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## Two Features of the Reformed Faith

**T**IME and again THE PRESBYTERIAN GUARDIAN has made favorable mention of the Reformed Faith. At its organization The Presbyterian Church of America took its stand on the Reformed Faith. Everyone who attended the General Assemblies of this church must recall that in the discussions reference was made dozens of times to the Reformed Faith. Anyone at all acquainted with Westminster Theological Seminary knows that it was founded for the defense and promulgation of the Reformed Faith. Dr. J. Gresham Machen lived and died for the Reformed Faith.

What is the Reformed Faith? That question can be answered in a few words. The Reformed Faith is that interpretation of Holy Scripture which is embodied in the doctrinal standards of The Presbyterian Church of America—the Westminster Confession of Faith and the Shorter and Larger Catechisms.

It appears that it is a simple matter to become acquainted with the Reformed Faith and that there is very little, if indeed any, excuse for misunderstanding it. And yet, strange to say, not only is it grossly misconstrued by its opponents, but ignorance and misconception of it are found also with many who would be known as its adherents.

Because of this state of affairs it would seem in order to call attention to some salient features of the Reformed Faith. For the present I shall limit myself to two—its inclusiveness and its exclusiveness.

### ITS INCLUSIVENESS

Now the notion has got abroad that the Reformed Faith is something narrow and provincial and

that its adherents are a mere sect. Nothing could be more false. The Reformed Faith is exceedingly broad.

It is worthy of note that already in the Reformation period the Reformed Faith spread from Switzerland, where the profound and penetrating genius of Calvin had given it expression, to France, along the Rhine through Germany to Holland, eastward to Bohemia and Hungary, and westward across the Channel to Great Britain. And that the foundations of our American republic were largely Calvinistic every student of history knows. How clear that the Reformed Faith is international. Perhaps *supernational* describes it even better. It far transcends national boundaries and racial distinctions.

Occasionally one meets a Scotchman who appears to suppose that only he who has at least a few drops of Scotch blood in his veins can be a good Presbyterian. And once in a while one comes across a Hollander who seems to think that his nationality has a patent on the Reformed Faith. It must be granted that in the providence of God the Reformed Faith has flourished especially in Holland and Scotland, and it behooves lovers of the Reformed Faith everywhere to profit by the flood of Reformed literature which has issued from these lands. But how absurd to suppose that the Reformed Faith belongs to any nationality in particular! To do so is to deny its very genius. Calvin was a native of France—for which he could hardly be blamed—and spent the most fruitful years of his life in Switzerland, and he turned out to be a pretty good Calvinist at that. Our own America too has produced great exponents of the Reformed Faith, not all of whom could lay claim to Scotch or Dutch ancestry. The Reformed Faith smiles

benignly at national and racial peculiarities. It belongs to the universals.

The universalism of Calvinism is easily accounted for. The Reformed Faith is to all intents and purposes synonymous with the Christian Faith. With due respect for interpretations of Christianity that go by other names it may be truly said that the Reformed Faith is its purest and fullest exposition. And is not universality of the very essence of Christianity? Did not Jesus declare: "I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto Me?" Did He not command His apostles to disciple all nations? And did not the seer on Patmos hear the redeemed sing: "Thou, O Lamb, wast slain and hast redeemed us to God by Thy blood out of every kindred and tongue and people and nation"?

The inclusiveness of the Reformed Faith is manifest in more ways.

When the Reformed Faith is spoken of in their hearing many think of the so-called five points of Calvinism—absolute predestination, definite atonement, total depravity, efficacious grace, and eternal security. It is well, for these doctrines are distinctively Reformed. It were a serious blunder, however, to suppose that these five teachings together constitute the Reformed Faith in its totality. That were taking far too narrow a view of the Reformed Faith. It contains a great many teachings in common with other Christian systems. In fact, it comprises all that is true in all other interpretations of Christianity. It is nothing less than a complete, full-orbed presentation of the system of truth contained in the Bible.

A few illustrations may serve to elucidate this fact.

That Luther strongly stressed the doctrine of justification by faith is a matter of common knowledge. The Wittenberg reformer rediscovered this precious truth in the Pauline epistles and proclaimed it aloud in vigorous denunciation of Roman Catholic denial. But to suppose that this teaching is in any way the peculiar property of Lutheranism were plain folly. Calvin was just as insistent on it as was Luther. Throughout the centuries it has been a substantial element of the Reformed Faith. It may even be contended that only in the Reformed theology has it retained its pristine purity, free from the tendency to become a doctrine of justification *on account of* faith.

Some time ago I heard a minister speak of the Scriptural doctrine of salvation as a sphere consisting, of course, of two hemispheres. He named the hemispheres divine sovereignty and human responsibility. Then he went on to say that the Reformed Christian holds the former of these hemispheres, the Arminian Christian the latter. What a display of ignorance! How unpardonable a caricature of the Reformed Faith! The Arminian does indeed stress human freedom to the point of doing violence to divine sovereignty. But the true Calvinist is scrupulously careful not to do the reverse. He glories in the sovereignty of God but insists just as firmly on the free agency of man and his consequent full responsibility. Even when he finds it impossible—as every one must—to bring the two into perfect harmony before the bar of finite and sin-darkened human reason, the Reformed Christian yet holds tenaciously to both, for the simple and conclusive reason that both are taught unmistakably in Holy Writ.

Public opinion to the contrary notwithstanding, the Reformed Faith is characterized by a broad tolerance. To be sure, it is not at all tolerant in the loose sense in which the word is so often used—rather abused—today. Of error it is extremely intolerant, for it knows that to tolerate falsehood is sin. But in a very real and noble sense tolerance is characteristic of the Reformed Faith.

It must not be supposed that all Reformed theologians are in full accord on every detail of doctrine. On minor points there are differences of opinion among them. In consequence, a Presbyterian church which requires that its officers subscribe to that statement of the Reformed Faith which is known as the Westminster Confession does not insist that all must find themselves in perfect accord with every single proposition of this creed. All that is asked is that they express their agreement *ex animo* with the system of doctrine contained in the Confession. The view held by the Westminster divines that the pope is the man of sin whose coming was foretold by St. Paul does not belong to the integrity of the Reformed system. There is a difference of opinion among adherents of the Reformed Faith as to whether it may be said with certainty that *all* who die in infancy are saved. And premillenarians,

supernaturalistic postmillenarians, and amillenarians have for generations lived together in peace within the Reformed household of faith.

Again, while the Calvinist, in his zeal for the truth, is quick to detect and ever prepared to condemn the doctrinal errors of those of his fellow-Christians who with him hold to such fundamentals as the inerrancy of Scripture, the deity, virgin birth, bodily resurrection, and personal return of Christ, and His death as an atoning sacrifice for sin, but feel that they cannot subscribe to the Reformed Faith in its fullness, he willingly extends to them the hand of Christian fellowship. He recognizes in every genuine Christian a Calvinist in principle. In the beautiful words of B. B. Warfield: "Whoever believes in God; whoever recognizes in the recesses of his soul his utter dependence on God; whoever in all his thought of salvation hears in his heart of hearts the echo of the *solus Deo gloria* of the evangelical profession—by whatever name he may call himself, or by whatever intellectual puzzles his logical understanding may be confused—Calvinism recognizes as implicitly a Calvinist, and as only requiring to permit these fundamental principles—which underlie and give its body to all true religion—to work themselves freely and fully out in thought and feeling and action, to become explicitly a Calvinist."

#### Its Exclusiveness

The Reformed Faith by no means excludes every interpretation of Christianity that goes by another name. For example, it does not exclude Lutheranism. It does indeed aim to exclude whatever of error is found in Lutheranism, but it willingly acknowledges and gladly embraces all that is true in that system.

Let me illustrate. Christian truth is a target, let us say, with concentric circles. Three men aim their arrows at it—a Lutheran, a Wesleyan Arminian or old-fashioned Methodist, and an adherent of the Reformed Faith. All three archers hit the target, but the last pierces the bull's-eye.

Let me illustrate again. Lutheranism, Wesleyan Arminianism, and Calvinism are represented by three apples. They are not apples of three kinds. No, the three apples are of one kind but of different degrees of soundness, and the Calvinistic is the soundest.

In a word, the Reformed Faith, while claiming to be the more pure Christian faith, cheerfully recognizes the Christian quality of other really Christian faiths.

However—and what follows now is extremely important at this stage of our discussion—there is a fourth man shooting at the target. He fails to hit even the outer circle. His name is Modernist. To use our other metaphor, there is what purports to be a fourth apple but in reality is a Sodom-apple. If one bites into it his mouth is filled with ashes. It represents Modernism.

To speak less figuratively, the Reformed Faith refuses to recognize Modernism as an interpretation of Christianity. It looks upon Modernism as a religion other than Christianity. It puts Modernism into a class with the many false religions of the world. Its attitude toward Modernism is that of exclusion.

The question might be asked whether Modernism does not contain elements of truth. The answer can be very brief. Modernism, like every other false religion, contains elements of truth, but it does this in spite of its fundamental principle, not because of it.

*It is a fact of supreme significance that of all faiths deserving of the Christian name the Reformed stands most diametrically opposed to Modernism. The Reformed Faith and Modernism are opposite poles.*

That claim is easily proved.

Modernism stands for naturalism. Christianity stands for supernaturalism. Of the various Christian systems of theology the Reformed is most consistent in its supernaturalism.

A brief comparison of the Modernist, the Arminian, and the Reformed doctrines of salvation, by way of illustration, will make this clear.

While there are but few consistent and a great many inconsistent Modernists, Modernism in its very essence is thoroughly Pelagian. It teaches that man is abundantly able to save himself—so far as he needs salvation—without the aid of supernatural grace.

There are a host of Arminians in the Christian churches of our land. Sad to say, even among those who call themselves Fundamentalists they are very numerous. They say that divine grace is indispensable for the sinner's salvation. Had not God sent His Son into the world, and had not

the Son of God died for the sins of men on the cross, salvation would be entirely out of the question. But now that Christ did atone for sin, salvation is possible for all. Men everywhere have a chance to be saved. Whether or not the possibility will be translated into actuality in the case of a given individual depends on whether or not he grasps his opportunity by believing on the Lord Jesus Christ. And for so believing he is dependent on the voluntary exercise of his own unregenerate free will.

There is in our land a band of men and women who profess and love the Reformed Faith. They insist that salvation from beginning to end belongs to the Lord. Christ died on the cross, say they, not to make salvation possible but to save. And faith in the Lord Jesus Christ is not an act of man's unregenerate will but a fruit of the regenerating grace of the Holy Spirit. When one does work out his own salvation—as indeed one must—he does so only because, in the words of Paul, it has pleased God to work in him both to will and to do.

In a very few words, the Modernist teaches that man saves himself without God's aid; the Arminian teaches that God makes salvation possible and that it is for man to make it actual; the Calvinist teaches that God saves the sinner.

Differently expressed, Modernism denies salvation by grace; Arminianism begins with a profession of salvation by grace but ends up with its nullification; the Reformed Faith proclaims salvation by grace with unerring consistency.

What could be clearer than that the Reformed Faith is the very opposite of Modernism, while Arminianism constitutes a serious compromise with Modernism?

The charge has of late been laid at the door of Westminster Theological Seminary that it has shifted its attack from Modernism to Fundamentalism. It is but one of many false and foolish accusations brought against that stronghold of the Reformed Faith.

There is something humorous about this charge. It is clear that at least some of the accusers are themselves, to put it mildly, tinged with Arminianism. Now for one who himself compromises with Modernism to find fault with anyone for not attacking Mod-

ernism more vigorously is ludicrous indeed.

The fact is that Westminster Seminary, instead of having shifted its attack from Modernism to Fundamentalism, has from the day of its founding to the present fought Modernism with might and main. *And just because its attitude toward Modernism was utterly uncompromising it could not help opposing every compromise with Modernism.* A great many American Fundamentalists are compromising with Modernism. The prevalence of Arminianism among them is one piece of evidence.

Westminster Seminary has from the beginning attacked every compromise with Modernism. It has not spared even such compromises as come in the name of Fundamentalism. This policy was never changed. It never can be changed so long as the seminary persists in its strongly militant opposition to Modernism. *If the seminary should weaken in its attack on compromises with Modernism, it would have weakened by just so much in its attack on Modernism itself. May God forbid!*

At its Second General Assembly the danger was present that The Presbyterian Church of America might yield a point to Arminianism. Then Dr. J. Gresham Machen, zealous for the Reformed Faith as he was, made an impassioned plea for the members of the Assembly to come out from their former Modernist connections "clean." The majority heeded. Of the minority many have since left The Presbyterian Church of America.

Dr. B. B. Warfield once wrote this significant sentence: *"There is nothing against which Calvinism sets its face with more firmness than every form and degree of autosoterism."* Autosoterism is the view that man is his own saviour, that salvation is not wholly of divine grace. The Reformed Faith has set its face like a flint against "every form and degree" of this soul-destroying and God-dishonoring heresy.

The Reformed Faith is inclusive. It would include all that is true in every Christian system of theology.

The Reformed Faith is exclusive. It excludes that false religion which is known as Modernism and together with it each and every compromise with Modernism, no matter if made by Christians.

—R. B. KUIPER.