaching of Proverbs 26. “As a mad man who casteth firebrands, arrows, and death, *so is the man that*

deceiveth his neighbour, and saith, Am not I in sport? Where no wood is, there the fire goeth out: so where there is no talebearer, the strife ceaseth” (Prov. 26:18-20). We must be careful in this regard especially as parents and teachers. We like to joke and have fun with our students. But is it at the expense of the student or at the expense of a fellow teacher? Are we really using the humor to accomplish something else? Be on guard.

What do we do to improve the Christian character of the covenant seed’s communication?

- Stamp out vulgarity, put-downs, and mockery with appropriate discipline.
- Encourage and strengthen those who communicate Christianly.
- Bring the Word—let each esteem other better than themselves (Phil 2:3).
- Be an example—especially watch our use of humor.

The main point here is that ethical, Christian communication must always strive to BUILD UP. Christian communication requires that we esteem other better than self. Whenever we communicate we must consider the calling to BUILD UP, that is, we must strive to promote the good name of our neighbor.

May God give us the grace to teach our students how to BUILD UP rather than to tear down with their communication. And may our speech be full of grace and love as a godly example to the lambs of God’s covenant.

Conclusion

You’re a mathematician, a grammar expert, a history buff, or a biologist. But you are also a communicator and constantly work with little communicators. I challenge you to consider your classroom and your lesson plans. Are you teaching your students the necessary content? Are you *also* teaching them by direct instruction and admonitions how to be ethical Christian communicators? Are you, in your day-to-day instruction, promoting good listening skills? Are you striving to be a good example of ethical, Christian communication? Do you faithfully discipline the lambs of God’s church when they err in this area of their life? May God grant us the grace to work with the covenant seed in this most vital area of education! May God grant us the grace to teach the children to be HONEST, to LISTEN, and to BUILD UP.

Dr. Oma

Lois Kregel

Dr. Oma: The Healing Wisdom of Countess Juliana von Stolberg, by Ethel Herr. P & R Publishing: Philipsburg, NJ.

Many—perhaps most—of you are familiar with the term “Oma;” perhaps you may even have a beloved grandmother who you call “Oma.” I always thought of it as an affectionate term, but whether or not this is true, it certainly is such in this book.

The setting is sixteenth century Holland and Germany, near the border of Holland, at the time of William of Orange. William of Orange was the defender of the Netherlands against the hated Duke of Alva of Spain. William’s mother was the Juliana von Stolberg named in the subtitle. The duke was in the service of Philip of Spain, a Roman Catholic, who bitterly hated and persecuted Protestants. Protestantism had spread throughout Europe, and had taken root in the low countries.

Maria was William’s young daughter. Her mother had died, and her father had remarried a woman, Anna, who had turned out to be mad. At nine, Maria’s father had sent her to live with Princess Margaretha at Brussels, to be taught in the ways of the court. Margaretha was sister to Philip. Now Maria was eleven, and her father sent for her to come back to Breda; from there he would bring her to live with her grandmother (William’s mother, Juliana) at the Dillenberg castle over the border in Germany.

Maria had many things to learn and unlearn when she went to her Oma. Margaretha had sought to impress upon her that Protestantism was evil, of the devil, and that to read the Bible was a deadly sin. She said that “Mad Anna” was insane because she had become Protestant. Yet, the puzzled little girl noted that her father and Oma were Protestant, and one of her uncles read the Bible at mealtimes.

Oma was skilled in the art of healing; hence the title, “Dr. Oma.” She knew about the uses of many herbs, and knew how to mix healing potions and salves

for many ills, having learned from her own mother. Maria was fascinated, and eager to imitate her, and quickly absorbed everything her Oma taught her. When her Oma went to visit the sick and bring them medicine and salves, Maria would go with her. And when Oma read the Bible on those visits, Maria saw what a blessing it was. In those days it was rare to have one's own Bible, and it was treasured.

Maria had to come to see that what her guardian back in Brussels had told her about Protestantism and about the Bible were lies. She came to love the Word; she learned to pray; and the chief lesson her grandmother taught her was one she herself had had to learn: trust God for everything.

Meanwhile, fierce fighting had broken out in the Netherlands, and William and his brothers were in the thick of it. The two brothers were killed, adding more grief to Oma in the loss of her sons.

Maria's father had remarried a Frenchwoman named Charlotte, and they had six little girls. When a troubled peace came, he sent for Maria to come and live with them in an old castle in Holland. Reluctantly she bade farewell to her beloved grandmother, who was now bedridden with what proved to be her last illness. Maria had learned all the knowledge and skills her grandmother could teach her about herbal medicines and healing. She knew she belonged with her father.

In a brief epilogue, Maria tells the rest of the story in her own words. After Charlotte died, and William remarried yet again, he and his new wife had a son, and they moved to Delft. There, through a plot instigated by Philip of Spain, he was assassinated.

William was the ancestor of the future queens of the Netherlands, who were and are of the House of Orange.

I can recommend this book for teenagers and adults, too. It is well-written, not the work of an amateur, and to the best of my knowledge historically accurate. William of Orange was one of the heroes of the Dutch people. Read it and give it to your children to read.

Twilight

Tom Bergman

Twilight, by Stephenie Meyer. Little, Brown, and Company; 2005.

Except for *Harry Potter*, I have never seen any book or series that has been as popular among our young readers as the *Twilight* books by Stephenie Meyer. Since I noticed *Twilight* and its sequels sitting on desks and sticking out of backpacks, I was curious enough to read the first book in the series.

Notice immediately the allusion to the forbidden fruit on the cover. A crucial component of the book is the danger and the forbidden nature of Bella's love for an attractive vampire; the entire plot hinges on it. Several times throughout the book, the main character explicitly outlines her situation this way: she knows it would be bad to love a vampire. She knows her family and friends would not approve. She knows she would put her own life in peril if she follows her heart's desire. But she does it anyway because the vampire is so beautiful and so irresistible, and her feelings are so intense.

The notion of a vampire romance may seem asinine, but Meyer's books are hugely popular.¹ Although the writing is mediocre and unchallenging, the simple plot is very thrilling. However that may be, I cannot recommend a fantasy that glamorizes the notion "It's wrong, but it feels so right." *Twilight* will send our young readers a powerful and poisonous message about the pleasures of suppressing conscience and going against authority. As John Calvin states in the *Institutes*, "We are not our own, to follow whatever course passion dictates" (2.8.2).²

1 The fourth book in the series sold 1.3 million copies on the first day (*Publisher's Weekly*, August 4, 2008).

2 John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. Henry Beveridge (Grand Rapids, Mich: Eerdmans, 1989), 2.8.2.

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