

HARVEY'S HYPOTHESIS REVISITED

The "Just Do It" Approach also practiced in Holland

In the October 29, 1996 issue of Reformed Polemics we discussed "Harvey's Hypothesis" (a), and we defined a hypothesis as "a supposition made as a basis for reasoning," or "an unproved theory, proposition, supposition, etc., tentatively accepted to explain certain facts or to provide a basis for further investigation, argumentation, etc." Such was our definition of a hypothesis. So who's Harvey? He is none other than Rev. Harvey Ouwinga of Second CRC (Christian Reformed Churches) in Kalamazoo. We were introduced to him in the pages of Christian Renewal (b) where he, in response to the discussion about the need to provide adequate grounds for women in office and women being delegated to attend Classis, made the following rather intriguing observation: "The ground is that we're doing it and therefore it ought to be done because it is practiced."

When we examine Harvey's somewhat perplexing hypothesis we note that - regardless of how absurd or ridiculous his implausible or ludicrous observation may be - his rather dynamic "we're doing it" approach has been freely affirmed and willingly practiced. The debates and discussions held at the recent CRC Synods on the question of women in office and women being delegated to Classis are a testimony to the fact that many churches in this federation have already used Harvey's hypothesis as the basis of their approach to settling these particular issues. And as we shall see, the practice of this "just do it" approach has certainly not been limited to the issue of women in office or women delegated to Classis, nor has endorsement of Harvey's hypothesis been confined to the events that took place in Kalamazoo. In many different denominations and in a variety of church federations Harvey's "modus operandi" has been employed to deal with such diverse and divisive issues as changes to the liturgy, children at the Lord's Supper table, homosexuals in the pulpit, the use of "inclusive" language, same sex marriages, etc. These issues are (re)solved by simply "doing it!"

The application of Harvey's "we're doing it" approach has at times also enjoyed the sanction and support of those involved in all kinds of attempts to come to church unity. We think here of a document such as "Evangelicals and Catholics Together" (Roman Catholics, RD). The growing impatience with the lengthy and lagging discussions of this overture to church unity, prompted some to suggest and implement a strategy that stressed the merits of "just doing it" rather than waiting for the conclusion of further joint discussions of this proposal. This "just do it" strategy resulted in combined worship services, combined celebration of the Lord's Supper (shared communion), cooperation in evangelism activities, joint efforts in the social and political realm, etc. This strategy certainly brought people together, but it is very doubtful that it brought about true unity of faith. It should then be clear, also from this initiative to unite Evangelicals and Roman Catholics, that the goal of true ecclesiastical unity is not promoted or achieved by the application of Harvey's dynamic "just do it" approach.

Harvey also seems to have found some support among the proponents of the current initiatives and proposals, "to promote further unity between the respective churches" of the various Reformed federations. This support becomes particularly apparent when these efforts toward further unity move into the direction of initiating local pulpit exchanges, accepting each others attestations, and

accepting each others members to the Lord's Table, etc. We are reminded of Rev. J Visscher's ARCH proposal, in which it is suggested that "some may see their duty to the Lord and the unity of His church as being more important than federative loyalty." To many readers this statement seems to suggest a sentiment which says: "We will 'go it alone' if this proposal does not meet with a favourable response from the churches in the respective federations." In the words of our acquaintance Harvey, "we are doing it and therefore it ought to be done because it is practiced."

A recent article in "Nederlands Dagblad" © again reminded us of this particular aspect of our local attempts "to promote further unity between respective churches", namely the notion (or threat?) that it may be necessary for the local churches to "go it alone" or the thought or sentiment that consistories, regardless of what has been agreed upon, have the latitude to go ahead and "just do it." The issues under consideration may vary, but in many churches the approach to resolving these issues is increasingly becoming the same: "Were doing it, and therefore it ought to be done because it is practiced." When we scan the pages of "Nederlands Dagblad" it soon becomes apparent that, also in The Netherlands, Harvey's "supposition made as a basis for reasoning" has been eagerly embraced, freely affirmed, and willingly practiced. And putting Harvey's hypothesis into practice has apparently been a particularly popular pastime in Holland.

We are informed that the Nederlands - Gereformeerde Kerk at Nijmegen recently decided to leave open the possibility that, under special circumstances, children could be "presented" (opdragen) instead of baptized. The sister churches were not consulted, nor did these churches receive a request for advise on this matter. For Rev. A.J. Moggre this was a rather painful experience. His discomfort with this situation is confirmed in the regional Church periodical of his churches (Flevoland, Gelderland, Overijssel). He writes: "The Consistory of Nijmegen gave notice of its position, and apparently is going its own way." He poses a couple of questions: "Is this typical nederlands - gereformeerd? Is it surprising that unity with our churches has in the course of time become less and less attractive for the other members of the narrow (Reformed) ecumenical community?"

Good questions indeed! When we apply the gist of these questions to the current situation in the Can/Amer. RC (Canadian /American Reformed Churches) then some questions are unavoidable: "Do we, as Can/Am. Ref. Churches and as church members still know what it means to be (typically) Reformed, particularly when we deem or esteem our own opinions and our own course of action 'as being more important than federative loyalty?'" Closely tied to this question is the substance of Rev. Moggre's second question; a question which once more leaves us with a question of our own: "Why would a church in one federation seek federative unity with a church in another federation, when in their respective federations there are member churches whose commitment to their own federation and to federative unity is exemplified by their inclination to "go it alone" or their disposition to "just do it.?"

Rev. Moggre had more questions and comments: "Where do we begin when, on the one hand, we deem ourselves called to have joint discussions (samensprekingen) to effect federative unity, while on the other hand congregations such as Nijmegen busy themselves with widening the chasm we are trying to bridge? When this trend continues, and when congregations without any regard for each other decide to go their own way, then a lot can happen!" Rev. Moggre then explains what

can happen when congregations “just do it.” In the first congregation women are moved into the elders bench and/or placed on the pulpit; in the second congregation the consistory has a “synodical” female minister lead the worship services; in a third congregation the afternoon worship service is eliminated; in a fourth, church members are given a choice between “presenting” or baptizing a child; in a fifth, the Lord’s supper table is opened to children, and in the sixth there is no longer any regard for congregational boundaries, so that people can come from “here, there, and everywhere” to join a congregation that suits their own particular slant and exemplifies their own specific preferences. Rev. Moggre asks: “Has the time of 2 Timothy 4:3 arrived; the time when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own likings, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander into myths?”

Rev. Moggre’s questions and observations about the current and potential developments in the Nederlands - Gereformeerde Kerken should prompt us to a review and evaluation of the developments in the Can/Am Ref. Churches, particularly as they relate to what could be called “joining the church of your choice.” In some churches congregational borders (gemeentegrenzen) are no longer observed or taken into consideration. People drive past one church to attend the worship services in another. They join a congregation in a different geographic area even though they have not moved or changed their place of residence. They withdraw from one congregation, while under discipline, and they are readily accepted in another congregation where, in their considered opinion, there is a more pastoral approach to their specific situation. They have “scruples” or mental reservations about the confession of the church, and so they seek a church that suits their specific slant; they join a congregation that shares their particular sentiments. They trek to a neighbouring congregation because they are not exceptionally fond of their minister’s preaching and they don’t particularly agree with their consistory’s direction.

The question posed by Rev. Moggre in response to corresponding developments in his church federation becomes our question as well: “Has the time of 2 Timothy 4:3 arrived; the time when people accumulate for themselves teachers to their own liking?” And we might well ask: Does the fact that people simply “carry out and bring about” whatever “suits their own likings” not suggest a “turn(ing) away from listening to the truth?” Do these developments not reflect a rather unusual, unscriptural, and therefore also unreformed approach to church membership? Has putting Harvey’s hypothesis into practice also become a popular pastime with our church members and among the churches in our church federation?

That some church members employ Harvey’s “just do it” approach to their membership in a church should not completely surprise us. Many churches in our federation have from time to time had to deal with these particular issues. However, that Consistories permit and allow or sometimes even sanction and support this type of approach is reason for concern. That Consistories, particularly in their initiatives and proposals to promote further unity with other Reformed churches, foresee the need “to go it alone” or “just do it” is cause for alarm.

Rev. Moggre’s observation in regard to the church at Nijmegen giving notice of its position and then apparently “going its own way” leads him to the conclusion that “if this trend continues we can forget about (federative) unity with other churches.” In the context of these developments Rev.

Moggre suggests that “joint discussions (samesprekingen) become more or less a joke (een klucht).” He asks: “Is it surprising that unity with our churches has in the course of time become less and less attractive for the other members of the narrow (Reformed) ecumenical community?”

When we evaluate these “made in Holland” developments we note that in the Nederlands - Gereformeerde Kerken there are indeed church members who are busy “doing their own thing.” There are unfortunately also churches (Consistories) that are working at “going their own way.” Harvey’s “just do it” approach or his “supposition made as a basis for reasoning” has apparently been freely affirmed and willingly practiced, also in Holland. And when we reflect on Rev. Moggre’s questions and observations about these “made in Holland” developments we would perhaps be wise to allow also these developments to function as a monitor for the developments in our own churches and in our own church federation. And quoting Rev. Moggre we might once more ask: “Has the time of 2 Timothy 4:3 arrived?”

Ron Dykstra

- (a) Harvey’s Hypothesis Applied: The “Just Do It” Approach Put into Practice?, Ron Dykstra, Reformed Polemics, October 29, 1997.
- (b) Kalamazoo Declines to Allow Women Delegates to Classis, Darrell Todd Maurina, Christian Renewal, Feb. 12, 1996.
- (c) Opdragen, J.E. Hopman, Nederlands Dagblad, August 23, 1997.

The Value of Christian Education

By Wes Bredenhof

“It is in the educational field that the struggle for or against God is being decided today.”

Dr. Cornelius VanTil, Foundations of Christian Education,

p.130

When the above words were first published, in 1953, the Canadian Reformed Churches were in their infancy. Our parents and grandparents had barely set foot on Canadian soil. These Dutch immigrants faced a struggle in this new and unfamiliar land. They had left established churches and their families back on the Continent. But they had also left behind the Reformed legacy of Christian schools in the Netherlands. When they moved to Canada, they immediately realized that it would not be desirable to send their covenant children to the public schools. Almost from the very beginning, the need for Christian education was recognized among the members of the newly established Canadian Reformed Churches. Today we have a large number of our own schools, along with some families who home-school. Indeed, the value and necessity of Christian education is recognized. Yet it is good to remind ourselves of why we have Christian education,

and why it is so vitally important.

Why?

Why do we have Christian education? The answer of course, lies in God's mandate for it. We do not do it because it is cheaper or easier, we do it because Christian parents promised the Lord at their child's baptism that they would do everything in their power to ensure that the child is educated in a Christian way. This is in accordance with God's mandate in Deuteronomy 6 that parents teach their children His ways. Christian education, whether done in the school or in the home, is the fulfillment of that mandate. Out of thankfulness for God's many covenant blessings, we obey His commands with regards to education.

These commands are not trivial, there is a definite reason for them. That reason lies in the antithesis between the believer and the unbeliever. The public schools are run by unbelievers for unbelievers. There is no recognition of the Lordship of Christ over all areas of life. The public schools maintain that they are "neutral," but we know from Scripture that neutrality is impossible (Matt. 6:24). The conclusion must be that the public schools are at war with God. This warfare is manifested not only in something obvious like evolution in the biology class; it also shows up in more subtle ways in other areas. For example, advocacy of non-Christian economic systems such as socialism or communism, promotion of homosexuality and other sexual perversions, historical revisionism, multiculturalism, pluralism, and so on. The young children of believers are most vulnerable to those false ways of thinking and it would be very difficult for parents to undo in the evening the damage done by the public school during the whole day.

Christian education is education from the perspective of the Christian worldview. Christian education recognizes that all human thought must begin with God. Christian education realizes that the world is what the Bible says it is, not what man wants it to be. Christian education takes a unique perspective on the child, as VanTil puts it, "Non-Christians believe that the personality of the child can develop best if it is not placed face to face with God. Christians believe that the child's personality cannot develop at all unless it is placed face to face with God." (Foundations of Christian Education, p.4). The Christian outlook on education is radically different from the non-Christian outlook. There can be no peace between the two points of view, they are irreconcilably at war with one another. That is why we need Christian education. How can we send our children to be educated by those who are at war with God? We need teachers for our children who are firmly committed to the Christian worldview as well as to the godly walk which ought to be the fruit of a life redeemed by the Messiah.

Teacher Training

At this point we should also consider the effect of secular university educations on our teachers. Some of our teachers graduate from the Christian high school and enter right away into a program in a faculty of education at a secular institution. Three or four years later they graduate and are able to teach in our schools. Have these teachers seriously considered a Christian approach to education in their years at the secular institution? Some undoubtedly have, but in most cases are these four

years enough to produce a teacher who truly understands what Christian education is all about? A suggestion here is that school societies mandate teachers to receive some level of education at our Teachers' College in Hamilton. It will not do to have Christian teachers who only know how to add a Christian coating to what they have learned in university. We need Christian teachers who know Christian education and how necessary it is.

Over the years there has been much division over the necessity of Christian education, especially "Canadian Reformed" education. This is regrettable and has caused much grief in some of our churches. However, has not history borne out the correctness of those who maintained the necessity for our own "Canadian Reformed" education? As other historically Reformed churches are on the road to apostasy, and as other "Christian" schools have lost their grounding in the confessions of the Church, is it not time to admit that we do need our own specifically Canadian Reformed schools? Our churches ought to be unified on the value of Christian education.

Christian education is valuable, we should all agree. We must never take it for granted. What our forebears established must not be lost or abandoned, but must be improved. One can look at Christian schools as an extension of the home. In that sense they are boot-camps for Christian soldiers. Christian schools, homes, and churches are the places where young Christian soldiers learn how to wield the sword in every area of life. They are prepared not only for a vocation, but also for a life of warfare. We are at war with the world. We cannot adopt the world's education, for that would be treason. Our education must be Christian and distinctively so.

OTHER NEWS

Eastern Avenue CRC Withdraws Endorsement of Gay Minister's Ordination; Classis Tables Issue Until January

In a surprise move at Classis Grand Rapids East's September 18 meeting, Eastern Avenue Christian Reformed Church withdrew its request to extend the ministerial credentials of gay CRC minister Rev. Jim Lucas. Lucas serves as chaplain of "As We ARE," a gay support group meeting at Eastern Avenue and affiliated with a network of similar gay support groups in the United States and Canada. Because the organization is not officially endorsed by the CRC as one to which a Christian Reformed minister can be called, Lucas is technically without call and Classis Grand Rapids East must annually renew his ministerial standing. Lucas last held a regular ministerial position in 1989. In a prepared statement, Eastern Avenue pastor Rev. Mary Antonides said her elders met September 14 when they learned Lucas' ministry had unanimously decided that "faithful, committed, same-sex unions can be an experience of God's grace and within God's will and should be affirmed by the Christian church," and decided "that this decision on the part of AWARE prevents us from calling anyone to this ministry at this time." In an appeal to classis Lucas proposed that classis extend his credentials until next May rather than the customary one-year extension, thus "allowing classis to let my credentials lapse before synod, if you so choose, in order to spare our denominational assembly from a possibly contentious debate." After hours of debate, classis finally voted to take an action which it hoped would offend neither supporters nor opponents of Lucas' continued ordination. "We made a decision to withhold action without prejudice," said

classis president Dr. William Vanden Bosch. “His ministerial credentials will continue until January and people will have the opportunity to discuss some very new stuff that has occurred.”

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