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## SHALL WE HAVE CHRISTIAN SCHOOLS?

**A**S HAS been indicated elsewhere in THE PRESBYTERIAN GUARDIAN, a meeting is to be held at the Whittier Hotel in Philadelphia on the evening of January 11th to consider the question of the forming of Christian schools. We regard that question as a very momentous question indeed, and bespeak a very earnest attention to it on the part of all our readers.

If one looks out upon the condition of the world today, one has to be very blind not to see that something is radically wrong. Of course something has always been radically wrong ever since the fall of man. But when we say that something is radically wrong with the age in which we are now living, we are referring to something more specific than that great central fact of the presence of sin in the world. What we mean is that the deadly evil of sin is becoming particularly blatant in the present age, and that the sweet and gentle influences of the gospel of Christ somehow *seem* for the time to be stayed in their working.

Compare the state of public opinion today with that which prevailed forty or fifty years ago, and you will see that something little short of a moral revolution has come about. Forty or fifty years ago public opinion, at least in Great Britain and America, was in the main favorable to decency and to liberty. Today it is increasingly unfavorable to both of these things.

It is true, there are here and there indications that the sense of decency is not altogether dead. Even the enormous prestige of custom could not quite enable the King of England to remain on the throne when he contemplated marrying Mrs. Simpson. The abdication of King Edward was certainly a victory for Christian morality.

But the king who has thus abdicated has unquestionably great hosts of sympathizers, and unquestionably the trend of the times is in favor of toleration for the sin which he is contemplating.

As for liberty, that is almost everywhere prostrate. Fascism and communism, superficially opposed to each other but really twin sisters, are threatening to divide the world between them; and it seems doubtful whether persons who believe in civil and religious liberty will very long be allowed anywhere a place in the sun.

Underlying this widespread decadence in the field of conduct is a decadence in the field of thought. The licentiousness of the age is not due merely to a disregard of recognized moral standards; it is due rather to the fact that there are no recognized moral standards. Immoral conduct is quite generally defended by immoral doctrine. The existence of the law of God is denied. Men no longer believe that there is any very profound difference between right and wrong.

In the midst of such a world stands the Christian Church. We are not referring to the merely nominal Christian Church; we are not referring to ecclesiastical bodies like the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. that have officially dethroned Jesus Christ and that refuse to tolerate real Christian testimony within their membership or within their ministry; we are not referring to the Federal Council of Churches with its pseudo-Christian, Modernist preaching mission under the leadership of those who do not believe in the truth of God's Word. But we are referring to the *real* Christian Church. We are referring to those ecclesiastical bodies that really do endeavor with some sort of faithfulness to obey the commands which are found in the Word of God. We are referring to those groups of Christian

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people who are honestly endeavoring to make use of the means of grace which God has provided for His people upon this earth.

What shall *they* do in the midst of a hostile world? How shall they be God's instruments in preserving His Church from the engulfing paganism?

Whatever the answer to that question may be in detail, one thing surely is clear. It is that the efforts of the true Church ought to be directed particularly to the nurture of the children. Even experience shows that that is the case. Ask any company of earnest Christian men and women, especially those who have given themselves to the ministry, and you will usually find that the overwhelming majority of them received their Christian convictions in their youth, through the nurture of Christian parents or Christian pastors or teachers. It is a natural instinct in those who are opposed to the Christian Faith that they desire to get their grip on the children—through paternalistic government control or in other ways. So it should be a very powerful instinct in Christian people that they should desire to influence the children for good, as atheistic or agnostic governments seek to influence them for evil.

But it should be far more than an instinct in Christian people. The truth is that the nurture of the children is rooted deep in the commands of the Word of God. According to Reformed doctrine, baptized children are members of the Church. They are children of the covenant. Surely, then, they should be treated as such. Surely, the Church, whatever else it may neglect, should not neglect the instruction of its own children, in order that when they come to years of discretion they may confirm the vows made for them in infancy, trusting in the Lord Jesus Christ for the salvation of their souls and then growing up into stalwart Christian manhood and womanhood.

How, then, shall this great work of instructing the children be carried on?

In many ways, no doubt. Most important of all is the work of the Christian home—family prayers, family instruction in the Catechism and in the Word of God. Very important also is the work of the pulpit. It is a great calamity when children attend a "children's church," under the control often of uninstructed laymen, instead of sitting with their parents in the family pew. No doubt also young people's societies have their uses. They are a great evil when they lead young people to attend their meetings instead of attending the evening service at which the pastor preaches; but they can be productive of much good if instead of being a rival to the evening service they make it their primary business to support the evening service and the other regu-

lar services of the Church. The Sunday School, also, is an important agency. Its sad decadence is one of the most important causes of the defection in the Church, and much good can be done if it is improved.

All these agencies, however, are faced by a terrible handicap. It is found in the attendance by the children of the covenant, during five or six days in the week, upon non-Christian public schools.

There was a time in the history of our country when the evil of this policy was somewhat disguised. In the days of "the little red schoolhouse," no doubt teachers in the public schools were usually Christians and the evils of secular instruction, though they were always present, were apparently kept within bounds. Today, if school-houses are "red," we very much fear that they are apt to be "red" in some other way than by the application of red paint on the outside. At any rate, from state universities down, the anti-Biblical character of public instruction is becoming increasingly clear.

What shall be done about it?

Well, various palliative measures are being proposed. Some of them—like the introduction into public schools of "character education" based on considerations of expediency—are positively harmful. Others of them, like the required reading of the Bible in public schools (it is, alas, apt to be a sadly garbled Bible even if Modernist or indifferentist propaganda can really be eliminated) are at least dangerous. All of them are woefully inadequate.

The real remedy, as over against these makeshifts, is found in the establishment of Christian schools.

Fortunately we have in this country a splendid example of the way in which that can be done. Our Reformed brethren, largely of the Christian Reformed Church, have established a splendid system of Christian schools, and very richly has God blessed them. Those schools are not under ecclesiastical control. In that they differ from parochial schools. But they are under the control of associations of truly Christian people and they are doing a splendid work in building up the children and youth in a solid knowledge of the Reformed Faith as it is taught in God's Word.

Dr. Cornelius Van Til, Professor of Apologetics in Westminster Seminary, formerly a minister in the Christian Reformed Church and now a minister in The Presbyterian Church of America, will discuss Christian schools at the meeting to which reference has already been made. No one is better qualified to do so. No matter what measures can immediately be taken, the meeting offers a unique opportunity to obtain information about a subject that is of vital concern to Christian people.