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p 345 TEXT INTRODUCTION

During his lifetime Kuyper penned more than thirteen hundred devotionals or meditations on a theme taken from Scripture. Until 1877 they were published in the Sunday supplement of the daily *De Standaard*; after that date, until 1920, the last year of his life, these meditations appeared in the weekly *De Heraut*. The one titled “As Sheep among Wolves” was written in the mid-1890s during a relatively tranquil period in the school struggle. Kuyper reminds his readers that a Christian school is not an evangelistic instrument but a training center for future warriors in God’s kingdom. At the same time he faults parents who risk sending their children to a secular school. He also manages to insert a warning against letting the prevailing social stratification determine what friends their children may choose to associate with.

Source: Kuyper, Abraham. *Als gij in uw huis zit. Meditatiën voor het huislijk saamleven*. Amsterdam: Höveker & Wormser, 1899, chap. xxv, pp. 105–9. Translated by Harry Van Dyke. An earlier translation by John Hendrik De Vries appeared in *When Thou Sittest in Thine House: Meditations on Home Life* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1929), 171–76. It was reprinted (Wipf and Stock: Eugene, OR, 2009).

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When it comes to educating their children, some Christian parents put themselves above the Lord Jesus.

Christ clearly stated that the difference between his followers and the world is like the difference between sheep and wolves. Some parents apparently know better. They think their children and the children of the world are all the same. So they don’t see any danger when their baptized children, dedicated to Christ, make friends—even bosom friends—with children their own age from families that do not follow Christ. And when it comes down to a choice between children of a lower class but from Christian homes, and children of higher social standing but from non-Christian homes, they all too often prefer that their offspring associate with children of the “more respectable” class.

It gets worse. When these parents have to choose a school for their children they again are wiser than Jesus and refuse to believe that here too the difference between sheep and wolves applies. In general, of course, they are in favor of Christian education as the best option. All things being equal, they would prefer to enroll their children in a Christian elementary and a Christian secondary school.

But things are not always equal. If the Christian school is more expensive, or has fewer resources, or is located in a working-class neighborhood, the choice for a Christian school has to take a back seat, and the child is sent, p 347 as Jesus would say, among wolves—though they like to improve on Jesus

by saying: among more respectable people.

But, you will say, Jesus did the same thing. He did not keep his disciples isolated. He said himself: “Behold, I am sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves” ([Matt 10:16](#)).

And so he did. With this difference, however. Jesus sent them among wolves *when they were ready*. Nowhere in Scripture do you read that when he chose Peter and Andrew, James and John and the others to be his followers the Lord first sent them to the schools of the scribes or to the academy in Jerusalem. These men had first gone to the school of John the Baptist. Not exactly a “respectable” school, but one located in the wilderness, headed by a man dressed in an animal skin, with all sorts of sinners and publicans as pupils—definitely a “separate school.” But then Jesus had started his own separate school and taught his pupils at two levels: first the twelve, then the seventy. And he was so concerned that his disciples might come under the wrong influence that when they met up with teachers of the other schools it was almost always Jesus who carried on the conversation, shielding his disciples.

Thus Jesus, who evidently thought quite differently about education from the parents I mentioned, educated his disciples in isolation from any influence of the official schools. Only when they were sufficiently educated and prepared did he charge them to begin their official ministry, sending them out into the world with those words: “Behold, I am sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves.”

Of course there comes a day when this has to be done. Once our children are mature they have to go out into the world. Then withdrawal into isolation is out of place. Jesus himself prayed: “I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one” ([John 17:15](#)).

Our children too are called to battle in their lifetime for Christ and against the world. Only then will they receive a crown one day. And you cannot do battle against the world if you keep yourself in isolation. You have to step out into the world, and as a sheep of the fold take the risks of being in the world, among the wolves.

That is what you have to do. And your children eventually have to do the same. But not until they are prepared, until they are mature, until they are well armed and properly equipped.

But some parents do not mean it that way at all. They do not tell you: “My son, my daughter is already so mature, is burning with such zeal for the Lord Jesus, that they can’t wait to go out among the wolves to do battle for the Lord.”

p 348 No, nothing of the sort. If these parents had fostered such zeal for the Lord in their children, they would be the first to enroll their children in a school where Christ is held in honor.

But they have not fostered any such zeal. No such zeal is kindled in the hearts of their children. That is why these children find the wolves so attractive and pleasant, and why they say: “Father, Mother, we’d rather go out among the wolves. Won’t you let us go and be with those strong, robust animals? It’s so stuffy among the sheep.”

And those parents will reply: “Well, son, daughter, we don’t want to force you. If it can make life

more fun for you, go and be with the wolves. But don't let them bite you. Do be careful."

That is the situation. It arises only when people rank their own insight higher than Jesus' pronouncement, when they do not really believe what he said, when they believe in Jesus in the abstract but do not surrender to his word.

These parents will say, "Sure there is a grain of truth in the warning. Some people are indeed wolves. But to begin with, not all of them are. Also, there are wolves and wolves. Some people at least are not savage, greedy wolves. Some wolves among them are even lovable."

After having weakened their position by all sorts of shallow arguments, they go on to reason further in the following vein: "Our children have always been present when the Bible was read at family devotions. We have always given them a good example. They're not at all hostile to the faith. Besides, so long as they have not accepted Jesus as their personal Savior it makes no difference whether we send them to a Christian school or not. If they are truly children of God, the Savior will protect them even among wolves."

Oh, the heart is "deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?" [Jer 17:9].

And they call this "loving our children"! These are parents who have made a solemn vow at the baptism of their infants.¹ And every evening finds these parents on their knees, praying that God will protect their child. But they haven't the faintest notion what it is *to tempt God*. We need to ask them: p 349 After showing such feeble love for your children, do you really think you can pray that prayer based on a prompting by the Holy Spirit?

Think of the implications when Jesus draws such a sharp contrast between sheep and wolves. Does he mean to say that his followers are all gentle and loving and the people of the world are all as evil as wild animals?

Not at all. Jesus' words have nothing to do with that kind of self-flattery and condescension toward people of the world. Just take a look once at sheep in the meadow: how violently they can butt; at times they can be anything but lovable.

The point is this: just as a watchdog is strong in its own yard, so the people of the world are so much stronger in the world than you are. You are no match for them. Your children too will be defenseless against them; once they enter their company they are lost.

That first of all. And in the second place, the people of the world are fanatical in their zeal for the world, and they are bent on saturating your children with the spirit of the world, even as your children at first offer resistance. They will not rest until your children too are completely wrapped up in the world. That is why Jesus calls them wolves. They want your children to become as they are; they want to absorb them, to spiritually devour them.

¹ The vow that Reformed parents make at the baptism of infants reads: "Do you acknowledge the doctrine taught in this Christian church to be the true and complete doctrine of salvation ... and promise to instruct this child in the aforesaid doctrine *and cause it to be instructed therein* to the utmost of your power?" (emphasis added).

In the face of them we and our children are like defenseless sheep—but as lambs of the flock of Christ. Not as a deer or an ox, which too are assailed by wolves; but as lambs. How so? Because when the wolves attack, a deer will defend itself with its antlers until it drops, but a sheep *flees to its shepherd*.

So this is the secret of Christian education. Keep your children in the company of Jesus and educate them under the shadow of his wings until they are ready. And when they are ready, send them out into the world, among the wolves, but as sheep—as young people whose shield is the Lord.