IV. THE GOAL OF CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

In this and in the next lecture, I intend to deal with education. Although the aim of the two lectures is the same, the contents are of course different. The next lecture is especially geared to teachers, whereas in the present one I aim at a more general public. But in both cases I am trying to get across the same message, which is the important role of curriculum content in education. By curriculum content I mean traditional subject areas: English and history, arithmetic and mathematics, science, geography, and so on.

1. Changing goals of education

This curriculum content receives less attention today than it used to. This is so because educational goals have changed in late-modern and postmodern times. The primary purpose of education used to be the transmission of knowledge from one generation to the next. This was inspired by the idea that for young people to function in their society they had to know its traditions, so that they would be instructed by them and enabled to build on them.

The idea that each generation has to start from scratch was unheard of. Young people were part of a community, one that was held together by many bonds and whose roots were in the remote past. There was something organic about it. For the plant to flourish, it had to be connected to its roots. For society to survive and do well, it had to be aware of the experiences and accomplishments of previous generations. Hence curriculum content was important in the schools. It was the lessons taught by history, the insights gained by literary works, the contributions of geographers, scientists, mathematicians, law-makers, and so on, that were to be passed on to the next generation, so that it might learn from them and so build further on them.

The transmission of knowledge under attack

It is this idea of the transmission of knowledge that has come under attack. The reasons for this are many. I will mention a number of them. One is the modern idea of progress. Ever since the rise of evolutionism people have tended to believe that perfection lay in the future, rather than in the past. The past was more ‘primitive’ than the present and

therefore could not really teach us anything. The many technological advances of course served to reinforce this feeling. After all, for practically every gadget we own or know of, from microwaves to c.d. players, from cars to computers to 'smart bombs,' the newest is always the most efficient and therefore the best. The past has nothing to offer us here. The fact that the past, on the other hand, may be able to teach us insight and wisdom is ignored. Insight and wisdom are intangible things. Science and technology are what counts.

A second reason why the transmission of knowledge is under a cloud is the advance of democracy and the nature of the modern economy. A far larger proportion of all children now attends school, and attends it for a longer period, than was the case in the past. This is inevitable, for a democracy cannot function if a large part of the population is illiterate, and an industrial or information economy cannot flourish if there is no well-trained work force. Workers must now at the very least have a secondary school diploma, and preferably some post-secondary training as well. Secondary schools therefore have had to make room for every student, whether he or she was academically inclined or not. Since the traditional kind of education was felt to be too demanding for many of these youngsters, emphasis was placed on social and career skills. What mattered was that young people were able to get along and find and keep a job; the training of the mind and the transmission of knowledge took second place, and curriculum content was watered down. Unfortunately, this happened not only for the slower student, but for the intellectually more gifted one as well.

Still another reason for the stress on career and social skills at the expense of the transmission of knowledge is the need to make the country governable, and therefore socially and politically stable. This was not always a primary goal. There was a time, not all that long ago, when 'progressive' educational leaders made a point of telling us that education was a means to bring about social change. Teaching obedience and submission to authority, these people informed us, was to inculcate "values conducive to a docile work force not to an empowered politically active population." The education system, instead, should "foster an understanding of people's ability to effect change in their world," and therefore schools should empower students by means of "such initiatives as guaranteeing student representation on school boards and school councils, introducing an enforceable student bill of rights, ensuring the presence of

an independent students' advocate at each school board and student participation in evaluating curriculum and teacher performance."

These quotes are taken from the General Policy Statement on Education adopted by the 1991 Convention of the (socialist) New Democratic Party in Ontario. I don't believe that until a few years ago this type of statement was exceptional. In recent pronouncements by educational leaders, however, these goals are lacking. Today the stress is not so much on revolutionary changes as on economic and political stability. Statements by educational leaders in both Europe and North America suggest that these people expect the schools to produce not a politically empowered and aggressive citizenry, but a work force that is flexible, capable of advancing the economy so that the country can compete in the global market, and docile enough to be governable.

You may be inclined to say that this development is not all bad. After all, we have had enough student rebellions and unrest in previous decades and can do with some stability. Furthermore, it is important that our young people are trained in such a way that they can find a job and hang on to it, and also that our country can compete in the world market. These goals are indeed worthwhile. But I am afraid that we should not expect miracles from the new approach to education, even though some of the more enthusiastic educationists promise such miracles.

Behaviourism

More importantly, even if the goals should be reached, the price exacted for them will be too high. When I read of this type of educational goals I am reminded of a book that made quite a stir a few decades ago. I am referring to a work by the American psychologist B. F. Skinner, entitled *Beyond Freedom and Dignity,* which saw the light in 1971. Like many of his contemporaries, Skinner was convinced that drastic measures were necessary if mankind and its habitat were to survive. There were too many problems at the time. The growth of the world's population was getting out of hand, the cold war was still going on and a nuclear holocaust threatened, the cities were becoming uninhabitable, the educational system was a mess, poverty and crime increased, and the environment was being poisoned by industrial waste.

In brief, mankind's behaviour was out of control, and modern science and technology had been unable to do anything about it. They had in fact added to the problems. Persuasion did not work either. It had

been tried, but people were either unable or unwilling to change their behaviour. The only solution therefore was, Skinner concluded, to change human nature. Humanity as it had existed so far was to be abolished, and a new humanity put into its place.

This was to be done by what Skinner called operant conditioning, an approach he had developed when working with pigeons. For Skinner was a behaviourist, which means that he believed that human beings are not all that different from animals. Just as a dog or rat or pigeon can be trained to behave in a certain way, so can humans. The human person was, in Skinner's view, largely the product of his environment, and therefore if he was to change, his surroundings had to change first. People were to be placed in a proper environment, positive reinforcements (rewards) were to be provided whenever they behaved the way planners wanted them to behave, and these reinforcements were to be withheld in the opposite case. In this way man could be controlled, manipulated, and remade into the type of being he ought to be.[40]

Skinner is a transitional figure. He is a typical modernist in his confidence that science and technology (in this case psychological conditioning and perhaps genetic engineering) can establish a utopia on earth. This is a quintessentially modernist idea. Yet he is a postmodernist in his easy rejection of man as man, a being created in God's image. Humanity in Skinner's utopia will be little more than a collection of robots, programmed by a planning elite that thinks it knows best. Also, like so many postmodernists, Skinner makes few efforts to resolve the difficulties implied in his theory. No real answer is given to the question, for example, who will control the manipulators, nor is Skinner capable of giving the criteria by which these people are to decide what is good and evil, acceptable and unacceptable. But those who agree with Skinner that the only way to save man is to abolish him are willing to overlook these shortcomings.

Behaviourism and the schools

Skinner believed that the educational system, from nursery and kindergarten onward, has an important role to play in the proper conditioning of humanity. Children can quite easily be moulded. Nurses and teachers can work on them. They can teach the proper attitudes and skills, reinforce them in a positive manner, and make sure that the children get the type of information that agrees with Skinner's behaviouristic goals. They can at the same time prevent students from getting acquaint-

ed with anything that goes against these goals. Time and again Skinner tells us that the study of history is useless, and time and again he attacks the so-called 'freedom literature,' that is, the works of our civilization which speak of human freedom, human dignity, liberalism, democracy, and similar ideals. He makes clear his conviction that the abolition of human freedom and dignity is a small price to pay for peace and stability and security. It is better to have contented robots than anxious, rebellious, unhappy, and ungovernable human beings.

What we must realize is that Skinner has the support of the modern educational system. To say this is not to suggest that our educational planners are his disciples. Behaviourist psychology is not as fashionable as it used to be, and in any event, not all behaviourism is of the radical Skinnerian type. In short, I am far from implying that there is a conspiracy abroad among educationists to rob, consciously and maliciously, the coming generations of their freedoms and their dignity. Yet I do believe that present educational goals are conducive to creating the type of unthinking, robotized human beings that Skinner had in mind. The old idea of the transmission of knowledge aimed at forming people who were acquainted with ideas different from those of their society. This made it possible for them to compare and contrast, to think critically, to make up their own minds. Today's young people miss those advantages and consequently will be easy victims of whatever planners are in control. They will be little more, as one author put it, than 'fodder of the service economy.'

2. An American voice

It is this prospect, together with other shortcomings in the schooling of today's youth, that has caused several thinkers to attack the so-called progressive educational system of our days. These people include Christians and non-Christians. It may be of interest to listen to one of the secular critics of modern education. The one I have in mind is an American professor of English by the name of Daniel J. Singal, who some years ago published an article on education in the *Atlantic Monthly*.[41] Singal writes about the American system, but the problems he deals with are world-wide. We can read his article, therefore, as dealing with the inadequacies of modern education in general. He blames these inadequacies on the declining emphasis on the teaching of content and cognitive skills, and on the fact that too much time is devoted to teaching fashionable social and personal skills.

Singal comes with many of the complaints and arguments that we can read about in the columns and 'letters to the editor' on the same topic, but I have chosen him because his article is exceptionally well documented. He comes with facts and figures to substantiate his conclusions. Another reason why I find him relevant is that he does not talk about the general school population. Often we are told, and rightly so, that average test scores had to fall because formerly only the more capable students received secondary schooling, whereas nowadays practically everybody does. His article, however, deals with declining test scores among the top students. To quote the brief summary that is given with the title, the article looks at "the forgotten victims of our mediocre educational system — the potentially high achievers whose SAT scores have fallen, and who read less, understand less of what they read, and know less than the top students of a generation ago."

Singal is talking here about the SAT or Stanford Achievement Test, which has long served as one of the main instruments for measuring pupil progress in American schools. He shows that from the 1920s to the late 1960s American children taking this test made so much progress that each decade the difficulty of the test was increased. From the late 1960s to the early 1980s, however, that progress was lost, with the greatest declines coming at the secondary level, especially in the humanities. He quotes the report of the National Commission on Excellence in Education, entitled *A Nation at Risk,* which was published in 1983:

> Each generation of Americans has outstripped its parents in education, in literacy, and in economic attainment. For the first time in the history of our country, the educational skills of one generation will not surpass, will not equal, will not even approach, those of their parents.

This is not, Singal says, a result of an influx of disadvantaged students. Test scores of black students have gone up in recent decades, yet average scores have gone down, largely because of the performance of those in the top quartile. Although between 1981 and 1991 there was a rise in average scores, that rise was in part explained by the influx of Asian-American students, who now make up a larger percentage of American students than before.

Singal talks about the frustrations university professors experience as a result of having to teach inadequately prepared freshmen. The rate at which students read has gone down, and so has the level of com-

prehension. There are similar problems with writing, especially with analytical writing. Expressing their personal feelings, on the other hand, is easy for these students, for that's what they have been engaged in for twelve years. But, Singal complains, students "have never learned how to construct a rational argument to defend their opinions."

Singal then speaks about the need for *prior* knowledge, about the fact that if you know little you learn little. To provide the necessary foundational knowledge, Singal says, the acquisition of knowledge used to be a main goal of a good secondary school education. It was done by year-long survey courses in literature and in American, European, and world history, which provided students with the necessary background to make sense of whatever new subject matter they encountered. Because this is now lacking, students have great difficulty absorbing detail. "Since they have no context in which to fit what they read," Singal writes, "it quickly flows out of their minds." This helps explain, among other things, the high drop-out rates at colleges and universities, and the discontent among employers.

Asking what caused the decline in performance over the past few decades, Singal answers that the list of so-called 'social factors' as the main culprit (such as T.V., rock music, peer pressure, single-parent families, faulty nutrition) does not really explain the phenomenon. Those who use that explanation, he says, forget about the small number of secondary schools across the country that have escaped the downturn — some of them wealthy private academies, but others blue-collar neighbourhood schools. The 'social factors' among these students are not significantly different from those elsewhere. The major factor, he says, is the school, and he quotes an official report in support of this conclusion.

Singal lists four remedies for the malaise suffered by the American school system. They are:

1. Dramatically increase the quality and quantity of assigned reading for students at all grade levels;
2. Bring back required survey courses in English and history as the staple of the secondary school humanities curriculum;
3. Institute a flexible programme of ability grouping at both the primary and secondary levels. Singal is talking here, I should add, not of locking students in at a certain level for all courses, but of a flexible type of streaming, where a student can be at one level of difficulty for one subject, and at a different level for the next one, according to need;

4. Attract more bright college graduates into the teaching profession. In this connection Singal stresses the importance of good academic qualifications for teachers and complains that, generally speaking, much more time is expended in training future teachers on how to teach than on what they will be teaching. Teachers' knowledge of subject content is far more important than is often realized.

3. Arguments against curriculum

So much for Singal. His piece is worthy of our attention, even if it is not necessarily the last word on the question. Singal has made it clear that to deprive students of curriculum content is to disadvantage them greatly. That is certainly true for Christians, who have been told to test the spirits — and you can't do that if you don't know what type of spirits are abroad, or if you have no knowledge to test them with. This realization is among the reasons why our own schools continue to stress academic content and make the transmission of knowledge one of their primary goals.

We cannot afford to be complacent on this score, however. Like their public counterparts, our schools face the problem of a crowded time table. There are, as every teacher knows, too many subjects nowadays battling for a share of a finite curriculum; we simply can't teach all the things we feel we ought to teach or would like to teach. Furthermore, our schools are expected to follow government guidelines, and they use text books that may promote the approaches Singal and others have warned against. Nor should we forget the fact that our students themselves are influenced by the climate of opinion of their times. As teachers will tell you, it is a daily struggle to uphold academic requirements, for students are less and less inclined to stretch their minds. Here parental help is urgently needed. I will come back to this point. First, however, I want to deal with arguments against the traditional curriculum which are often heard also among us.

(1) The knowledge explosion

One of these is the argument of the knowledge explosion and the rapidity of change in today's world. The feeling among many is that we can't keep up with the information deluge anyway, so why force young people to try until their skulls burst? Rather than having knowledge stuffed down their throats, we are told, students should be shown where to get information if and when they need it, and instructed how to

analyse, synthesize, and evaluate that information. That is, they should be taught skills rather than content, and even at the expense of content.

The argument seems reasonable. Unfortunately, it does not work, as a host of university professors, teachers, employers, and concerned parents keep telling and showing us. It does not work, firstly, because information is needed so often that there simply is no way to retrieve it all from outside sources. Imagine someone trying to read the newspaper and meeting such place names as Bosnia, Ruanda, Sudan, or names like Isaac Newton, John Calvin, Harry Truman, or concepts like postmodernism, or sin, or grace — names and concepts that he has never met before — do you believe that each time this person would drop his paper and run to the computer or encyclopedia to 'retrieve' the information he needs? He wouldn't. He would stop reading instead. And what goes for the daily newspaper goes for books, for religious literature, for lectures — even for the Sunday sermon. We need to have *prior* knowledge to gain *further* knowledge.

Another reason why it won't work is that too often an empty head does not know it is empty. Its possessor's intellectual curiosity has not been awakened, and even if there is a desire for knowledge, it remains unfocused. For we cannot gainsay it: the less we know, the less we learn and understand. And also, the less we know, the more easily we become the victim of ideologues and manipulators like the B. F. Skinners of this world, the ones who want to deprive us of our freedom and our dignity as human beings, made in God's image, for the sake of socio-political and economic stability.

All this is not to suggest, of course, that students should not also be taught how to find, synthesize, and evaluate information. They should. It has always been a necessary part of education, already at the elementary level, and certainly at the secondary one. But it is to suggest that such synthesizing and evaluating cannot be done with an empty head. There is nothing automatic or mechanical about the process.

(2) Irrelevance

A second argument that has been raised against upholders of curriculum content is that it can become a dry-as-dust teaching of facts upon facts upon unrelated facts. That danger exists especially, I think, with subjects such as history and church history, and it must indeed be guarded against. Students can legitimately ask that subject material be made

relevant. After all, don't we do the same when listening, for example, to the Sunday sermon?

But to say that things ought to be made relevant does not mean that there must always be instant gratification. It does mean that teachers help students see the importance of what they teach them, showing them that it is part of a larger picture. There must be a context, a framework. This may mean that students are shown the aesthetic value of something, or the intellectual challenge, or else that they clearly see that what is being taught is part of the grand edifice. That could be the case in the teaching of grammar, language drills, time tables, and memorization of the psalms and parts of the Catechism. If some of these things can be made immediately relevant to the student's own life and times — as can often be done – so much the better. And of course, there must always be the overarching framework — the framework (to use a postmodern term) of the Christian metanarrative, the grand story of the Bible.

As the above implies, in my opinion rote learning and memorization have their place in education, even an important place. The same applies to information that is not yet fully understood. Education, after all, can be defined as 'the art of awakening the natural curiosity of young minds for the purpose of satisfying it afterwards,' and also as 'the art of creating a disequilibrium' or imbalance, so that pupils look for further knowledge to restore the balance. We have all experienced that. We have heard of terms like child-centred education or the whole language approach, and we were not satisfied until we knew what was meant by them. The disequilibrium we experienced served as a motivation for further learning. And as to memorization, young children are exceptionally good at it, they love doing it, and it pays great dividends later. Aren't we all glad that in our youth we were made to memorize, for example, the time tables, the list of books of the Old and New Testament, and a variety of psalms and Bible texts? Or the Catechism, for that matter?

I know that modern educators frown on the idea that students are told to learn or memorize something before they fully understand its meaning. The American author of a recent work tells us how as a young man he heard of a Lutheran minister who said he took two years to teach the Smaller Catechism. The first year he had the students memorize it, and the second year he explained it. When as a young man he heard this, the author writes, he was scandalized by such an old-fashioned approach, but years later he realized that the idea was a wise one, that memorizing

was essential. For meaning, he writes, is transitory, "and the meanings one learns at twelve years of age are not the fullness of the words one memorizes. If the young person is fitted out only with the meanings of youth, what does one return to when the words are faded and forgotten? Words, however, endure, and if one has the words the meaning is never wholly lost."[42] It is the same thing that survivors of concentration camps have told us. They may have had no Bible, but the words of the Bible and of the confessions and psalms they had memorized in their youth were still present and therefore still able to stir the heart.

(3) Academic content is not neutral

Last but not least, there is the argument against curriculum content that such content is not religiously neutral, and that teaching it can be a risky business. We are not dealing here with an imaginary danger. Much of what the students encounter in curriculum content is secular, some of it even outspokenly anti-christian. The way to guard against it, however, is not for our schools to turn away from teaching the works of our culture, but to realize their responsibility in acting as mediators between the students and the knowledge being taught, to be careful in the selection of that knowledge and also in the use of textbooks and government guidelines.[43]

At the same time we must, I believe, avoid trying to make a hothouse of our schools, an environment where students are protected from all the evil influences of the world. For secular ideas are spread not only through curriculum content but also, and often in much cruder form, via the electronic media such as television and the Internet. We will therefore be wise to deal with them up front. Our schools should not feel they should rely on Christian texts and Christian literature only. There must also be curriculum content that acquaints students with the anti-christian ideas that assault them in any event, so that teachers and other educators can help them analyse these ideas and show them how to deal with them. In other words: there must be, increasingly so in the higher grades, guided confrontation.

It must be *guided* confrontation, but it must indeed be confrontation. For we can't be satisfied with telling students that they must reject a certain theory or point of view just because we say so. Students may ask their teachers to help them test the spirits in a rational manner. They may do this in connection with their own intellectual perplexities

and in order to defend the Christian faith in the world and so draw others to Christ.

I say this because ours is a reasonable faith, and because the Lord Himself provides us with evidence of the truth of His revelation. He does so not only in Scripture (although there first of all), but also when He reveals His power and majesty, His mercy and judgment, in nature and history (Romans 1.19, 20; Belgic Confession, Arts. 2 and 5).

Students must be made aware of this evidence. They must be shown that there are answers, rational answers, to the questions our anti-christian culture raises. They badly need our help, for spiritually our age is a dangerous one. Especially via the electronic media, the spiritual forces of evil are able to invade our homes and schools and churches as never before. And they *do* invade them. As C. S. Lewis once wrote in this connection, "Plain men are forced to bear burdens which plain men were never expected to bear before." Those plain men include our young people. We must prepare them for their life of burden-bearing.

4. Home and school

And this takes us back to the relationship between the school and the home. Professor Singal, we noted, believes that the school plays a major role in reforming education by teaching curriculum in the traditional manner. He is right to stress the importance of the school, but I think he could have said more about the part the home can play in educational reform. As any teacher will tell you, the effectiveness of the school depends greatly on the attitude of the parents. If they truly respect learning, if they read to their children and encourage them to read, if they make sure that at the secondary school level the student's part-time job does not compete with the homework, then the children will practically always take their education more seriously than in the opposite case. I know that parents can't work miracles. One child is more interested in reading and in school work than another. Nevertheless, the example of the home makes a lot of difference for all of them.

Reading to the children, already at a very early age, is perhaps the most important thing parents can do to encourage learning. The love for reading, the ability to read, and the level of comprehension are slipping drastically also in our schools. As a teacher you can notice the decline, decade by decade, indeed year by year. Television, video, and the computer are taking over. Unless children have developed a love of

reading when still young, they are in danger of turning from the printed page to the electronic media.

5. Word and image

And we cannot afford that. Of course, the electronic media constitute technological advances that we may and must employ. We can only use them responsibly, however, if we exercise proper caution and discernment. This means, firstly, that we acquaint ourselves with the nature and potential of these media — and this applies not only to the T.V. and the video, but also to the computer. I have noted that parents who are careful to keep the television out of their house are sometimes unaware of the negative use that can be made of the computer, and confidently entrust their children with that medium. We have to realize that computer literacy implies more than knowing how to operate the instrument.

Knowing one's roots

Responsible use of the electronic media also means that we do not allow the image to become our only, or even our primary, avenue to information and knowledge. Other means of communication such as oral discourse and the printed page should never be pushed into second place, for media like television and the video are not conducive to the kind of education that Christians require.

For one thing, they are hardly the best mains of acquainting our students with the roots of their culture. With few exceptions, these media deal with the contemporary situation rather than with the past. But if the past is ignored, if our young people are cut off from their roots, they cannot function as they should either in their youth, when they attend school or college or university, or in adulthood, when they assume their tasks as parents and citizens. We all know how paralysing personal amnesia is. Believe me, cultural amnesia — that is a lack of knowledge of one's society and its history — is no less devastating. It is also far more common today than is the personal kind, and the neglect of the printed page, of oral discourse, and of the transmission of knowledge, are among the reasons for its widespread occurrence.

The need to avoid this disease was the reason why from the beginnings of civilization people have insisted that schools be established, and that these schools transmit knowledge from one generation to the next. It is only in our times that the necessity of acquainting young

people with their roots is ignored. We are now given the impression that the past has nothing to teach us; that children will do well to ignore it; that they have to find their own way and make up their own mind about what is good and evil, worthwhile and contemptible, wise and foolish. But children cannot do this. They will flounder and give up both on their parents and on their society. If you want a reason for youth crime, drug abuse, the gang phenomenon, and the rising teen-age suicide rate, then look at the fact that this generation has been left rootless, without guidance and without hope. Not knowing their culture, they are alienated from it and reject it.[44]

Critical thinking

I said a moment ago that if children do not develop a love of reading, the danger exists that they will turn to the electronic media, and that this is something Christians must fight. I want to return to the reasons why reading should be stressed, rather than a reliance on electronic substitutes like video and T.V. An obvious one, of course, is that much of the most worthwhile literature is available only in print, and another that it is indeed available. We can go to the library or the bookstore and choose what we want and when we want it. Indeed, in the words of a Christian literary critic, the printed page gives us "the extraordinary freedom to choose the intellectual company we will keep, to select those with whom, in spirit, we will walk."[45] That freedom is far to seek in media that concentrate on the image.

I am not suggesting here, of course, that the printed page is neutral, or necessarily harmless. Several centuries ago, when printing with moveable type was in its infancy, it was rightly said that this new technology was a step to both heaven and hell. A contemporary Christian author expressed the same truth when he wrote that "novels open windows on various Sodoms as well as Edens."[46] Also when we are reading books, therefore, discernment continues to be necessary. Yet it remains true that those who look for good literature are in practically all cases restricted to printed works.

There are other arguments in favour of the printed word. As media critics keep telling us, reading is the best means to sharpen the mind. In an article I wrote some years ago I have dealt with the view of one of these critics, the American Neil Postman, on the superiority of the printed word over the image. Let me summarize what I wrote at the time.[47] The *printed word*, Postman tells us, demands abstract, analytical thinking, whereas the

image discourages it. In a culture dominated by print "public discourse tends to be characterized by a coherent, orderly arrangement of facts and ideas. The public for whom it is intended is generally competent to manage such discourse." These people have learned to analyse what they read, to detect an author's mistakes, and to notice his contradictions and his failures to provide logical connections. They also have developed the attention span necessary for such mental exertion.

Furthermore, in the world of the printed word the emphasis is on "logic, sequence, history, exposition, objectivity, detachment, and discipline." The world of the image, on the other hand, deals with "imagery, narrative, presentness, simultaneity, intimacy, immediate gratification, and quick emotional response." Rather than encouraging careful, critical evaluation, it does not even allow for it. The images pass too quickly; there is no possibility of taking a pause to think. The implication of this decreased emphasis on analytical thinking is that the possibilities of the public's being manipulated by the media elites multiply. Reading is essential to the formation of a discerning, a critical mind, and today as much as at any time, Christians need a mind that can discern and criticize, that can distinguish truth from untruth, special pleading from honest reasoning.

Postman has also reminded us that when God revealed Himself, He chose to do so by means of the Word, rather than the image. God in fact sternly warned His people against making an image of Him. And we are grateful for that. For an image can be seen, and that is attractive, but it is also dumb. It gives us no guidance. Only the word can do that, and the God of the Covenant makes Himself known as the God of the Word, both in His written revelation and when He revealed Himself in His Son, who is the Logos, the Word of God. He created us with the gift of language, so that we could hear Him, obey Him, respond to Him in prayer and worship. And He made it clear that those who believe His words and His promises will not be deprived of evidence of His presence; they will indeed *see* the fulfilment of His words.

The word is so much greater than the image. Let us remember this in a time when the word is forgotten, when the book is ignored and the image threatens to take over. Together with the school, parents have to concentrate on the written word and cultivate a love toward it. Together with the school, they also have to create a love for learning in general, so that the next generation will be prepared for the task that awaits them.

That task does not require people who ignore the world. That is not possible in any case, for we are in the world and must work in the midst of it and on behalf of it. It does require people who, when they read the newspaper or watch the news, engage in politics, surf the world-wide web, and speak with their unbelieving neighbours, are able to discern the spirits. Only so can they deal with the problems and temptations and opportunities of their own day. And only so can they serve Him who bought them.

To prepare our young people for that service — in church and world, in family and society, that is, in all of life — that, in the end, is what the teaching of curriculum content in our schools is all about.