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Convention Issue

Our Christian Schools: Living Monuments of God's Faithfulness

On October 21 and 22, 2004, teachers from the Protestant Reformed Christian schools gathered for the 50th annual Teachers' Convention. In his keynote address, Rev. Bruinsma spoke about this year's theme for the convention: "Our Christian Schools: Living Monuments of God's Faithfulness."

Rev. Bruinsma read the fourth chapter of the book of Joshua where we find the history of a monument being established. The people of Israel had finally come to the promised land of Canaan and were about to cross over the Jordan River. God performed a wondrous miracle and parted the waters of the Jordan River so His people could walk through on dry land to the other side. As the people crossed the Jordan River, God commanded that twelve stones be carried to the other side of the river and set up as a monument. The purpose of this monument is explained in verses 21-24. "And he spake unto the children of Israel, saying, When your children shall ask their fathers in time to come, saying, What mean these stones? Then ye shall let your children know, saying, Israel came over this Jordan on dry land. For the LORD your God dried up the waters of Jordan from before you, until ye were passed over, as the LORD your God did to the Red sea, which he dried up from before us, until we were gone over: That all the people of the earth might know the hand of the LORD, that it is mighty: that ye might fear the LORD your God for ever."

In Washington D.C., we see other examples of monuments. Several different buildings have been constructed as monuments to important men who have served our country in some way. The Washington Monument, the Lincoln Memorial, and the Jefferson Memorial are all examples of buildings which have the purpose of reminding those who see and visit them of the great deeds which these men did. As these men are remembered, there is a sense of gratitude to these individuals and, for the Christian, a thankfulness to God Who used these men to perform His sovereign purpose.

Just as that pile of twelve stones on the banks of the Jordan River and the buildings in Washington D.C. are monuments to help people remember and be thankful, so also are our Christian schools monuments. They are monuments of God's faithfulness to His people. When we see our schools, we are called to remember that our God is faithful to His people even when we are not faithful to Him.

There are several important distinctions that need to be clear as we view our Christian schools as monuments, however. First, these schools are not monuments to men as the buildings in our nation's capital are. When we see our schools, we are not to think of the hard work and time which men have given in order for these schools to be established. Instead, we must see God's hand as He uses and blesses the feeble efforts of man so schools can be founded. The second distinction is that our schools are more than just piles of stones or cold buildings. Our schools are, in fact, living monuments to the faithfulness of God. More important than the bricks and mortar of the school itself is what goes on inside of these school buildings. When instruction is God-centered in every subject, our schools are living testimonies to the enduring faithfulness of God.

As the teachers from the various Protestant Reformed schools gathered for the Teachers' Convention, God's faithfulness to His covenant people was clear. From sometimes very small and humble beginnings, God has given us many Christian schools. As we see these schools we acknowledge that it is all of God's doing that any one of them could be established. With thanksgiving to God for His blessings, we strive to serve Him by ensuring that these schools are living monuments to His faithfulness. Parents, teachers, and students all have the calling to see God in every aspect of the instruction which occurs in our schools. Only when this is true will our schools be living monuments. Then, in years to come when our children ask what the purpose of these schools are, we will be able to answer that they are monuments to God's faithfulness.

—Miss Carrie Huizenga

Historical Reflection in the Mathematics Classroom

Reflection is important in our everyday lives. We reflect on our day, on our week, on the past year of our life, on our whole life, and we even reflect on all of history itself in various ways. We also reflect when we rest on Sunday and on holidays to commemorate what God has done for us in His wonderful works of salvation.

Reflection is important in Christian teachers' everyday lives. We constantly reflect upon our work, determining what is best for the children we teach that they might grow up to be mature men and women of God. This reflection is not easy, and it takes much time. As I have reflected on my work so far this first year of teaching, I have often wondered about my presentation of the subject matter that I teach. I have a strong desire to teach the material in a distinctively Reformed, Christian manner, but I often feel inadequately prepared to do so. This feeling of inadequacy is probably a result of not always receiving distinctively Reformed and antithetical education myself. Nevertheless, I still have this calling before me to teach in an antithetical manner.

Because of my reflections on teaching antithetically, a sectional at the recent teacher's convention piqued my interest. It was "The History of Mathematics: Necessary Knowledge for Christian School Mathematics Students," led by Brian Kuiper. I was especially interested in the math history sectional since I had taken a course at Dordt College entitled, "Theory and Context of Middle School Mathematics." In that class, we examined how mathematicians in various cultures uncovered mathematical principles, so we could better understand how math should be taught and how math should fit into the overall curriculum.

I believe that Brian Kuiper had basically the same premise in his sectional except he took it a step further. Not only did he think that teachers should learn about math history but he also thought students should learn about it as well. He gave this rationale for teaching math history: "Since mathematics is a part of God's created world, we must be sure to teach it as such. Part of this teaching will include information regarding what has been done in the field of mathematics. I have come to think that this is as important as our need to give applications for the theories and concepts that we are teaching in the mathematics classroom." Interestingly, in his rationale he stated that he believes application of concepts is important also.

I do not find it surprising that a teacher who promotes giving applications would encourage bringing a historical perspective into the mathematics classroom. These ideas fit very well together. Math concepts were developed throughout history as the need arose. God allowed men to uncover mathematical principles, which they applied and used often for their own selfish gain and glory. Looking back at history, we realize not much has changed today. In our age of technological boom, mathematical principles are uncovered and applied to serve man and his needs at an astonishing pace. The principles that God has allowed mathematicians to uncover throughout history have had a tremendous influence on our culture and daily lives. One only needs to think of the developments in weapons, transportation, and communication throughout history. These developments would not be possible without mathematics. God is directing these developments toward the end times.

Our children need to know how and why mathematical ideas were developed. They need to understand the ancient, as well as the recent, mathematicians' philosophies and how they misused the mathematics they uncovered. Our students need to know the history of mathematics because it really is "HIS story." Christ is directing all areas of culture and all of history toward his return.

Meanwhile, teachers and students alike need to be busy in the work of God's kingdom, which includes the field of mathematics. Like Mr. Kuiper, I believe a blend of historical background and practical application, along with daily practice in solving problems, is a great way for our students to learn. I hope to implement this in my classroom in the future. In this way, in math class, students will reflect on their own work, on the work that mathematicians have done before them, on the work that God has done throughout history, and on the work He has done in their own lives. As a teacher, it is my prayer that God might even use me to teach and edify these students. My hope is that they might become mature men and women of God, standing firm even in the midst of the philosophies and doctrines of the world, growing in all areas of life unto Christ (Eph. 4:12-15). May our students reflect and glorify Christ even in their study of mathematics!

—Miss Valerie Westra

My Voice Shalt Thou Hear in the Morning

“My voice shalt thou hear in the morning, O Lord; in the morning will I direct my prayer unto thee, and will look up” (Psalm 5:3).

I count it as one of the perks of teaching at a small school. The entire school body, both faculty and students, assembles together most mornings for fifteen minutes of praise to God. We read the Word of God together. We talk about the truths of Scripture. We bow before the Lord and meditate in prayer. We sing praises to His name. Could there be a more beautiful and fitting start to the hustle and bustle of a busy day of work? What a privilege it is that the first fifteen minutes of our school day at Heritage Christian High School is set aside for devotions!

I was reminded of the privilege and importance of devotions at this year's PRTI Teacher's Convention. Shaun Karsemeyer's presentation on "Teaching Devotional Skills" reminded me that devotions must be at the heart of the life of the child of God, and therefore must be at the heart of the life of the Christian school. Mr. Karsemeyer addressed a wide range of devotional topics including the goals of school devotions, various devotional expectations for specific grade levels, and practical devotional ideas. Mr. Karsemeyer emphasized the importance of both teacher-led and student-led devotions. His presentation prompted me to dwell on and appreciate the unique devotional experience we have at Heritage Christian High School, but more specifically, this sectional reminded me that coming together in the morning before classes begin to worship the Lord is both wise and wonderful.

The Bible itself reveals to us the wisdom of devotions to God in the morning. The inspired Psalmist David illustrates this in Psalm 5 when he writes, "My voice shalt thou hear in the morning" and in Psalm 59 when he declares, "I will sing aloud of thy mercy in the morning." David understood, as all of God's children must, that before we wrap ourselves up in our daily work, we must take the time to praise the Lord, bring our supplications to Him, and ask Him for His guiding hand. God clearly reveals to us in His Word that we must worship His name while the day is young, and it is important for the Christian school to follow this instruction as well.

God in His wisdom sets the example of morning devotions before us for a very practical reason. We begin our day in the morning, and at the outset of our day God teaches us that we must meditate upon Him. Devotions to God in the morning should serve to set the tone for the rest of the school day. Throughout the day, teachers and students must consciously walk with God and work in His service and for His name's honor and glory. Morning devotions are a constant reminder that the whole of our day must be dedicated to Him. Morning devotions remind teachers and students why it is that we attend Heritage Christian High School—to learn to live a life of devotion to God. With a refreshing start to the school day, it is the desire of every teacher that these devotions create a climate of worship and discipleship that is reflected in each and every class throughout the day and throughout the lives of our students. To God be the glory! Why else are we here? Students and teachers must treasure their devotions, and they must remember that all of Christian education is devotion to God.

—Mr. Dan Van Uffelen

Advanced Art Lessons

There are many good reasons for our teachers to assemble once each year as the Protestant Reformed Teachers' Institute: to be reinvigorated for the calling, to listen together to the words of reminder and exhortation from our keynote speaker, to share experiences and ideas, to renew old friendships and acquaintances, and to cooperate together and share expertise in particular fields. I was especially thankful for the last of these items at this year's convention.

With the sponsorship of the Federation of Protestant Reformed Christian Schools, Erik Lubbers and Connie Meyer, two of our capable art teachers, have been working on the development of an art curriculum for the past few years. Each school received a supplementary packet to this curriculum at this year's convention. This supplement included the latest lessons Erik and Connie have developed for advanced art lessons in acrylic paint, watercolors, and oil pastels, and this year's convention included sectionals led by each of them to explain and demonstrate these new lessons, as well as give opportunity for sectional attendees to try out the projects themselves.

Mr. Lubbers' sectional reminded us teachers of another valuable lesson: sometimes things don't go as planned. The paper Erik stretched in preparation for demonstrating a watercolor project did not turn out, so he quickly adjusted and showed us a crackling technique that students could be taught in art class, but also could be used in many other classes for projects and reports.

Mrs. Meyer demonstrated some concepts in color and light for her audience and went through some of the new lessons in acrylic painting and oil pastels with us to give us the main ideas and hints for how to carry out the lessons.

Art, like science, is a class in which students are called to closely observe creation. These art lessons are infused with biblical truths and observations about God's creation, and are complete with suggestions for presenting these to the students. For example, the introduction to an acrylic paint project notes light as the first creative work of creation week, and reminds us of the Light, Jesus Christ, the firstborn of every creature, and then how important the light is to the artist too.

I appreciate the effort these two have made to develop an art curriculum our schools may use. A perusal of the materials reveals their efforts to make the lessons understandable even to teachers without much of an art background; the lessons include lists of objectives, materials, and vocabulary, as well as introductions to lessons and explanations of procedures, including sample works. But more importantly, these lessons reveal the thoughts put into giving scripturally sound instruction to our art students.

—Mr. Ralph Medema

Despise Not the Day of Small Things

This year marked the 50th Annual Protestant Reformed Teachers' Convention. At the keynote address given Thursday morning, Rev. Bruinsma reminded us that this milestone is evidence of God's faithfulness. After the convention banquet Thursday night, Prof. Engelsma gave a speech in which he focused on the history of our Protestant Reformed schools.

Prof. Engelsma used Zechariah 4:10 to urge us not to despise the day of small things. He reviewed with us how the beginnings of our schools were small. A school would start with only a few teachers, board members who had very little qualification and preparation for the work, associations of families with little resources, school buildings that were only one or two rooms.

In the same way, many of the people in Zechariah's time that had returned to Jerusalem after the captivity were disappointed with the temple because it was not nearly as glorious as the former temple. They were discouraged in the work of rebuilding the walls of the city because the work was hard and there was opposition on every side. But God, through Zechariah, comes to them and tells them not to despise the day of small things.

We are motivated by knowing that God delights in making something out of nothing. In the beginning, God created all things from nothing. From Abraham, God brought forth the nation of Israel—a people that were as the stars of the heaven for multitude, and as the sand which is upon the sea shore. From the remnant that returned after the captivity, God brings forth an innumerable host of saints.

This is great encouragement as we labor to provide schools where we can educate our children in the knowledge of God—showing them Who He is, what He has done, and teaching them to serve and glorify Him. What a tremendous work! How feeble and small we are. How great the opposition may seem at times. But, inasmuch as we are doing the work of the Lord, He will bless us and cause our work to prosper. As we look at Heritage Christian High School, only in its fourth year, we already see that He is giving increase and is blessing us. We started with a faculty of three; we now have been given six. From fifteen students in two grades, we now have forty-seven students and all four grades. We have had the privilege of seeing our first students graduate. But beside all this, we have seen our children grow spiritually. What a blessing to be able to send our children to school with those of like precious faith and be taught by teachers who hold to the same truth.

God encouraged the remnant in Jerusalem and encourages us by telling us that it is “not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit” (Zech. 4:6). It is God's work and He will prosper it. May He give us a mind to work as teachers, as parents, and as children in our respective callings. Let us keep our focus on the promise that we read in Isaiah 60:21, 22: “Thy people also shall be all righteous: they shall inherit the land for ever, the branch of my planting, the work of my hands, that I may be glorified. A little one shall become a thousand, and a small one a strong nation: I the LORD will hasten it in his time.”

—Mr. Bob Vermeer