

Chapter 5: Conclusion

This thesis begins by pointing out that there is a lack of spirituality in Reformed circle; this lack of spirituality stems from the lack of spiritual discipline. In the many disciplines that have been practiced throughout the history of the church, this thesis proposed that we take another look at the discipline of solitude, which has been abandoned together with the demolition of monastery within the Reformed tradition. To be more specific, this thesis turns to Nouwen's idea of solitude to show that solitude is, in fact, compatible as a discipline for Reformed Christians. The aim, then, is to ground Nouwen's idea of solitude to Calvin's concept of sanctification. If solitude is in fact a spiritual discipline for our sanctification unto Christ, then it is just straightforward that it ought to be compatible with Calvin's concept of sanctification. By showing this compatibility, then there can a ground to say that the discipline of solitude can be taken up as a spiritual exercise within this tradition. Of course, the here between Nouwen's solitude and Calvin's sanctification serves only as an underlying work between the solitude in general and the whole of Reformed tradition. Again, I would like to repeat what I have written in the first chapter that this work is merely a brick in a great fortress. The progress of this thesis, as we can see, is simple: to lay out Nouwen's idea, then Calvin before finally harmonizing them.

In the second chapter, this thesis tried to define Nouwen's view of solitude similar to the way Nouwen defines his solitude; which is not by a simple, linear definition but by laying out what it entails. Once again, chapter two does not strictly arrange Nouwen's idea in a "proper" method but rather loosely broadened the scope of solitude within its own nature. It is important to point out here that while many other theologians have been brought up in the matter of solitude apart from Nouwen, their views on solitude have either inspired

or been inspired by Nouwen. First, this research approached solitude and its general dimensions, namely: (1) physical isolation, (2) social disengagement and (3) contemplation. Simply put, (1) isolation does not mean alone *per se*, but in solitude, it is to be alone with Christ. The direction is always Christ-centered rather than man-centered. (2) To be socially disengaged does not mean to be socially disinterested. Solitude is a physical withdrawal from the society so that it can be spiritually and wholly be engaged in it. (3) Solitude denies inactivity. Solitude does not serve to be a ground for laziness but at its very core, it pushes to contemplate not only on our shortcomings but also upon Christ whom we engage in it.

Next, this thesis tries to show the deep intertwining relationship that solitude has with silence. In fact, we can even go further to say that solitude and silence is synonymous. Silence does not only function as a discipline for self-control but also to free us from the deception and compulsions of the world. In contrary to some, silence does teach us how to speak. Speaking too much, is in fact, the root of unruly speeches. Very importantly, in Nouwen, silence brings us beyond our earthly life; silence is, for Nouwen, “the mystery of the future world.” Silence does this in a three-prong ways: (1) silence makes us pilgrims, (2) silence guards the fire within and (3) silence teaches us to speak. Firstly, silence teaches us that the world is our home. Nouwen argues that words bind us into this world. Next, Nouwen argues that too much word would deplete us of our “fire” within. This idea can be captured more clearly by the analogy of a minister who is burned out by too much preaching. He is letting out much but receiving little. Last, the word that can truly bless must be words that come from our “divine silence”. What this mean is that in silence, we listen to the word of God and not just our own words. Only when we

encounter the eternal words of God in silence then our words can come into real fruition in this world.

To deflect those who would argue that solitude is merely an outer exercise, this research has also shown how Nouwen himself thinks that it is not just the outer solitude that counts. What matters most is the inner solitude. Once again, the goal of solitude was always were the spiritual union with Christ. If solitude must indeed become its own end just as Nouwen argues, then there must be more in solitude than a mere outer discipline. The outer solitude must always lead us to an inner disposition; to the inner solitude of the heart. It is in this context of inner solitude that we can come also to a view of the relationship between solitude and prayer. Once again, solitude for Nouwen is not just a ladder to greater things; in this perspective, solitude is not merely a preparation for prayer. Solitude is the ground of prayer, the listening to God, the direction of prayer and the gift of prayer. Solitude (both physically and spiritually) is so intertwined with prayer that without it, we cannot come into a true prayer before God.

As many theologians, along with Nouwen, have pointed out, solitude finds an integral place in the community life; there is no community without solitude. While solitude is to be alone, a community without solitude is one without a deep binding bond. Such a community builds itself up from mere proximity and is bound by give and takes. Solitude takes us to the realization that we all belong in the body of Christ. In solitude, Christians find their true solidarity that is unaffected by every external circumstances and situations. In solitude, we realize that we and the other people are loved by Christ. To be in solitude in a community means to accept the fact that we belong to each other even way before we are created.

In the third chapter, this research proceeds to the concept of sanctification in Calvin.

However, before it goes into the details, it is important to show that sanctification in both Calvin and Reformed traditions can be private, active and expressed in a discipline and imitation. A passive sanctification is definitely not a biblical image. What the Bible demands from believers is that we actively try to imitate Jesus and thus be sanctified.

Sanctification is not merely a matter of the within but that it is an active discipline.

Furthermore, we do not just actively seek to be further sanctified, sanctification also finds its role in Jesus and therefore it requires certain level of imitation. If Jesus was sanctified through all the disciplines that he did, so will we. Lastly, this thesis argues that in Calvin, opposing many Reformed understanding, sanctification does not need to be a communal one. A private sanctification is present in Calvin's writings, especially evident in his view of God's singular providence towards every believers and the power of solitude in prayer.

When this foundation has been set, then this thesis moves onto the matter of sanctification. Based according to Calvin's arrangement of his *Institutes*, this thesis have categorized his concept of sanctification into five parts: mortification, vivification, denial of self, carrying the cross and the meditations of future life. Mortification in Calvin is to kill the flesh, which is ever-present as long as we live. Vivification is the recognition that we have to grow unto Christ after we mortify our flesh. Denial of self is a humble acceptance of our wickedness and in this sense we have to deny ourselves in two aspects: with regards to men and God. Without denying ourselves, we will not have true relationship with either party. To carry our cross means to be willing to receive afflictions in this world. While afflictions are deemed negatively by the world, in Christ, Christians can approach afflictions positively. For believers, afflictions must be received as our

training unto sanctification because of how deeply we are engaged to the deception of this world. Not only as training, afflictions can also be considered a fatherly chastisement that prevents us from falling deeper into sins. To meditate on the future life is to oppose our love towards this world. To be sanctified is to know that we do not belong in this world just as much as Jesus. The direction of our heart must always be directed above and not in this world if we are to be sanctified unto the image of Christ who sits in heaven.

In chapter four, the main goal is to harmonize Nouwen's solitude to Calvin's sanctification. Before this research continues to the matters of comparison, it has shown, as well, how solitude is indeed a biblical discipline. Drawing from many theologians, this research have shown through the Old Testament and the New Testament, that solitude is not merely just a romantic adaptation by the early Christians but rather rooted in the Word. In relation to this context, we have also seen how Calvin comments on solitude. While his opinions on solitude are far and between within his Commentaries of the Gospel, there is still enough to show that Calvin does not totally reject this practice. In fact, Calvin thinks that "solitude has a powerful influence" on prayer. It is on this ground that Nouwen and Calvin can stand together. While Nouwen never treats solitude merely as a functionary tool, he does not deny that solitude possesses this aspect. In its relation to prayer, Nouwen says that solitude is its preparation and directions. It prepares us to have an encounter with God; it directs us away from ourselves and to God and as a gift.

The main similarity between Calvin's mortification and Nouwen's solitude here is that both lead us to the identification of "flesh". Not only we unmask ourselves of our fabricated image in solitude, we also see the depravity which is around us. Thus, in this

sense, solitude becomes the “furnace of transformation.” To complement Calvin, Nouwen says that by voiding us from any distractions, solitude deepens our sinful self-recognition by bringing us to face the reality of who we truly are without the any cover-ups. While Calvin believes in the order of mortification to vivification, solitude in Nouwen does not function likewise. The experience of solitude in the context of mortification and vivification is very much intertwined; while one may lead to the other, it would still cycle back. For Nouwen, solitude is the encounter with Christ both in mortification and vivification. Thus, while Nouwen differs with Calvin in that there is no clear distinction of order, they are similar in that there is a process in this experience. In both Nouwen and Calvin, we see that they both hold to the concept of inner and outer. For Calvin, it is the inner mortification which is the most important. For Nouwen, even though the outer discipline of solitude must lead to the inner solitude, this is enhanced by always returning to the outer solitude. Therefore, Calvin and Nouwen shares the realities of both the inner and outer aspect of mortification and solitude respectively, but in Nouwen, the outer discipline is not pushed way down in pecking order.

It is right to say that Nouwen echoes much of Calvin’s vivification in the aspect that Christ is always the aim of sanctification. In solitude, we do not merely change ourselves to be better; we are changed to be more like Christ. Nouwen notes that there is no way to defeat the demons of solitude without the power of Christ and that without Christ, the demons and struggle we face in solitude is neither real nor authentic. Calvin shares this notion when he states that there is not true mortification without vivification; doing so is merely a wandering about from one sin to another.

One of the biggest powers of solitude, for Nouwen, is to deny ourselves of the image that we build up from the opinion of others. A life without solitude is a life of compelled by self-love and a desire to be recognized. Calvin, likewise, points out that one of our biggest obstacles to come to Christ is self-love. To come to Christ means to deny oneself. More specifically, we have to deny ourselves in two regards: (1) to men and (2) to God. For Calvin true communion comes only with self-denial. Nouwen concurs when he says that solitude is the foundation of communion. To commune is to have compassion and this, according to Nouwen, is achieved in solitude; in solitude we tear away our love of self and go deeper into our bond which is rooted in Christ. It is in solitude in Christ that we can see beyond ourselves and enliven the true bond and community we have in Christ. It is only then that we can love, be compassionate and to celebrate whatever gifts God has given to us individually and differently. (2) Like Calvin who points out our fallen nature that loves worldly blessings, Nouwen similarly says that we love to be recognized by the world and not by God. A life of self-denial to God means to deny our status before the world and turn to God for his blessings. In this context, Nouwen points out that a life of solitude is “to live in the world without being of it.”³⁴⁴ In solitude, we truly can come to hear and live our status as the one beloved by God.

To carry our cross means that we must not deny afflictions in our lives. Likewise, Nouwen notes that Christians who commits to the discipline of solitude must shy away from the various demons and afflictions within. One of the most painful and primary affliction that we receive in solitude is loneliness. This research has shown how that Jesus, too, must go through this affliction. Loneliness is an affliction because it is within

³⁴⁴ Nouwen, *Out of Solitude*, 25

this condition that we feel unloved and abandoned. However, just like Calvin who says that the suffering of the cross promotes our salvation, Nouwen says that we must turn our loneliness to fruitful solitude.

Last but not least, the aspect of silence in solitude complements well with Calvin's meditation of future life. Calvin says that to meditate on the future life is to fight against our love of this world. Solitude nicely fits in as Nouwen says that it actually makes us pilgrims in this world. While Calvin exhorts Christians to "burn with zeal for death and be constant in meditation," Nouwen teaches that silence keeps the inner fire within us alive. In the meditation of future life, it is, in the opinion of Calvin, that we keep things in moderation. We ought to be neither too lax nor too fiery. In the same way, silence teaches us to speak moderately. Thus, in all the aspect of silence as the mystery of the future world, we see that in principle, it highly relates and even complements Calvin's idea. Thus, to conclude in a very simplistic manner, this thesis has amply shown that Nouwen's idea of solitude is indeed compatible with Calvin's view of sanctification.