

The Generation Gap and Protestant Reformed Young People

Feature

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My first impression of this topic was its irrelevance to Protestant Reformed young people because none of us is trying to find ourselves thru the medium of LSD, “grass”, or glue sniffing; none of us are hippies who have become disillusioned by The Establishment. But when I considered the generation gap as a term meaning the lack of understanding and communication between generations the topic became more relevant. All of us have probably said to ourselves, “my folks just don’t understand—they’re so old fashioned!” Yet when our parents were young they probably said the same thing about their parents. There have been generation gaps from the beginning and there will be generation gaps until the end of time because situations and events in history vary for each generation.

There are three main factors which have made the gulf between our parents and us. First, the educational background differences. The majority of P.R. young people today have attended a Christian grade school and possibly high school also. We are learning many more facts in our thirteen years of schooling because advances in science and events in history have increased one hundred percent in the last ten years. And, more of us have the opportunity to continue our education into the college level.

Our casualness towards our Christian education, which we so often take for granted, causes parental consternation, for they themselves had much less Christian formal training than we, and they have sacrificed to give it to us. The increase in our knowledge without a continued knowledge and wisdom of the truth presents other fear to our parents.

Second, economic differences have come between our parents and us. Under President Johnson’s administration we were known as “the affluent society”. All of our parents own one or two cars and a few of us teenagers even own our own cars. We, along with millions of other American teens, possess the greatest spending power of the nation which gives us access to more luxuries and entertainment than ever before. Owning a TV which brings worldly education and entertainment directly into our homes is no longer a number one status symbol. Very few of us find ourselves in a position of need which has to be filled by distribution from the deacons. Blue Cross-Blue Shield, life insurance, Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid protect and provide from birth until death.

Because most of us don’t know what it’s like not to have a closet full of clothes, a cupboard full of a variety of nourishing foods or even a garage without a car, our expectation of these things appears to our elders as a lack of appreciation and thankfulness. Rightly so, parents may fear that we are placing too much trust in men and material things and forgetting our need for God.

Third, family life patterns changed. Family members no longer return from work or school for a relaxing supper hour and evening at home. The whole family is so involved in meetings and events that they hardly have time to eat together much less to have devotions together. The family has also lost its bond of togetherness in working for a cause. Because everyone no longer has to work to support the family—Dad’s paycheck is sufficient—the extra money earned by junior family members is used for their own entertainment while Mom and Dad can stay home or do as they please.

The independence that money earned by part-time jobs and the freedom a car provides frequently give teens a choice of entertainment to participate in, companions to hang around with

and responsibilities of conduct without supervision. Unwise use of this independence and freedom can lead to disregard and disrespect of parental authority. Parents fear that we, in spite of our training, will fall into temptation.

No doubt many more gaps in understanding and communication between our generations could be mentioned. But, perhaps the most influential gap that has arisen between the generations occurs when we listen to popular theories of the world: One must know the “why” of everything and not just accept the answer of elders; one must update and modernize old beliefs to fit today’s world; and one must be assured of his individual right of freedom of speech.

Some of the dangers of a generation gap are apparent as seen by the breakdown in respect for authority, campus disturbances and moral decay of the world around us. The dangers for P.R. young people are more subtle. Impatience with our elders and dissatisfaction with the answers they give to our questions can easily give way to violation of the fifth commandment. Attempts to modernize old beliefs to fit today’s scene tend to jeopardize the creeds and fundamental truths upheld by our parents. In our attempts to be “with it”, our parents fear we will not remember, “Lean not to thine own understanding” (Proverbs 3:5).

To overcome the lack of understanding and communication between children and parents there must be “sharing of work, sharing of responsibility and sharing of recreation...[resulting in] each person [being] recognized as an individual in the home.” The respect that a child feels his parents give him will be generated back to the parents. The child will desire to carry out his parent’s wishes because he has respect for their ideas and opinions.

Our Protestant Reformed parent’s wishes reflect Solomon’s words, “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge: but fools despise wisdom and instruction. My son, hear the instruction of thy father, and forsake not the law of thy mother: For they shall be an ornament of grace unto thy head and chains about thy neck” (Proverbs 1:7-9).

When we Protestant Reformed young people have the proper perspective, that is, the fear of the Lord and the respect for our parents, then we, too, can go along with the modern trends to question, to update and to demand our rights. But our goals will be different from those of the world because the words of I John 2:14-17 will apply to us as to the youthful generation of that time, “I have written unto you, young men, because ye are strong, and the word of God abideth in you, and ye have overcome the wicked one. Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth forever.”

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