

The Great Delusion In Reformed Churches

REFORMED LABEL, ARMINIAN CULTURE

The hypocrisy and peril of a religion that rests in the mere acquisition of knowledge, a religion that is rife in the reformed circles, why even among the chiefest of them.

Excerpts of a letter written to a visitor from a Reformed church in answer to a query over the true meaning of reformed religion.

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WHILE rejoicing in your keen and serious desire to pursue a more thorough and sound knowledge of the doctrines of Christ, I would like to vent my anxieties over your spiritual state. By virtue of my pastoral experience, I perceive two rank problems that young people of your age and disposition almost inevitably encounter.

Firstly, they apparently learned their religion largely from books, even good spiritual writings. The exuberance of an academic approach may fizzle out fast and doubts about the benefits of giving priority to spiritual matters will increasingly emerge. Such a trend can be immunized only if your thirst for spiritual knowledge is commensurately matched by an experimental religion. By this, I include an agonizing conviction of sin and a holy sensitivity to the work of the Spirit of God and also an uncanny ability to gauge the sweet presence of Christ. Without the experimental aspect, our piety will adopt a mere form. Religion would then debase to Pharisaism. Experimental religion is the product of importunate prayers and soul exercise. It is the constant infusion of the Holy Spirit and the power of God bringing about a holy work in our souls. Some of the more striking marks of such a religion are contrition, diligence, sobriety, full dependency upon God for all things, humility of spirit, holy contentment and of course, an insatiable spiritual thirst and hunger. These are attributes I find direly lacking in those who are merely puffed up with spiritual knowledge. On the other

hand, we see such experiences are diametrically different from those intimated by the adherents who claim authenticity for the Charismatic heresy. Wherefore while seeking experience earnestly, we must be careful to debunk spurious ones.

Secondly, I detect in many who come from churches with Reformed labels a kind of cockiness and confidence concerning the state of their souls. Such a mentality is inconsistent with practical Calvinism but almost always associated with Arminianism. This is especially so when they take for granted their salvation and are hardly anxious or disturbed about the matter of assurance. Rather than having the spirit of waiting, of carefulness, of searching and of praying, a sense of complacency is assertively manifested. It is preposterous that they should harp boisterously of the sovereignty of God and link it with especially the grace of Christ and then go about adorning an Arminian lifestyle. They are nonchalantly oblivious to the fact that the enjoyment of covenantal privileges do not necessarily mean their salvation. "*For many are called but few are chosen*" (*Matthew 22:14*). Hence it is not surprising to appreciate how hardly any in their midst speak of soul travail, an exercise in anguish for the welfare of one's soul. Instead they conduct themselves as though they have already procured a sure ticket to heaven. It is likely that the chiefest among them may know nothing about true repentance nor pardon of sin. Forgiving themselves, they overlook and over-

throw the sovereign prerogative of God.

It is little wonder that many such have already suffered loss of their zeal and enthusiasm in the course of time. The waning of their spiritual fervour is the ominous siren to the stark reality of deficient religion which cannot deliver one from the eternal fire of hell. For effectual grace perseveres all the way. *“But he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved”* (Matthew 24:13). Such people often proffer excuses such as establishing their own careers and businesses and engaging themselves in family matters for their lack of commitment in the King’s business. In truth, it can be attributed to a want of conversion experience. A token of evidence of this unregenerate state is the lack of reverence and trembling for spiritual things. Hence their confusion in the scale of priorities. We do well to remember the indictment by prophet Haggai, *“Is it time for you, O ye, to dwell in your ceiled houses, and this house lie waste?”* (Haggai 1:4). But who can attain to the rigours and spartan attitude of discipleship save those who have effectually received the grace of God? It is the unregenerate who finds the callings of the world preventing his dedication to the kingdom of God. While he gives glib service to Christ Jesus, he hardly attempts to meet His stringent requirements for discipleship.

The dismal scenario of religion in our times is graphically portrayed for us both in the words of our Lord Himself and the apostles in the New Testament.

Hence if the response that is inculcated in us in the ambience where we are apparently worshipping does not bring us to deeply probe and query within ourselves as to what a true ministry is, what the true Gospel is, what a true conversion is, what a true church is, what a true preacher is, it is because Reformed faith is never actually understood, let alone practised. For these posers are highly pertinent simply because they ultimately relate to our own personal salvation. For if the posers cannot be answered affirmatively, then very likely it is because the Holy Spirit is absent. Without the blessed Holy Spirit, all divine operations will come to a standstill. We are then reminded of what the Psalmist said, "*Except the LORD build the house, they labour in vain that build it*" (Psalm 127:1). Also the words of prophet Zechariah: "*Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the LORD of hosts*" (Zechariah 4:6b). Outward religion may help us to a certain measure but it cannot win for us eternal life. Those who labour in the churches without the approval of God and without the assistance of the Holy Spirit are designated by our Lord Himself as those that "*work iniquity*" (see Matthew 7:15-23).

There are some who will attempt to evade these posers. This is deceiving oneself and God. We must be diligent and honest in these matters. We cannot afford to go awry here because it will bear eternal repercussions. Much difficulties and impediments must be overcome if we are to discover truth. We

must scale the loftiest summits, descend the most staggering depths, cross the most turbulent seas, or even brave the most intimidating hazards, if that is what it takes us to find Christ Jesus. Consider the doggedness and persistence of those who found Christ in the days when He walked upon earth. Nothing is too costly in the matter of the pursuit of our eternal salvation. *“For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?” (Matthew 16:26a).*

Be wary of being deceived by labels — what matters is the essence and culture of the ambience of preaching. Do they bear the evangelical marks of the sphere wielded by the Reformers and Puritans? Very often, it is all too conspicuous in the so-called Reformed churches that their culture is Arminian. They can chant “Reformed” or “Calvinism” till the cows come home but their culture betrays them for what they really are. Labels can be blatantly misleading in this instance.

I hope you will consider these things prayerfully. I don’t think I need to further emphasize the importance of the matters I have spoken afore. **W**



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