

Covenant Education

A gift to our children and the whole community

By William H. Smith

One of the most momentous decisions families face concerns the education of their children. Our family has tried all the options—public school, Christian school, homeschool. One principle to which I adhere strongly is that, under God, decisions about education belong to parents. Christian children are God's and He has delegated to Christian parents the privilege and responsibility to bring up their children for Him, which includes making decisions about where and how to educate them.

While I defend the right of all parents to make educational decisions, I have come to a strong conviction, which I do not hesitate to commend to you. I believe the best education for Christian children is covenant education. But what is covenant education?

Covenant education is a Christian education. Some Christians think that "education is education" and that the only thing distinctive about a Christian school is a class on the Bible, or a chapel time, or the beginning of classes with prayers. Other Christians think that "God was banished from the schools when prayer was eliminated" and that "if prayer could be restored our schools would be Christian again."

I disagree. Education, by its nature, requires a foundation (a philosophical starting point) and a superstructure (a philosophical context). I am convinced that belief, or lack of belief, in the Triune God who is both Creator and Redeemer of creation makes a critical difference to every aspect of the education enterprise.

Covenant education is Reformational education and it combines some commitments that have a unique impact on the nature and quality of learning. Among these commitments are:

- Believing in the Bible as trustworthy, authoritative, and relevant to education.
- Seeing the child as created in the image of God, sinful in Adam, claimed in the covenant, and redeemed in Christ.
- Viewing the world as created good by God, fallen and cursed because of sin, but redeemed and reclaimed by Christ.
- Understanding the purpose of education as preparing citizens of Christ's kingdom to live all of life under His lordship.

Because of its theology, covenant education is different. It is realistic about sin, but essentially positive toward creation and learning. It plays defense against the world but is primarily on the offensive for Christ's kingdom. It is devotional but rejects pietism in favor of academic rigor and serious intellectual inquiry.

Covenant education is community education. God's covenant with us binds us to Him as individuals and families. But it also binds us together as a community of His people. We recognize that within the covenant community God has given some the gifts to be educators. We celebrate and take advantage of these gifts. We come together as parents, children, administrators, and teachers in a common school so that together we can educate our children.

What about some of the objections?

- "This kind of education is expensive." No doubt about it, but it's worth every penny. As one who has spent many thousands of dollars on covenant education, I believe the money is better spent on education than almost anything else-home, cars, vacations, clothes-I could spend it on. Besides, I have this "vision"-of the whole covenant community taking education so seriously that no Christian family will be denied a covenant education for lack of money.
- "My child will have a long bus ride." I never heard this one until I moved to Pennsylvania, because I never before lived where the state provided transportation to private schools. In the past we took a "covenantal approach." We shared responsibility for getting our children to and from school by forming carpools.
- "These schools could do more for children needing special education, gifted education, and technical education." True, but almost any legitimate educational need can be met if God's people become willing to provide the financial resources and to do the work.
- From public-school advocates: "These schools shelter children from reality." Hardly. The covenant school looks squarely at the world of sin and rebellion while not condoning it. The covenant school appreciates "common grace"-the insights and abilities of unbelievers who, for instance, can make important scientific discoveries or produce great literature. But the covenant school prepares the student to think and live in the "real world"-a world created by and accountable to God, a world redeemed by and destined to reach its consummation in Christ.
- From homeschool advocates: "These schools will corrupt my child." Yes, your sinful child will go to school with other sinful children. But, the covenant school brings together redeemed but imperfect children. This is great preparation for life with other Christians in the family, the church, and the kingdom because in this world all Christian institutions consist of Christians who are "works of grace in progress."