STRATEGY FOR SURVIVAL AND THE STANDARD REQUIRED

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The theme for this convention has a ring of militancy. It is filled with the imagery of battle. Survival, the enemy has struck. The roar of the aircraft fades in the distance, replaced by the muffled groans of the wounded. Strategy, the military brass huddled in an underground dugout pouring over maps, men locked in mortal combat. Standards, what a difference they make, the great American flag or the much feared German swastika. They represented what the war was all about.

This is a timely theme for the Christian school movement in general and our schools in particular are involved in combat. The reason for this is that it is part of the battle of the ages. Did not Nehemiah have to gird the builders of the wall with swords as they worked with their other hand at the trowel, Nehemiah 4:18? The Apostle Paul describes in detail the armor for the Christian soldier as he fights in the battle of faith, Eph. 6:10-17. That battle extends into the arena of the Christian school.

As we deal with this subject tonight, we will follow somewhat these lines of thoughts. First, we should examine the standard! We realize that this word is used in two ways. On the one hand it identifies the army of cause. On the other hand it is

set up or established by authority as a rule for the measurement of quality or value. We intend to examine both of these ideas and apply them to Christian education. The standard for quality in education also makes up the rallying point for all to join. The higher this standard is raised, the more intense the battle. This necessitates strategy to deal with such attacks.

What are we fighting for when we fight for Christian education? Why do we labor intently to establish such schools and defend withall our might those already in existence? Why are you teachers willing to join the ranks of Protestant Reformed teachers when most of you could obtain much more lucrative positions in other professions? Why do we parents dig deep into our pockets to pay tuition and building costs in order to maintain our schools? You administrators and board members know the vexing problems involved in running such a school, yet we do all this work. Why?

The standard explains this all to us. It identifies the cause that is so dear to our hearts.

In one word that standard is the Word of God! The truth of the Holy Scripture came not by the will of men, God revealed that Word and inspired men to write it accurately. It is the revelation of God Himself in Jesus Christ His Son. It is truth. It forms the message of the gospel which is preached unto us. By faith we believe what God says to us.

There are many truths revealed in the Bible and they all stand very close to one another. Yet, I would like to draw out four specific truths which are revealed to us in the Bible that serve as the standard for Christian education. First, the Bible reveals to us the great truth that God is a covenant God of believers and their children. The words to Abraham speak to us, "And I will establish my covenant between me and thee and thy seed after thee in their generations for an everlasting covenant to be a God unto thee and unto thy seed after thee," Gen. 17:7. The triune covenant God of friendship embraces us and our children. He speaks the words of promise to us and makes us to be His friends. This covenant includes children, not all children, but the children of the promise, Rom. 9:8. Concerning these children Jesus said, Suffer the little children to come unto me for of such is the kingdom of heaven.

Secondly, the Word of God directs our attention to Christ as Lord of all. "Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him and given him a name which is above every name; that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in

earth, and things under the earth; and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father, Phil. 2:9-11. That Lordship of Christ is the Father's reward for His faithful mediatorial work. By His suffering and death, Jesus took away the cause of death and misery for His people, namely, sin. The Father exalted Him to His right hand and made Him to rule over all things. He rules over His precious church by His grace and Spirit and causes that by His power all things serve their welfare.

Thirdly, the Bible directs our attention to the kingdom of heaven. Indeed, this is a future promise which will ultimately be realized in the second coming of Christ. According to Revelations 21 and 22 the present heaven and earth will be dissolved with fire and God will create a new heaven and earth upon which the New Jerusalem, the perfected heavenly church will dwell forever. The rule of that kingdom will be perfect love as the citizens drink of the water of life freely. Yet, we know that the kingdom of heaven is also a present reality. Jesus said, "The kingdom of God cometh not with observation: neither shall they say, Lo here! or Lo there! for behold the kingdom of God is within you," Luke 17:20, 21. By this Jesus distinguishes His kingdom from all earthly kingdoms, made up of empires, armies, earthly rulers, he said in John 8:36, "My kingdom is not of this world". His kingdom is a spiritual reality. It begins to take hold of a person by the mysterious work of the Spirit in the heart. This work of conversion provides spiritual direction for the whole life of the child of God. As "kingdom people" we confess that the whole of our life must be brought in subserviance to King Jesus! Our thoughts, our desires, our ambitions for the future, our daily work in the home, in school, in business and industry, our moments of entertainment, all must be brought into the service of the King.

Finally, the Bible directs our attention to the presence of the Holy Spirit. The glorious account of His coming recorded in Acts 2 explains the significance of His presence. The Holy Spirit is the third Person of the Holy Trinity, given to Christ in His glorification in order that He might realize the salvation of His church and the establishment of His kingdom through Him. The Holy Spirit inspired the authors to write the Bible, the Holy Spirit guides the ministers to declare the truth. The Holy Spirit applies that word to the hearts of His dear people. The Holy Spirit abides with us, gives to us and our children the spiritual strength to serve God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength. He is the one Who brings all the work of salvation to its glorious

culmination in the song of Moses and the Lamb in heavenly glory.

The Word of God, and in particular these four great truths given to us in the Word of God, make up the standard of Christian education. Well may this standard be written upon the door of every Christian school, upon every board room, on the chalk board of every class room, in all our teachers' lounges. The Word of God teaches: God is our covenant God, Christ is King over His kingdom, and the Holy Spirit is present with us.

As a standard this defines for us the reasons for Christian education in a three-fold way. First it determines the material that will be taught in a Christian school. The Word of God will be the sourcebook for the interpretation of the facts presented. All the subjects stand related to Christ the king and the kingdom of heaven. The challenge to the teacher is to hold up the standard before the students that they see God's sovereign design in all areas of life. Secondly, this standard will influence the method used in teaching. A teacher that has this standard in his/her heart will not teach *opinion*, but truth. The pupil will not be given the option to accept or reject what is taught, but the truth will be taught from a deep conviction of the heart. In addition such a teacher acknowledges that discipline is essential to good instruction. The standard requires obedience and good behavior by the student. The demands are high in a Christian school because God demands much of all of us. It will be the teacher's duty to enforce such discipline that the students learn to do their work well and co-operate in the class room for God's sake. Finally, the standard of God's Word and these four truths will also provide the proper motive for teaching and learning. It will reach far beyond the empty demands of humanism, for individual respect and human good. Rather, the standard will lift the perspective for all of us to see God and His kingdom in Christ Jesus. It is not a matter of getting rich, easy life, pleasures and the world, rather what does God want me to do in the furtherance of the Kingdom of His Son.

When that standard is held high in the class room the children learn to love the truth and reject error. The standard clearly exposes what is wrong with all other ideas, it shows the natural man at enmity with God. It condemns the world and draws a sharp antithetical line between truth and error. It extols God and His covenant of friendship.

At the same time the presence of this standard draws enemy fire! The same standard that produces school programs,

graduations, sons and daughters that come forth with the knowledge of their calling in this world and the conviction of faith and makes tears of joy well up from our souls, causes the enemy of the faith to gnash their teeth. The battleline is drawn by the standard. The enemy in varying degrees says man is god, man has his own kingdom, man must plan his own destiny, man must learn to eat, drink and be merry. This opposition is not a matter of curious indifference on their part, their hostility is such that they hate God and hate God's people. Today, we can see evidence of the enemy intent on ending Christian education in the Christian school.

How is this attack taking place today? In answering this question, we must make a distinction between the attack from without the Christian school movement and the attack as it takes place right within the movement itself.

Turning to the attack that comes our way from without, we first of all think of government interference with Christian education. The Bible reminds us of this in Revelation chapter thirteen. You will recall that two beasts are mentioned in this chapter. The first rises out of the sea and represents the political power of antichrist as he gains ascendency over all the nations of the world. The second beast receives power from the dragon but has the appearance of a lamb. This beast represents all attempts on the part of the antichrist to get people to willingly bow down and worship the beast. This includes false religion, education, science, falsely so called. The end product of the work of this beast is to do great wonders, even miracles, so that all wonder after the antichrist. What if a person does not go along with the antichrist, then this beast also has power to learn of their whereabouts and to persecute them and kill them. Government has many avenues to pursue in order to get people to follow after the goal of world rule. The school system of our land (public school system) is a powerful weapon in the hand of such evil men. In order for it to succeed they must remove all alternatives and opposition. Hence the Christian schools become the objects of their hatred and contempt. Christian schools hold up the standard of God's Word which is the very opposite of all the antichrist stands for. It may sound high and mighty to call out for pluralism in education, but in the long run, it will not convince evil government to allow the right of Christian education.

We have heard for quite some time now, the evils of federal aid to education. Not only do many parents clamor for some aid, but many legislators are equally eager to give such aid. To some

it is an appeasement to quiet down the sector of society that supports private and Christian education, to others it is an attempt to get something started, to get the government committed to support in principle other schools than public. It might be anything from a milk program, book loaning, to tax relief. In this area, the supporters of such aid are working on three methods. A voucher system in which parents get a voucher worth so many dollars determined by the number of children they have, which can be redeemed at any school of their choice and the school inturn would get the monies from the government; a tax credit system in which parents who send their children to schools other than public would be able to take a deduction from their income tax; and getting B.E.O.G. grants (Basic educational opportunity grants which the government now gives to qualifying students on the basis of ability and need and which are given to public as well as Christian colleges) for high school and even grade school students. The danger with all these attempts is the same as always, the government never gives anything without some degree of control, whether that is given directly to the school or indirectly as a benefit to the parents or school. In a recent article in *Time* magazine (Sept. 22, 1980) reference was made to Wheaton College:

> "So far the college has escaped Washington's wrath because it gets no state or federal aid for either capital or operating costs. But its students receive $4 million a year in government grants, loans, and loan guarantees. Since two-thirds of Wheaton's revenues are from tuition and fees, 'it would be difficult, if not impossible to replace such student aid, says admissions director Stuart Michael Worse, the government might one day strip the college of tax-exempt status. If Wheaton were forced to change its admission policies, its defenders argue, it would no longer be Wheaton—whose motto since 1860 has been For Christ and His Kingdom".

This indicates to what extent government grants and loans have already influenced private education and the fear of tax-exemption.

This leads us to our second consideration and that is the attempt to take away tax exemption. We are acquainted with the attempt in Aug. 22, 1978 by the I.R.S. to enforce integration through tax exemption. It drew a protest of 155,000 letters which had the effect of defeating any necessary legislation to implement it. We can be sure however that the battle on this front is not over as yet.

Add to this the battle that has been going on for some time

already over the crucial question as to who owns children, the parents or the state. Long ago Plato in his Republic contended for state ownership. Did not Adolph Hitler as well as all totalitarian rulers contend for this? Here we have the same thing in our country. The leaders in this pernicious struggle are from the women's movement who battle for the Equal Rights Amendment. In the White House Conference on the Family held during the International Year of the Child opportunity was given to everyone to participate whatever their sex, race, religion, political affiliation, sexual orientation, age, or ideological orientation (stated on the advertisement blurb). In that movement there is room for those who would advocate homosexual families and sexual communes. Gloria Steinam, a wicked proponent of this movement said, "We really don't know how to raise children . . . the fact that children are raised in families means there's no equality . . . in order to raise children with equality, we must take them away from families and raise them together . . . ." Significant court battles have been fought, and some won, over the issue whether a parent has the right to educate children at home or whether they must attend a state approved school.

Other signs of danger involve the establishment of a department of education on the cabinet level, support for the licensing of teachers (not certification, but examination by the state to determine qualification) and even the proposal to license the school itself, much like a business needs a certain license to operate. The point is, more and more government involvement with a view to control.

There is also an attack from within the Christian school movement itself. Satan, our arch-enemy is very clever. He knows that if he can get the Christian school destroyed from within, he doesn't have to get too concerned to attack from without, or the outward attack will be fatal if the school movement is weak from within.

Hence, we have to deal with such movements as the A.A.C.S. which we should identify as the Association for the Advancement of Christian Studies and not the American Association of Christian Schools. We are acquainted with this movement as much has been written about it already. It is divisive, it seeks to turn the Christian School movement away from the Word of God and direct it to many words. It sets as its goal a kingdom concept, couched in traditional Reformed language, but very much different from it. It is definitely mutiny within the ranks and must be dealt with accordingly.

Closer to home however, is the influence of apostacy and spiritual lethargy which affects our homes and consequently our schools as well. As our homes go, so go our schools. It stands to reason for we believe in parental schools which are an extension of the home. Our schools are the best mirrors of our homes. What do we see?

We can best examine ourselves on four scores. First, it is our great calling to be *responsible* for the instruction we or others give our children. That means, we must give account to God how and what we teach them. This is expressed in those awesome questions we answer at the baptism of our children. Accountability demands knowledge. Do we know what our children are being taught and more importantly, do we care? Our duty is not finished when we finally get a P.R. school built and in operation. It has just begun! We say this not to sow suspicion about our faithful teachers, rather this is the spiritual foundation for our next point. Secondly, we are concerned about *involvement.* Do we examine the papers our children take home from school? Do we ask them about the things they learned for that *day*? Do we visit school when we have opportunity? Do we attend P.T.A. meetings and school conferences? Are we interested in the chapel exercises when invited to join the children? Are we willing to serve on the school board and canvass for the financial needs of the school? Proper involvement demands a yes answer to all the above. What do we see? Thirdly, do we have a right *value* concerning Christian education? It really hasn't changed one bit that school is still teaching the basic skills of reading, writing, and arithmetic, though they call it something different today. The heart-beat of the school is the class-room where this teaching and learning takes place. Youth may clamor for something else, they like "snap courses", sports programs, trade skills, and a host of other things. Parents however, must be more mature. The homes that produce these children must recognize that hard earned money, precious time, dedicated teachers are brought into the school to *instruct* children of the covenant in the knowledge, wisdom, and skill needed to serve God in the whole of life. Especially sports programs can easily get out of hand both in time and money involvement. Excessive emphasis on these things reflect a wrong value on education. Finally, discipline is so crucial to instruction that any lack of it is an attack upon the educational process. A body cannot stand without a skeleton, a school cannot operate without discipline. Here too, it must be the discipline that extends from the home.

Lack of discipline at home produces chaos in the school. If students think they can get away with wrong at school and not be disciplined at home, we run into the same hopeless situation which is evident in the public schools and in some Christian schools: the kids run the school. Discipline more than anything reflects the spirituality of the home and the school. Evil must be put away from among us. Wrong must be punished for God's sake. Something is very wrong if the "toughs" are the popular ones around the school. Parents must support the teachers in loving but firm discipline.

Pointing out these things, we must ask ourselves, are we right on these scores or wrong? Is there lack? If there is, we must see this tool as a subtle attack of Satan upon the standard!

Now, what is the strategy we ought to follow in dealing with any of these attacks upon our Christian schools?

The first and most important thing I see is to revitalize our forces. Could it be that our morale is low? Sometime the soldiers get battle weary, loose sight of the danger of the enemy, fail to anticipate the sweet joy of victory; are we perhaps that way spiritually as regards Christian education? I think we need some old-fashioned pep rallies to get our troups stirred up. We have so much going for us; we have the Covenant God of heaven and earth Who promises us grace sufficient to every task. We have King Jesus sitting at the right hand of God directing all things toward victory. We have the standard that represents everything precious to us and our children. Yes, we must be keen on knowing the enemy, but it will do no good unless we have a sharp understanding of our cause and its blessing. Imagine a soldier saying, my country is not worth dying for, then you have a defeated soldier! Imagine parents saying, Christian education is not worth fighting for, then you have closed schools and children swallowed up in the world about us.

What is the strategy, let's rally around our Lord Jesus Christ and promote gladly His cause in our schools. I recently thumbed through a series of lectures given by Dr. Clarence Bouma at the N.U.C.S. convention in Holland, Michigan during the summer of 1932. It struck me that that was the year of the great depression. In his address he stirred up the people to carry on Christian schools in such dark times. He made three points that we do well to observe. First, Christian schools have come out of the deep conviction of God's people. He asked, "Can an economic depression touch this conviction except to deepen, to strengthen it, to reemphasize it." God's people act out of conviction, we do.

that too. All the attacks from without and within, will not cause God's people to give up the fight for Christian schools; there is too much at stake. Secondly, the alternatives make it plain that in essence there is no alternative to Christian education. We are either for Christ or anti-christ. Who can put a price on duty? Thirdly, Christian schools were never built out of luxury or surplus, rather by God's people who by faith put up schools, hired teachers, and run their schools taking the money out of the daily bread that God provided. Rich people never put up Christian schools, abundance never stimulated the cause, rather conviction of heart and firm trust in God did it. Now, when the battle seems to get more difficult, we must not panic, we must remember from what spiritual mettle God has made the soldiers of the cross. The world says, when the going is tough, the tough get going. History shows that this is more so for God's people. We need to rally to the cause as our Captain challenges us to the battle.

Secondly, I see that the strategy must be for victory, not survival! I know what you mean when you word it the way you do, you are concerned with Christian *schools*. It might very well be that Christian schools will not survive, the battle we face from without, especially government involvement, may lead to the closing of Christian schools. It has happened before in history and in many countries, we do not know what God has in store for us here in the United States. The point we want to make is this, Christian education is not dependent upon Christian schools. Nothing will stop us as parents from rearing our children in the fear of God, unless they are taken away from us by force and even then we will commit them to God who cares. As long as we have our children, *we* rear them. A school helps us do this better in many ways, but we as parents do this before God. And God promises to bless this effort and any strategy we may employ to preserve our Christian schools will ultimately end in the victory for our children, they will be instructed in the fear of God with God's blessing.

Finally, I would like to suggest three areas that cry for leadership. If this convention will produce any lasting results it must be in obedience to Christ Who calls us to carry on the cause in these evil days. The Federation seems the likely place to expect and bring to reality such leadership.

First, our school boards need leadership in dealing with the threat from the government. Recently, the call came forth in the *Standard Bearer* to write congressmen regarding legislation

concerning schools. Fact is, that was a good call, but I dare venture that very few actually wrote because it was not handled on a local level. If this is truly important as strategy for survival, our school boards ought to take lead and they should be counseled from this federation that should make it a matter of concern. Similarly, we are reading a great deal of law firms, and Christian lawyers who make it their speciality to deal with test cases to legally preserve the rights of Christian schools, etc. Here too, our local school boards need leadership. Ought we back up some of these efforts? Should we lend our moral and financial support to these decisions that will affect our schools as well? Someone ought to be involved in a knowledgeable way and operate this federation for the good of all our schools.

Secondly, it seems to me that this federation is doing a wonderful work in advancing and promoting the educational knowledge and skill needed to teach what the standard requires. You have now institutes, conventions, teacher's manuals and aids, books are being written concerning education of covenant children. I thank God for this and this federation after many years is making progress. You need encouragement in this. There is one thing I would like to add as inquiry and encouragement. Can't you also somehow offer leadership regarding the education our teachers receive in preparation for teaching? It's tough to be a teacher, just like it's tough to be a preacher. Yet, we preachers get solid education that prepares us to preach. Where do you teachers get anything like that? You have to pretty much strike out on your own, glean from manuals and books how to teach distinctively Biblical and Reformed material and methods. I would think that you who have gone through this process and know its difficulty would be the most enthused to try to get something going perhaps like we do as churches for our pre-sems. Couldn't some of you take a position of leadership to teach certain subjects that have a direct bearing upon the task of teaching, and take courses in the local colleges and receive degrees that would make it possible to get certificates. Maybe you are exploring these things, but I would think it a great advance if some of the teachers who are gifted and able to develop this field, were given the opportunity to contribute this knowledge for the benefit of future teachers.

Finally, I am convinced also that the church must be vitally concerned with the continuing welfare of our Christian schools. Let me put your mind at ease that I'm not advocating that consistories run schools. Rather we have three articles of the

church order, Arts. 21, 41, 44 that concern the church's duty over against Christian schools. The point is that Christian schools are the spiritual offspring of the church's ministry to parents. When parents show signs of neglect or spiritual indifference or error, the church must make this her concern. Herein lies the great power of Christian discipline. We must not think of that as a terrible word, a power reserved for the worse in the kingdom or a lever to kick out of the church the undesirables. God forbid! As the Word preached must set forth the truth in doctrine and life, so the work of the elders must support that preaching with loving action. A word of warning from the elders may save a soul, an admonition to a recalcitrant child may have a lifelong effect. If the teacher encounters evidence of home trouble that teacher should do what is necessary on the level of discipline in the school, perhaps even with the administrator or school board, but ultimately if correction at the home level does not take place, the minister and consistory should be notified so that they can work pastorally. The spiritual concern for teachers and students remain that of the consistory. This requires caution not to violate Matthew 18 in methodology, it requires care to remember that one does not appeal decisions of school boards to consistories. Rather, my concern is for the spiritual over-view of the school. If wrong is done by students of the school and parents do not deal properly with that, one may not blame the teachers, one may not blame the school, one should place the blame where it belongs at the door of the church. If these parents are members of one of our churches and their children are walking in open sin the hand of Christian discipline must be extended in the love of God.

In closing I want to say a word to you teachers. In many ways you are on the forefront of this battle to preserve Christian schools. God has called you to be a teacher, to set aside your life for this great task. Many times you get shot at, from without the school and even from within the school. These may even be occasioned by your holding high the standard that is so dear to us. God has called you to a difficult task, to expose yourself to danger, to be so involved that God is pleased to use you to mold the minds and hearts of children who are preparing themselves to take their place in the battle of faith along side of the rest of us. Think of what that means and never forget that such a task is of God and the strength is of God alone. Be faithful to that standard! Look to our Captain our Lord Jesus Christ, and hold your head high as you give God all the glory.