

RAISING CHILDREN & THE ANTITHESIS

Present wisdom often directs parents to show a love (as they see it) that leaves children to their own opinions and determinations (though some would insist that it be in a Christian environment). But the Bible teaches us to 'indoctrinate' our children with a pre-determined world view and life style.

Now it must be admitted that it is a dangerous undertaking for someone who still has a houseful of teenagers to write about the raising of children. At the same time, it is particularly those that are busy with and preparing to raise children that should study God's Word for guidance. It is from this perspective that we endeavour to understand how it is that the Lord wants us to raise our children. It is from this perspective that we need to understand how we can reverse the trend for declining respect for authority, also in and among Reformed families.

As we discussed last time with regard to education and religion, so now with family life, we can notice a strong influence of synthesis in the lives of Christian families. Children (and their parents), by nature, do not like to be different from their peers. They do not like to stand apart and be referred to as odd or different. They would rather not dress differently than their friends. They do not want to refrain from habits and practices that others have received explicit or implied permission for. They prefer not to speak to older people or those in authority respectfully or with two words. In short, they try to live according to the dictates of Scripture as little as they can get away with, instead of as much as they can. But the more we, as parents, teachers and government (the justice system) allow this to go on, the more we will discover that new generations will not walk in the pathways Scripture directs them to. Each generation will only find more reasons to stray further away from the parameters of Scripture.

But the Bible gives a different direction to the raising of new generations. Already early in God's special revelation to His people He gives clear instruction about the right method of raising children. In Deuteronomy 6 we hear clear language about what it means to love the Lord. At the same time the Holy Spirit specifies that there is only one Lord. There aren't all kinds of choices as to who we want serve.

At the very same time that the people of God are taught about the way in which they are to serve their Lord they are instructed to teach this same message to their children. And this is not done inadvertently. Rather, a strong emphasis is put on this mandate. We read, "...and you shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. And you shall bind them as a sign upon your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between you eyes. And you shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates." (Deut.6:7-9) Further along in the same chapter God's people are again urged to explain, not only the laws and statutes of God to their children, but also the reason for obeying. The Lord already made it very clear at the beginning of His Word to us that we must serve Him out of thankfulness for what He has done for us. In the Old Testament the pinnacle of the grace of salvation from sin was foreshadowed by the freeing of Israel from Egypt and their inheritance of the land of Canaan. But they were warned not to go after other gods

(v.14) and that obedience to God's commandments and statutes would be for their good always (v.24) and it would be considered righteousness for them (v.25).

As the Old Testament unfolds further we discover time after time that there is no room for serving God in any other way than what He Himself has taught. The people of Israel may not serve Him according to what they think is best. Nor may they serve any other gods.

Well, we, who live in the New Testament, do not have more reasons to stray than our brothers and sisters before us. Quite the reverse! We have even less reason for compromise or self-willed worship. The pinnacle of salvation history has taken place. The Christ of which the Old Testament always spoke has come. We have more to tell our children and even stronger reasons to pass on to them so that they might live in obedience to His Word. As much as the people of Israel had to be different than the people around them, so much more must we be different from those who reject the work of our Saviour.

That means that we have no reason to accept a variety of ways to serve our God. We have even less reason than the Old Testament people of God did to expand our world view and life styles in our families. Whether it is family, school or church, we may only accept what God has revealed to us in His Word. We may not be open to compromise or to a variety of interpretations. We may not be open to self-willed worship and service. But rather, we must insist on the obedience, service and worship in the one and only way revealed in Scripture.

Then we may not allow our children to dress in a manner that shows indifference to who and what they are. We may not allow our children to do, say or think wrong things, even if others around them (even within the same community of church, school or family) are saying, thinking or doing them. Then we must teach our children to respect others, especially those in special offices (government, justice, church, school, home).

When we learn to again approach our task in raising children in this way, we won't consider it a sort of love to let them make their own choices. Then we won't consider it some sort of love to allow them to discover truth on their own or with their friends. But we will rather explain to them that there are rights and wrongs. That these are taught in God's holy Word and that they are not open to interpretation or ambivalence for those who belong to Him. Then we will teach our children that God's love is in that He has already chosen them. That He has already taken them out of the realm of Satan and damnation. Then we will help them see that the road of love is the same as the road of obedience, even if it includes corporal punishment. We must keep them on that road until they desire to walk along it themselves, until they have come to an understanding of what God has revealed to them about His salvation for us, until they want to walk that road out of thankfulness.

That means that we will have to explain to them about their total depravity. [We still believe that don't we, that our children are born and conceived in sin?] Then we can joyously tell them of the salvation already obtained for them; and how they can show true thankfulness for it. To be sure, sooner than later, they will come to realize that this will bring them into an antithesis with the world (and maybe the community) in which they live. But they will receive the strength to live in it joyfully. Read it again ... and again in Deut. 6. It's encouraging!

PdB

TOWARDS ASSOCIATIONS FOR REFORMED POLITICAL ACTION (2)

Fifteen years after the "Amersfoort Congress," and after many elections, the well-known Piet Jongeling, Editor of the "Gereformeerd Gezinsblad" (Reformed Daily for the Family), which today is called "Nederlands Dagblad" (the Netherlands Daily), was chosen to represent the members of our sister churches in the Second Chamber of the Dutch Parliament, which is equivalent to our House of Commons in Ottawa, and the House of Representatives in Washington, USA. Hopefully, every ARPA will have members who are able to translate and summarize Jongeling's contributions toward Reformed Politics. Many of his books, including "P. Jongeling, 14 years in the Second Chamber of Parliament", which contains his speeches and discussions on a variety of subjects, are relevant for our Canadian political scene. How great it would be if many of our parents/grandparents who still read Dutch would get together and provide us with English summaries of the salient points at issue. Ever since the "Amersfoort Congress" one booklet after the other has been published on political/social issues, notably by the "Groen van Prinsterer Foundation." In total they have published more than 60 of them. Looking on my study bookshelf I can give the following as a flavour of what this Foundation has produced (the Dutch titles translated):

- Charter of Rights without a Basis, subtitle: right of liberty and forced equality.
- Compelled to be equal; re. Emancipation and government policy Concern for life; re. Euthanasia and the law.
- The Service/Mandate of Government; re. Character and limits of government's task
- A free church /a free state; re. The relationship and separation between church and state.
- Care for the aged; re. Government and citizens in a (vergrijzende) greying society.
- Habitable and affordable; re. Public Housing and government policy.
- Universal and anti-revolutionary; 1 of 3 volumes of commentary on the basis and political guidelines as adopted in 1979 by the party of our Dutch sister churches: (The Reformed Political-Covenant/Alliance)
- Party and Politics; 2 of 3 vol. Subjects: Education, Social welfare/defense/the environment etc.

Of the more than sixty available these are a few that I have been able to get my hands on. It would be so beneficial if those who still read Dutch provide the ARPAs with a detailed book report or summary of them. The titles of the ones given make clear that this Reformed heritage is of great importance for our political calling in English speaking countries.

There are, of course, many other books about politics which should be of interest. A number of these are also available in English. The first one I would like to mention is Ed VanWoudenberg's "A Matter of Choice". It is a must - and most worthwhile. Without a doubt this is a book produced by a Christian politician who wants our beloved Canada to be ruled in a God-pleasing way. Another good selection would be Christians Organizing for Political Service, by James W. Skillen? Sounds like the very one we need! And let us not forget the booklet entitled, Servant or Tyrant, which contains speeches held at Redeemer College on The Task and Limits of Government by Dirk de Vos e.o. Then there is that little booklet, How Are We Governed? by Ricker Saywel, which gives a short summary of how government functions in Canada. Along those lines there is also You and Your Rights; and You and the New Constitution, both published by CAA and Reader's Digest.

As is clear, there are many books on Reformed politics available to help us understand our social political calling as members of the Church of Christ. There is one of those Groen van Prinsterer booklets I haven't mentioned. I would like to share some of it with you as I conclude this presentation. It is booklet No.39, written in 1979, and is entitled (translated from the Dutch): Church and Politics/Political party, with as subheading, the political relevancy of our church choice. The first chapter poses these questions: How important is the church choice by members of a political party? What is the position of the church in society and what consequences does this have for the political activity of its members? In answer to these questions the author begins by stating that a Christian may not isolate himself, go in seclusion, away from the hustle and bustle of every day life. Quoting James 1:19-27, he points to the conduct prescribed for Christians in the midst of this world. We must at all times be conscious, he says, of our three-fold office, of being prophet, priest and king - see also L.D 12 and 32 of our Heidelberg Catechism. This confession stresses our public position as members of Christ, our calling to acknowledge His Lordship over all of life, that is, to image our Saviour in all our talk and walk . . . in all our social activity. After making a reference to Ephesians 6, the need to put on the whole armor of God, he stresses that already at our baptism we received the mark and emblem of our Captain, Jesus Christ. We are officially enlisted in the Militia Christi and this privileged position must come into the open in the family, church, state and society. This strong bond to Christ is primary and cannot but bring separation between Christians and non-Christians, between those who obey Him and those who don't (Eph.4:17ff). In short, a Christian will show at all times that he belongs to Christ and that he will bind himself only to that one and complete doctrine of salvation as confessed and proclaimed by the church. (See the form for Public Profession of faith).

To be sure, the battle to which we are called is not an individualistic endeavour. To the contrary, the Lord brings His children together in the unity of the faith . . . the faith as revealed in His infallible Word and as confessed by the church. The Lord insists that every person, every-believer joins this church wherever He has established it, even though the rulers and edicts of princes were against it, and death and physical punishment might follow (Art.28BC). And just as the Word of God set the believers/members of the church apart in every sphere of life, likewise the Word has a message for every sphere of life, that is, the Word proclaimed by the church.

There is a distinction in office between church and state, between church member and citizen, but a complete separation is impossible. Christ is Lord of both. He is Head of the Church (Eph.4:15,16) and the King of kings (Rev. 1:5; 1Cor.15:24,25). In fact, we confess as church in Lord's Day 19 of the H.C. that He ascended into heaven to manifest Himself there as Head of the Church through whom the Father governs all things. (Eph.1:22; Col.1:16ff.) The law of God, therefore, is a matter that not only concerns the believers but it concerns all the people (Eccl.12:13). The state has to be involved in God's dynamic intervention unto salvation. And because Christ's work concerns everyone, and since He governs and directs all those in high places, Paul was able to place this whole matter of civil authority in that great framework of the gospel of Christ (Rom.13).

Coming to the specific mandate of the church, the author states, the church is to preach the pure Word of God. And when the message of that Word becomes polluted at its source, in the church, it cannot but have dire consequences for social-political life. For example, he says, a seemingly non-political matter such as the proper concept of the church will have serious consequences for the political position of the church members. We think here of the untold damage the theory of pluriformity has done, initially among the members of the Antirevolutionary party (a party, consisting mainly of members of the Reformed church, but now also among the members of the present interdenominational Christian Democratic Alliance (CDA), which is (and listen well!) an amalgamation of the Antirevolutionary party (AR), the Christian Historical Union (CHU), consisting mainly of members from the Dutch Reformed Church, the church from which two-secessions had to take place in the nineteenth century, and the Roman Catholic Party (KVP), so that what was incidental with Kuyper in the past has become a fact of political life in the present.

Indeed, once the concept is accepted that the church is manifested in a multitude of churches, called denominations, and it is believed that each denomination reflects part or parts of the whole . . . the one more, the other less . . . the one more pure, the other less pure, then it must follow that these different doctrinal views do not exclude each other, but as individual parts form that one divine truth. In view, then, of such an individualistic and even biblicistic approach to Scriptural doctrines, it is no wonder that the AR has concluded that the differences and divergencies between the churches have become irrelevant with respect to party politics. It defended its amalgamation with the Dutch Reformed party and the Roman catholic party as follows: The CDA has adopted the ecclesiastical diversity through which it, on the political level, can run parallel to the ecumenical discussion taking place at the ecclesiastical level. And that's how that one Word of God, the author concludes, is being subjected to such a variety of interpretations that it is completely robbed of its power. And that's how the political edge of that Word has been made dull. When divergencies in doctrine are tolerated and considered irrelevant for political activity then it cannot but lead to utter confusion when topics such as marriage, family, emancipation, equality, etc. are discussed and decided upon. Without a specific confessional direction the political/social issues will become a matter of individualistic/biblicistic interpretations.

When, then, a Christian wants to pursue politics on the basis of Scriptural norms, he has to have a clear perception of those norms. When he is politically active within a party, it is necessary that there is clarity within that party regarding that mutually accepted basis, one that is beyond dispute. Only when there is mutual agreement about the significance and content of such a normative basis is there a possibility to pursue a constant and coherent political vision on a long term basis. People can, therefore, only be admitted to such a normative Christian party when they are members of a church that not only pursues the pure preaching of the gospel but also exercises church discipline for correcting and punishing sins. Only they can be admitted as active members of such a genuine Christian confessional party. Therefore, it is impossible for such a genuine Christian party to escape its responsibility to make a pronouncement concerning which church truly adheres to the Word of God. It should be clear that such a pronouncement can only be based on what such a Church confesses and practices with respect to that Word.

As you can imagine much more could be passed on from this little, but important booklet, and from many more such booklets, and from other books and papers on this important subject of Reformed politics, but the time has come to conclude that there is much need for more Associations for Reformed Political Action, as well as the need to stimulate those which exist already to renewed social political activity. I hope you will agree that the basis and objectives of the ARPA constitution manifests the willingness of its members to express agreement with and the readiness to promote the Reformed heritage left to us by our immediate forefathers.

You know, the well-known theologian Herman Bavinck called politics a holy affair, for it touches the service of those who have been set apart by the God of the covenant to uphold the Name of their Mediator and Head Jesus Christ, the One who has received all authority in heaven and earth, who is, therefore, the sovereign Ruler of the kings of the earth. His church is here then also in order that political life may be religion, as worshipping God, in which the Kingdom of Heaven can take on form as well as demand reform. When members of the church, both old and young, understand this God-given mandate there will be room again in politics for that divine order which sees in the authority of government both the limit and the basis of the freedom of the citizen; which recognizes that kind of liberty to serve God according to his Word.

Lastly, I want to stress that it is a great privilege when there is the possibility in our western world to organize Parties/Associations on a scriptural, confessional basis. We ought to make the most of it. I hope it is also clear that there is room to promote and be engaged in Reformed Politics even if it cannot take the form of a party in the way as described above. The members of the church of Christ at this present time can, within the confines of the law and within the room still left to them, find every opportunity to test and to influence government policy, and to see it bend into the direction of scriptural norms. It remains the mandate of the members of the church to seek and use every opportunity to let the light of God's Word shine forth in every sphere of life and at all levels of society.

My proposal is to channel our social - political calling via an ARPA. Let us strive for a form of organization that is truly Reformed and will remained Reformed because of that direct link to the Church of Christ, to that one and complete doctrine of salvation, a link to that power station for all social - political action, to the end, as Calvin puts it at the conclusion of his Institutes, to the end, that God be praised!

Rev. B. J. Berends

CHURCH NEWS

On Sunday, March 2, 1997 the Church at Port Kells, BC (whose name has formally been changed to Willoughby Heights Canadian Reformed Church) used its new building for the first time. After the morning sermon on Matthew 5:1-26 (By the images of salt and light the Lord teaches about the nature and purpose of his church), Rev. E. Kampen read the following Words of Dedication:

Beloved in the Lord, we are gathered to consecrate and set apart this house for the worship of the one living and true God. Let us therefore dedicate this place to its proper and sacred uses with the following words:

To Thee, God and Father of Jesus Christ, our Lord;

To Thee, eternal Son of God, Redeemer of Thy people and Head of the Church;

To Thee, Spirit of God, Lord and Giver of life, our Teacher, Sanctifier and Comforter;

For the worship of God in praise and prayer;

For the preaching of the gospel of the grace of God;

For the celebration of the holy sacraments;

For the diffusion of sacred knowledge;

For the promotion of righteousness;

For the extension of the kingdom of God;

For release to the captives;

For recovering of sight to the blind;

For rest to the heavy laden;

For comfort to those who mourn;

For strength to those who are tempted;

For assurance to those of little faith;

For the sanctity of the family;

For the nurture of the young;

For the perfecting of believers;

In gratitude for the gracious keeping of the divine covenant throughout past generations;

In reliance upon the promise that the gates of hell shall not prevail against the church;

In the hope of the eternal glory of the church triumphant.

Amen!