A Symposium:
The Sunday School in the RCA

ARTHUR O. VAN ECK

"The Sunday School is as American as apple pie," but not everyone likes apple pie and not everyone is American. The contributors to this Symposium on the future of the Sunday School in the Reformed Church reflect that the Sunday School is going to continue, that for some congregations it will be the same, for others it will be different. The Sunday School will be recognizable in some instances and unrecognizable in others. There are those who will cheer and applaud the continuation of the Sunday School, and there are others who will long for radical changes.

Yet, the general prospectus evidenced by contributors to this Symposium is that the Sunday School has a definite, even energetic, future in the Reformed Church. Peter Theune's enthusiasm for the Sunday School is already contagious. There is some good factual evidence that the Sunday School is coming back with new vitality after Life Magazine and other popular periodicals had counted it down and out. For one thing, we are in the midst of a second baby boom, not as great as the fifties and early sixties, but a real one nevertheless. There will be more children during this decade and more adolescents in the 90's. Secondly, there is still an immense reservoir of goodwill by lay people towards the Sunday School. That affection can be built on. Thirdly, in this day when spiritual questing is so much a part of the religious scene, the Sunday School can become a natural foundation for such growth. So, the Sunday School will go on.

Sometimes it will look like it has always looked, but not often. The lives of the teachers and the students will be enhanced and enriched. Major efforts in the RCA will be directed towards knowledgeable, communicative, caring, volunteer teachers. This effort will continue to be more important than curriculum efforts because the person to person interaction has more "good news" potential than the person to print interaction. The schedules, the styles will be adapted; the times will be expanded. The energy crisis may give the church an expanded opportunity for education: more people are staying at home or traveling less. There is also openness to new schedules and new formats. And, it will become purposeful; that is, instead of simply accepting assumptions handed down from the past about the purpose of the Sunday School, congregations will become more intentional about that for which they believe the Sunday School exists.

The Sunday School won't always or even usually be the Sunday School as we have known it. It will experience its own contextualization, with the Sunday School in Canada being different from the Sunday School in Brooklyn, and being different from the Sunday School in Ripon, California. Jane Richardson certainly evidences the need for the Sunday School to both reflect and contribute positively to the context in which
it is located.

Several of the contributors, especially Don Hoekstra, Tom Wray, and Jane Richardson stress that it is now important for the Sunday School to be the discipleship school of the church. The Sunday School or its successor should be the time and place where Christians, young and old, are equipped to act out the meaning of the gospel. While Hoekstra stresses this so strongly that his article sounds as though he is only for “doing,” his solid and thorough work as a church educator supports his concern for “being” as well. He thinks that it is important for Christians to know, but he also sees that the knowledge is in order to faithful discipleship.

Surprisingly, none of the contributors mentioned the role and influence of media for the Sunday School of the future. So, I mention it here. The Sunday School increasingly will be utilizing television and other media as a substance for reflection and response. Films such as those offered by “The New Media Bible” and video recordings will also be a part of study sessions.

Most of the writers have a vision for the Sunday School moving more towards education with adults and that education will be for mission. There is an expressed hope in Don Hoekstra’s article that families will carry a major responsibility for the nurturing of children. Perhaps, he envisions a rather radical departure from the old Sunday School model.

A common theme which comes through is that quality will be first and numbers secondary. Both Tom Wray and Jane Richardson emphasize that. I dare say, however, that Ken Van Wyk, would find that quality and quantity are not antithetical but that a faithful Sunday school will cause God’s people to rejoice in the numbers which participate in it.

The Sunday School in the Reformed Church is far from finished! This decade will see new life and new support.

The Future of the Sunday School in the RCA: The Trail Ahead

DONALD HOEKSTRA

In this day and age when people are almost totally preoccupied with making tomorrow better than today but are nevertheless still also harking back to the even better yesterdays, the future of the Sunday School in the Reformed Church in America is an ominously uncertain entity. Will we keep it? Should it be kept? What can it become and be in the world of tomorrow? What of significance can it hope to accomplish? The answers, responses, and impressions to these questions and others like them will no doubt be legion in this, the 200th anniversary year of the Sunday School movement.