FEATURE

A couple of years ago (October, 1984) Mr. Ron Koole delivered the keynote address at the Protestant Reformed Teachers' Institute Convention. The subject matter with which he had been asked to deal was that of teaching children to understand that the life of a pilgrim-stranger involves, in the nature of the case, a separation from the world of sin, a rejection of the vain philosophies of men, an antithetical walk. Ron's message to the teachers was thoughtful and thought-provoking. We're happy to share it with you in this space.

Teaching Children to Stand Alone

Ron Koole

The covenant of grace is a beautiful work of God. From the beginning of history God established a relation of "friendship" with His people, a relationship whereby He is their sovereign God and they, His people, are the recipients of the blessings of God through Jesus Christ. In the renewing and explaining of that covenant to Abraham, God makes it clear that His covenant is an everlasting covenant. Genesis 17:7, "And I will establish my covenant between me and thee and thy seed after thee in their generation for an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto thee and to thy seed after thee." The everlasting God establishes an everlasting covenant with His people, a covenant that is sure because it is His covenant that He establishes with us. David found great comfort in the everlasting covenant. He says in II Samuel 23:5, "Although my house be not so with God; yet he hath made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things, and sure: for this is all my salvation, and all my desire, although he make it not to grow." Not only is that covenant an everlasting covenant but it is a covenant with our seed. It is a covenant established in the line of continued generations.

Even though it is God's covenant and not dependent on man, the

child of God has responsibility and "work" to do as an obligation of that covenant. God said to Abraham in Genesis 17:9, "Thou shalt keep my covenant therefore, thou, and thy seed after thee in their generations." First, this work-calling is implied in the fact that we are God's friend-servants in that covenant and a servant must do service. That calling, as Rev. David Engelsma writes in *Reformed Education* (pg. 12), is this:

> Love Jehovah your God, serve Him, glorify Him. This is not something arbitrarily added to the covenant, but is an integral part of the covenant itself. . . .

Secondly, the covenant demands responsibility of God-fearing parents to instruct or bring up that covenant seed in the nurture and admonition of the Lord (Eph. 6:4). They promise to instruct and bring up their children in the doctrines of the Old and New Testaments and the articles of the Christian faith. Luther said in a sermon entitled "Keeping Children in School,"

> He has not given you children and the means to support them, only that you may do with them as you please; or train them for worldly glory. You have been earnestly commanded to raise them for God's service, or be completely rooted out, with your children and everything else; then everything that you have spent on them will be lost. The first commandment says, "I visit the iniquities of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me."

It is out of this covenant of grace and its God-given responsibility that the Christian school arises. Rev. Engelsma says more strongly in his book (pg. 14), "The Christian school, therefore, arises from the covenant of grace; it is, in fact, a demand of that covenant."

At what does the instruction in the Christian school aim? What is the goal of the instruction given within the four walls of our schools? I think it can be said that the goal of covenant education is twofold. First, we have in mind and view, when we instruct our children, their eternal salvation. Not that our instruction is aimed at an attempt to save them, for we teach them because and with the confidence that they are saved. Our instruction has as its goal, as our baptism form says, that they "eternally praise and magnify thee. . . ." T. Van Der Kooi writes, in a book entitled *The Distinctive Features of the Christian School* (pg. 40),

> Thus the distinctiveness of the educational ideal of the Christian School also becomes more clear. The child is created for eternity: the purpose of education, therefore, lies beyond this transient life.

Secondly, and in light of the first part of the goal, there is the child's life here on this earth. We must have as the goal of our instruction the godly walk of the covenant seed in this world. The late Rev. Hoeksema wrote, in "The Place of Doctrine in the Christian School,"

> The teacher must certainly consider his children as covenant children and in all his instruction, attitude, and discipline it must become evident that he bears this in mind and that he aims at the development of the perfect man of God, thoroughly furnished unto all good works as far as his life in this world is concerned.

Surely, it was with a view to our walk of life aimed at the perfect man of God that led the inspired Solomon to write, "Train up a child in the way he should go; and when he is old, he will not depart from it" (Prov. 22:6). Teaching the child that way in regard to his place in this present world is the calling of the school. It is with this in mind that Rev. Hoeksema wrote,

> . . . from eternity chose and in time forms a people unto Him in Christ Jesus their Lord, that they might walk in all good works which he ordained for them and in all their life in the midst of the world should be to the praise of His glory, children of light. . . in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation.

The very title of this article, "Teaching Children to Stand Alone," implies that our children must learn something about their place and relationship to this world. When one stands alone, he separates himself from the communion and fellowship of company. He desires not to engage in friendship and union with those from whom he separates himself. We must teach our children, our students, to stand alone and separate themselves from the world. We teach them I John 2:15, "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him."

What is the world that we must teach separation from, and what does standing alone mean? Negatively, separation from the world does not mean world-flight. It does not mean separation in the physical and local sense of the word. We reject the teachings of those who hold that the Christian can escape sin and the temptation of sin by fleeing to some private haven or Walden Pond. Those who teach the view of

isolation from the world physically do not understand the Scriptural, Reformed world and life view. God calls His people always to be in the world but not of it. Christ taught this in John 17:15: "I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that Thou shouldest keep them from the evil." In an article entitled "Separation or Isolation," written by Pastor Bekkering in the *Standard Bearer*, he writes:

> Isolation is an attempt to achieve holiness by human strength and therefore carries with it a false sense of security. It engenders a "holier than thou" attitude toward all others. Isolation takes what truth it has and buries it. It tends therefore to be negative, defensive, and critical.

As we shall see, God has for His children the command to live in the world for a very positive purpose.

Positively, that world that we and our children must separate ourselves from is the world of unbelief (sin) and unbelievers, who hold the truth under in unrighteousness. We keep ourselves separate from their friendship and close communion, and we separate ourselves from their goals and ideals. I John 2:16 says, "For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world." The world's goals are appealing to the flesh. By nature we and our children would seek after and enjoy these same earthly pleasures. And, don't you see, that is why we have to teach our children to stand apart. It isn't natural to the depraved man to be separated from the world. This requires the grace of the covenant.

The world scoffs at any type of separation, and especially a spiritual separation. The world's philosophy is to have people "reach out and touch somebody." Allow me a quote from a popular sports magazine (*Sports Illustrated*, 1984):

> But in no Olympic opening has that elation been carried to greater heights than in Los Angeles. Urged in song to "reach out and touch," the athletes began to join hands, to form lines. A wing of white doves, saved for last, flew in the same sky as a pair of menacing black helicopters. Concussive fireworks cannonaded overhead. Irish male athletes danced a jig. Canadian women formed a cancan line, Italian men ran to kiss women of the choir. "You couldn't keep people apart," said an exultant Antonio McKay, the U.S. 400-meter hope. "All the other countries were

> grabbing each other, squeezing each other. It just moved me like nothing else in this world. There has never been anything like it."

The world encourages unity and a melding together in all areas of society and life. Politically, ecclesiastically, socially, and economically we see the call for unity, fellowship, and peace. Thwarted yet for a time, even at their games, the aim is antichrist.

The child of God, then, is a pilgrim and a stranger in this world. His goals and aspirations in reality are far different from the world's. They transcend the things of this world. But he lives in this world. How does he view this world? Is it simply a myriad of matter in which he futilely labors until he's taken to his eternal resting place? On the contrary, he is called not to spurn human life or narrow it down, but covenant children are to live the human life fully in the fear of Jehovah. This is Father's world and all nature sings and rings the music of the spheres. That is what we teach the covenant child. This is not the Devil's World. The matter in the world is not intrinsically evil. This world reveals its Creator. Rev. Engelsma writes (*Reformed Education*, pg. 52, 53),

> God's purpose with creation is that it reaveals the glory of its Maker and that it glorifies God through the good service of man.

He continues, in reference to the curse under which the creation fell,

> We hold cosmic redemption. God loves His creation. This is the meaning of John 3:16, "For God so loved the world. . . ." "World" is not "every single human being" but "the creation organically considered, with the elect humanity in Christ as its center."

God gave the command to Adam in the beginning. He was to exercise dominion over the earth, to replenish and subdue it. This is exactly what we must be teaching. We teach our children to reject the philosophy of the world concerning man's right simply to use the world and all it contains for his own pleasure and enjoyment. We show them clearly that the wages of sin is death. This service of the creation and the creature only brings sorrow and eternal judgment. Rather we are busy teaching the children that they are to live in God's creation as stewards and to use all that God has given to subdue to His glory. T. Van Der Kooi writes further in his book (pg. 47),

> And thus we arrive at the position that the child must know and be able to do whatever is necessary to serve God in the various spheres of human life. We are here in the immediate present of the fundamental demand of Calvinistic life view with its sense of and open eye for empirical reality. Properly to fulfill that demand, knowledge of and insight into the world round about us is absolutely necessary.

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Now that we know that the aim of the education of the covenant seed is the mature man of God who lives in every relationship of life in this world to the praise of God, we need to examine the method of instruction that is required by Scripture to attain this goal. We must ask the same question that Manoah did in Judges 13:8, "Then Manoah entreated the Lord, and said, O my Lord, let the man of God which thou didst send come again unto us, and teach us what we shall do unto the child that shall be born." We too must inquire of the Lord, through His Word, as to how we shall instruct the covenant seed.

Before we examine that, let's notice that there are many popular theories of education that are foolish and contrary to God's Word.

First, there is the theory that reasons that the children ought to be allowed to develop naturally. The child must not be restricted in his development, physically, mentally, or spiritually; he must develop uninhibited by anyone or anything. The educator's role is simply to guard the child from anything that may restrict his development. This is the A.S. Neill philosophy of *Summerhill.* In the forward to his book we read:

> The principles underlying Neill's system are presented in this book simply and unequivocally. They are these in summary: 1) Neill maintains a firm faith "in the goodness of the child." He believes that the average child is not born a cripple, a coward, or a soulless automaton, but has full potentials to love life and to be interested in life.

He's right, of course, in his contention that the child will love life and be interested in life, the life in and of this world. But the matured man of God will never be the result. Our children and all children do not by nature possess this "goodness." Rather, the opposite is true. Children by nature are depraved sinners, and even God's children possess by grace only a "small beginning of the new obedience." It is

for this reason that discipline is required in that rearing. Solomon states clearly in Proverbs 22:15, "Foolishness is bound in the heart of the child; but the rod of correction shall drive it far from him."

Secondly, there is the popular educational philosophy, which shows itself clearly in the public school movement of our country, in which the role of the educator is to present to the students all of the various options and alternatives with no definite direction given. The student must then be given the freedom to choose the alternative that he believes best for him. In a book entitled *Humanism in the Classroom,* Gordon C. Lee writes,

> Much evidence suggests that the innovative teacher of the future will serve as a resource person in the guidance of the pupils' learning activities, instead of being an instructor. In the future the act of teaching will reside less in being unusually well informed in subject matter area – though this would be no hardship – than it does in knowing where information might be found and how a pupil might best use his own style of learning.

As is clearly seen from this quote, there is no instruction in this philosophy. In reality this popular theory is no better than the first one. There is no specific training of the child in the way he should go. This theory, as the first, is a game of Russian Roullette and, as we have seen from the recent news, even the blanks can kill. God does not bestow His blessing upon such instruction.

A third worldly philosophy might be called the materialistic theory. Here the instruction of the child should consist only of those things which the child needs in order to earn his daily bread, be a success at some employment or trade, and make some career for himself. The danger of this philosophy shows itself in our circles when students and even parents ask the question, "What will I or my child ever use this or that instruction for in life?" Writing about the danger of this philosophy, T. Van Der Kooi writes,

> No doubt this contention is well meant, and they who speak thus may be inspired with love for the child. Their good intention to equip the child for the struggle of existence by ridding him of superfluous baggage, however, sometimes causes them to be narrow and one-sided in their views. It is easily overlooked that material prosperity and vocational success, are strictly speaking only inferior values, so that they can never be considered final criteria in the choice of subject matter.

There is a warning here, I believe, against a cry to include more vocational training in our schools and especially high school. There is definitely a place for instruction concerning careers and vocation, but our schools are not founded to train for specific occupations.

The instruction in our schools (and homes) must be different from the theories presented. It must be instruction that is definite, clear-cut, and concise (Deut. 6:6-9). As is pointed out in a sermon on this text by the late Rev. Hoeksema printed in the *Standard Bearer* and reprinted by the South Holland Board for Secondary Education, that word *teach* "places the nature of education in a very peculiar light." That word means in the original actually "to sharpen," as in a knife or sword. Further, it implies to sharpen with the tongue, to use direct and pointed language, to express precisely and definitely. This teaching must also be performed diligently. This word refers not so much to our steadfastness or perseverence (although it must be that), but the point is rather that the instruction given must be unambiguously given to the understanding of the child. This kind of teaching is possible because of the antithesis. There is the truth and the lie. The Calvinist rejects the view that the only difference between views is that one is more or less true than another. There is the truth and the lie. Van Der Kooi writes:

> It is this high regard both for the absoluteness and objectivity of truth, that gives the Christian schools its character of tranquillity by means of which it hews to the line of historical continuity and steadfastly perseveres in its tasks.

The content of the instruction is also given in the text. The content is the Law of God. This is not to be viewed in the narrow sense of the word as if only the ten commandments, unrelated and isolated, should be taught. Rather, the principles of the command and the heart of the law must be taught: "Love God and love the neighbor." We teach that always and everywhere, in all activities, relationships, and enterprises, this law is to be applied to life in the world. The school must be busy teaching and applying the truths of God's Word to the life of the children.

This is the heart of instruction in our schools. This bears pointing out at every teachers' convention or gathering of educators that we have. I do go home from every convention with new methods for my teaching; but, more importantly, I leave with a better and renewed understanding of my task of applying God's Word to the subject material that I teach my students. We must see that applying God's Word to the various subjects takes careful preparation and study. The

principles of God's Word must be manifest in every area of the curriculum and school-life. I fear that many times we as teachers don't emphasize the principles of God's Word enough in our classes. It's not enough to introduce a subject at the beginning of the year and show how the principles apply to the subject and then feel we have done our calling. These principles bear repeating. Here, too, repetition is a good tool toward learning. Do your students, for example, know how the exacting and orderly discipline of mathematics reflects the exacting and orderly Creator? Our students' ears ought to ring with it. We ought to have more diligence in this matter than Cato had before the Roman Senate. No child should ever finish a civics course without being able practically to recite Romans 13. Test the students on the principles applied. Make them see and realize the importance of these principles. I could go on, but the point is that the child's education without the knowledge of the scriptural principles is aimless. It is only through this type of concise instruction and teaching that the child will clearly see that he is called to live apart from the world and its sinful philosophy. He then realizes that God's Word calls him to walk antithetically. Only as he learns more of the power and wonders of God through history and in Creation will he clearly see that he stands alone or apart from the world in his world and life view. He sees that he must "dare to be a Daniel" and dare to stand alone for the praise and glory of His Creator God.

Because God's children possess only a small beginning of the new obedience, our children (and we) are sometimes called to stand alone even among fellow believing students and peers. Many times this is even harder for our children than standing against the outside world. But we must teach our children that even on the playgrounds of Protestant Reformed schools they are called to stand up for God's Word and Name. Much ridicule and fighting can and often does result. I'm sure all of us have had firsthand experience with these sad but real circumstances.

There is a sense in which every child of God stands alone. When speaking of the end times, Jesus said in Matthew 24 that many shall be offended, many shall be deceived, and the love of many shall wax cold; "But he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved." That "he" is the child of God who has received instruction in the way of the righteousness of Christ. In another sense, however, the child of God stands alone, with others. Jeremiah said in chapter 16:6a, "Thus saith the Lord, Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your

souls." Many have stood alone before. The path has been well trod by God's people and the heroes of faith. Also, our children must see us teachers walking that way with their parents and all of God's people.

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What is the fruit of this distinctive instruction? Read Psalm 78: 2-7 for instruction from God's Word. It is through the blessing of God that a generation arises who know and confess God and live in this world as mature Christians, rather than a generation that perishes for lack of knowledge and corruption of walk. We learn much from Paul's words to young Timothy. He prayerfully encourages Timothy to keep that which was committed to his trust. So we prayerfully encourage our children to keep the principles of the Word (that we have committed to them) as they apply to their daily walk and conversation. Paul encourages Timothy to continue in the things he has learned, even from a child, and we, too, prayerfully encourage the same of our students. We know, as Paul teaches, that the Holy Scriptures make one wise unto salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.

Part of that fruit that God allows His people to enjoy is that they see God use their weak means of covenant instruction to fulfill His covenant. Some of you older teachers and parents have experienced this through the years. But we know that this joy arises because of our love for the glory of God.

The glory of God is the ultimate fruit of covenant, Christian education. It is His Name that is glorified through the child's service of Him in a godly walk. For we as teachers and parents realize, as Van Der Kooi says (pg. 28),

> No education is powerful enough, no pedology sufficiently perfect, no love for children passionate enough to alter in the least this sinful condition. The substitution of a heart of flesh for one of stone is the work of the God of Life. The teacher can plant and water but God must give the increase.

We then are called to teach our children by word and example that they must stand. We must equip them through our instruction in the spiritual principles that teach them how they must stand in this life. And, finally, we teach them also whom they stand with. But we know that it is only the grace of our covenant God that enables them to stand. Let me end with this quote from *Reformed Education* (pg. 86):

> Yet it is a glorious work. Work, that aims at young men and

young women living the life of the kingdom of God in the world, is glorious. But even this is more believed than seen. The coming of the Kingdom through Christian education is not spectacular, glamorous, and shewy. The Kingdom cometh not with observation; neither shall they say, "Lo here," or "Lo there." Nevertheless, it comes. Therefore, Christian education is worthy of our finest efforts, by grace.

The course of thy life
will speak more for thee
than the discourse of thy lips.
George Swinnock

PARENTS' CORNER

To have a television set in the house, or not to have one; to watch this or that program on TV, or not to watch it; to limit children's viewing time to so many hours, or to restrict them even more – all these are questions which no doubt trouble Christian families everywhere. There are in addition questions concerning the effect of television viewing on the viewers. Even the world struggles with this, as they strive to curb the very crimes in society which are portrayed regularly before the eyes of young viewers of today's sex- and violence-ridden movies. Teachers meanwhile wonder how they can best make of television an ally, rather than a foe, in the business of education. How should the child of God evaluate all of this – that is the question. It goes without saying, I think, that watching television is not in itself wrong. But that we are here dealing with an appliance that has potential for being a most powerful tool of the devil seems clear right on the surface of things. And because the dangers are as subtle as the devil himself, we do well to be very careful about our own and our children's viewing habits. We've asked Mr. Bernie Kamps, of our Grandville Protestant Reformed Church, to address this matter from the point of view of a parent. The concerns he expresses in what follows are worthy of our consideration.