

REFORMED, CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

The Reasons Our Parents Instituted Our Own Schools Are the Reasons We Must Continue With Our Own Schools

Forty two 42 years ago the William of Orange Christian School opened its doors for the first time. Twenty one years later Rev. van Oene wrote a tribute to the first teacher and principal of that school. He said, "... I have never noticed any unfaithfulness to the promise made that the whole instruction at school would be given in full harmony with the Holy Scriptures and in faithful adherence to the Confessions of the Church." Our parents and grandparents had established their own school(s) in order to educate their children in full harmony with Scripture and Confession. They realized that they needed to stay away from the public school system. For there education was not dispensed according to Scripture, but according to the wisdom of man. Beyond that, they also realized that, according to the Word of God, the education of their children was a parental responsibility and not the responsibility of the state, or of any other body. They learned this from Deuteronomy 6 and 11, Eph. 6:4 and other places in the Bible.

But they also understood that the increasing amount of knowledge that God had let man discover could not easily be taught by each individual family. So they joined forces and sought people who could help them in teaching specific topics and subjects to their children. But they were always sure to point out that it was parental education that was taking place in the school. It could be correctly said that our school was the result of a number of families home schooling together with the assistance of experts.

The founding fathers of our own school also realized that throughout history Christianity had been divided into various groups. Error and deviation have caused schisms in the Church. They understood that this also had to have consequences for working together in education. It was considered that if people could not worship together due to hardened error and theological deviation, then it would also not be possible to work together in the education of the children. Thus the education that was given in the new parental school also needed to be in harmony with the Confessions of the Church as they had come about due to her struggles throughout history. The formation of our own schools so soon after immigrating was confirmation of what our parents had learned and experienced in the old country.

And look how greatly our God and Father has blessed this obedient work of his humble children. Forty-two years later that one school has grown to three elementary schools and a high school that will enroll 360 students next year. Throughout North America and Australia similar schools and growth abound. We may and must rejoice in His immeasurable generosity toward us. At these schools trained brothers and sisters explain the many subjects that God has put into creation to our sons and daughters. Confessing members of the Church of Jesus Christ interpret the created realities, so soiled by the world, for the covenant youth of the Church.

But are we always filled with awe and thankfulness for these blessings? Or are there also criticisms about what goes on at our schools? Is there a feeling that discipline is not always dispensed fairly? Is the behaviour of our students often less than exemplary? If you listen carefully can you might also hear some criticism from teachers who wonder what goes on in those

Christian homes to allow some of the covenant children to behave as they do. What about the questions that are heard about the introduction of un-Reformed practices or ideas in the classroom? And, at times, there even seem to be some questions about who is running our schools.

Before we delve further along this road it is good to remember that there surely is also much thankfulness. Many good things happen in our schools. Our teachers provide much good, Reformed, Christian education. Many of our parental homes have disciplined and obedient children. There is much appreciation by parents of the education that takes place in our schools. There is also much appreciation by teachers for the sacrifices parents must make to ensure that their children receive education in the light of God's holy Word. We must always view things with a balanced approach. Therefore we may never lose sight of the positives, for there are many.

But let us look a bit closer at the three areas of concern that we mentioned to see how we can deal with them where and when they present themselves. First there is the area of student behaviour and school discipline. At bottom this becomes the issue of respect for rule and authority. Whether the issue is smoking or public display of affection, or the dress code, or just plain obedience (listening to the teacher), there is an increase in disrespect for authority. More and more students feel that they can call teachers to task. They question the teachers' right to demand things and their right to discipline them. In some cases there is also, among the student body, an alarming disregard for truth. Some seem to think that if a lie is more expedient, the need for Christians to tell the truth is easily discarded. Often times our teachers are challenged to prove violations that were clearly observed. Respect for authority and those in authority has all but completely disappeared with some students.

The second area of major concern is the matter of education content. There continues to be a concern that thought, ideas, and practices are being introduced in the schools that not everyone agrees with. Such questions and concerns bring tension into our communities and give feelings of uneasiness. As our schools do not exist in isolation from the rest of our Reformed community, this should not come as a complete surprise. The history of the Church teaches that with growth and the passage of time come an increase in the variety of thinking. This variation starts with theological matters and must work its way out in practical application. One of these applications is the cooperation in the education of our children in our own schools. More and more it has been said that the school must accommodate students and parents with an ever widening scope of opinions about what is Reformed or what is Christian; about what is good and what is sinful; what should be said and done, and what should be forbidden in our Christian schools.

And, finally, there is the matter of ownership. Do our schools belong to the educators, do they belong to the boards, or do they, perhaps, belong to the parents? Of course they are parental schools - in theory; but how about in practice? Do we still consider the heavy financial burdens a pleasant sacrifice in order to join our brothers and sisters in teaching our children the higher aspects of English, French, history, biology, mechanics, music, math and Bible? Or are we intimidated by the organization and the qualification of the school staff, to the point that we feel inferior to them?

With these types of issues living among us what must we do as we look toward the future? We can only look forward by reminding ourselves what was in the past. You remember ...our parents wanted parental, Reformed, Christian education. They wanted parental education because they had learned that education belonged to the task of being a parent and was not to be absconded

by or delegated to the state. They wanted Christian education because God had put faith and knowledge of Himself into their hearts and as a result they wanted to raise their children in the light of His Word and not according to the elemental spirits of this world. And they wanted Reformed, Christian education because they had learned how many people had twisted the truth of the Bible to fit their own philosophies, and they wanted their children taught the old, true way of the infallible Word of God as the Church had come to summarize that in the Reformed Confessions.

If we forget these basic principles we run the danger of becoming redundant. Then we will lose our reason for existing at all. We may continue in the form of our forefathers, but not in the faith of our fathers. Then we either become traditionalists, blindly following the old customs with which we grew up, or we get carried away with all sorts of new ideas and practices, unaware that we are moving away from the Reformed heritage.

And that has practical consequences. It means that at our schools we do not have flexible standards, but that we establish and maintain strict standards of behaviour, of ideology, and of involvement. But we will also realize that the growth for which we are so thankful has brought its own challenges with it. The larger numbers often make discipline a much more difficult task. It is much more difficult to ensure that the education all has a Reformed character when there are a variety of opinions as to what Reformed means. It is much more difficult to feel like parents running a school together, hiring specialists to educate our sons and daughters, when the schools become larger, distances are greater and home-life is complicated by both parents working and involvement in so many other worthwhile activities.

But we may not despair! In the past our parents also faced insurmountable objections, but they prayed for wisdom and strength; and then they put their shoulder under the task and went to work. We may do the same, as we look forward and see large obstacles on our way. How our Father will guide us is not known today, but that He will He has already shown us so often in the past, that we may not doubt that He will continue to do so.

In schools where parents desire all the children to behave in a scriptural manner it becomes increasingly necessary to ensure that what such behaviour is will be properly communicated to the students and consistently upheld by the staff. In some of our own schools, but certainly not in all, a uniform dress code has been implemented. Now I know that there is considerable difference of opinion about this issue. But, either as a consequence of, or as a by-product of such a uniform dress code, those schools seem to have a more peaceful, in school, atmosphere. It may be something to consider and discuss.

When I was preparing this paper I sought advice from several sources and sages about the matter of the Biblical soundness of what is done in our schools. I asked "Who checks that sort of thing, and how is it checked, and according to what measuring stick is it measured? But I haven't come to satisfactory conclusions. In some of the literature on the subject it becomes very clear that the highest prerequisite for Reformed Christian education is to have Reformed, Christian teachers in the classroom. Teachers who base the subject matter they are teaching on God's Holy Word and who use the Reformed Confessions as Scriptural guides to help our sons and daughters understand God's Word as it deals with all of life and creation. Discrepancies in these matters must be and will be addressed when interest in them is alive among the membership. Then members will also be willing to bring their concerns forward in a positive and upbuilding manner.

And finally there is that question of ownership. Our schools are parental schools. But the students and the teachers are there every day. The teachers and administrators must see to it they run properly from moment to moment. Is it any wonder, then, that the teachers, the administrators, become almost synonymous with the schools? Is it any wonder that they take a stronger interest in them than the parents? Is it any wonder that they take of their free time to help the students with sports teams, plays, field trips, and camping? I don't think so. But should we ask them to stop with their enthusiasm for our children and the extra curricular activities they provide for them? Again, I don't think so.

The only way I know of to get a feeling of ownership is by becoming involved. And the first level of involvement is with our own children. Show them, every day, that we are just as interested in their school, school work, extra curricular activities and behaviour, as the teachers have been all day. And it would also be very good to pay some extra attention to the special problem of lack of respect for authority with our children. Let us send them to school with the understanding that they must respect authority, must respect the rules of the school and be aware that the standards of behaviour will be inflexible.

The only way to know if the teachers in our schools are Reformed, Christian teachers is by getting to know them, to speak with them. [You know, the Bible teaches us that we must exercise mutual discipline. To many of us that means that when we see a brother or sister sin we should go and discuss it between them and us. If they do not heed our admonition we should bring two or three witnesses, etc.... We know what it says in Matthew. Now I'm convinced that this exhortation is to people who know one another, who often speak to one another. It is not very effective if we would go to someone in our congregation and speak to them about something we see them doing wrong, if we have never spoken to them about anything else, or nothing more than 'good morning' or 'how are you?']

So, just as we must maintain good communication with our children and our brothers and sisters in the congregation, we must also get to know the teachers we have hired in our schools. And if we, then, find problems that should be addressed, we should address them - firmly. Not by speaking about them behind their backs, but confront them, in a brotherly manner. For our reason for existence might be at stake.

We live in communities. A community is a group of people who communicate, who do things in communion. The communities we have established as school associations have been set up to educate our children in communion with one another - and certainly with those who we hire to do so. But in some places that communication seems to have broken down. That needs to be repaired!

Now most assuredly that is a two-way street. That means that teachers should be quite willing to pick up the telephone when they see a need to speak to a parent. And the parents need to get into their cars and stop in at the school or visit the teacher when the need arises. And even when there is no apparent need, try to visit some of the children's teachers on a social basis to get to know them. Communication can prevent so many misunderstandings.

And before and after doing all these things, never forget that we all have the same Father in heaven who wants us to succeed. He wants us to succeed in praising Him, in working in obedience to His Word. And He wants to help us. He wants us to ask Him for His help - for ourselves, for our children, for their education, for their teachers, and for their Reformed, Christian schools. And the

interesting thing is that when we seriously pray for these things, we will also work for them.

PdB

BORN AND CONCEIVED IN SIN

In a local Langley paper, a guest editorial was published which summarized the main view of those in favour of homosexual education in the public school system. The writer even declared that the "debate that rages on about gays as sinners, recruiters of impressionable youth, or as just plain wrong types of people amounts to hate (literature)." She goes on to say "It will take a lot of public education of those 'protectors of our impressionable youths' before the day when debating the rights of gays is as socially unacceptable as debating the right of blacks."

This made me reflect on how the world sees those of us who hold to an external moral standard, the Bible. Judging from this writer, we are seen as people who need education to overcome our ignorance about how the world should really be. Just as blacks came out of legalized oppression decades ago, so eventually homosexuality will be seen by all as a perfectly proper way to achieve self-fulfillment in today's society.

"But just a minute!" we say. "How can you compare the debate over homosexuality to racism? People can't help being black, but being homosexual is a choice!" Again, we are seen as ignorant Bible - thumpers who wouldn't know what common sense was if we tripped over it in Glen Clark's closet. Who are we to say that homosexuality is a choice? Everyone knows that gays are born that way, just like Americans are (usually) born that way. Homosexuals can't help who they are anymore than Americans can help who they are. Homosexuality is an entirely natural desire and therefore cannot be criticized as morally wrong. And here's where our argument reaches an impasse. The problem is, I am beginning to think that the latter argument may hold more truth than the former. But before you erect the stake and start gathering the firewood, read on.

As I finished reading the aforementioned article, I looked at the snapshot of the pouting Generation X writer and couldn't help but wish that she was really there so that I could remove a bit of her caked makeup in a moment of sheer anger. But the violent urges that sometimes spring up in me are clearly against God's will, and I must try to suppress them. Where do these urges and tendencies come from? Well, it's obvious that they are a result of sin. The Belgic Confession states that 'original sin...is a corruption of the entire nature of man and a hereditary evil which infects even infants in their mother's womb' (Article 15). This idea is supported by the Canons of Dordt. "Thus corruption has spread from Adam to all his descendants, with the exception of Christ alone, not by imitation, as the Pelagians of old maintained, but by the propagation of a vicious nature, according to the righteous judgment of God." (III/IV, Art.2) Therefore, the impulses and tendencies that we now face, (be they for violence, material possessions, sexual gratification outside of marriage, power, etc.) are a result of original sin. However, that's not all that our Confessions tell us. They also teach that sinful behaviour is not learned by imitation, but is within us from birth.

Our sinful impulses could be considered as natural, even if they are not good. Does this statement make you uncomfortable? Read Romans 1 again. Those people who ignore God and trust in their own understanding have darkened hearts and minds. As a result, God allows them to fall into serious sins such as homosexuality, which is specifically mentioned here, along with an extensive list of other vices. These vices are the result of sinful urges and impulses which, as we have seen, are inherently present in human beings (natural).

Now that we have come to this conclusion, does it change the way we think about homosexuality? Not really. God has still unequivocally condemned both the desire and the practice. But we can perhaps have a better understanding of it and truly pity those who are slave to these desires. If we understand homosexuality in this way, we can also consider the possibility of homosexuality in the Reformed community. Just as some of us struggle with violent impulses or sexual desire, others may struggle with homosexual tendencies. By the Spirit and grace of God, we are able to fight against these tendencies and can hope to overcome them.

The writer of the newspaper editorial ends her piece with the statement: "In the meantime, reasonable, tolerant people must endure more years of hateful judgment by those who feel they have the God-given right to inflict their morality on other." How's that for an inflammatory statement! It seems that Paul's words at the end of Romans 1 are written specifically for this situation ... "they not only do them but approve those who practice them." What is more reprehensible than homosexuality itself is approving and supporting it in community and schools. In our fight against this evil, I do not believe that we are forcing our morality on others. We are simply trying to prevent those who hold their own twisted views of sexual morality from foisting them onto society. God does not tell us to forcefully prevent those who will perform these sins from doing them. He says, Let the evildoer still do evil and the filthy still be filthy..." But it is our responsibility to battle against those who wish to make evil and filthiness the norm in our society.

Kent Dykstra

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE (Part of Press Release)

INTERNATIONAL BIBLE SOCIETY HALTS REVISION PROCESS OF NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION (NIV) BIBLE

Colorado Springs, May 27, 1997 - Amid significant response about potential updates to the New International Version (NIV) Bible, International Bible Society (IBS) announced today that it will forego all plans to develop a revised edition of the NIV, the most widely distributed Bible in the English language, representing 45 percent of Bibles circulated in North America.

"The NIV doesn't belong to IBS or our licensed publishers, it belongs to the people," said Dr. Victor L. Oliver, board chair of IBS. "Virtually all other contemporary Bible translations already reflect gender treatments consistent with the language of today. However, the NIV has essentially become the Bible of the evangelical church, which has come to trust in and depend upon the NIV's current accuracy, clarity and readability."

Dr. Oliver noted that in recent weeks it has become very clear that many people in North

America don't want the NIV changed, even if many Bible scholars feel a revision could more clearly reflect shifts in English language usage, and more precisely render the meaning of the original texts into English for current and future generations.

"As the most popular contemporary version of the Bible ever published, we knew the significance of the current NIV," said Dr. Lars Dunberg, president of IBS. "But it was not until the evangelical community became aware of a possible revision that we realized the beloved place this translation occupies for the Bible-reading public."

"We deeply care about the concerns of church leaders, scholars and Christian readers who favor gender-related language changes," Dr. Dunberg said. "However this decision comes from our internal conviction that to move ahead would cause division within the body of Christ and therefore compromise our mission to serve the Church in the U.S. and abroad."