

A walk with Mr O (7)

What about addressing modern issues?

Mr O, may I ask you a question?

Of course, that's what these walks are for. What's on your mind?

In my walks with you all that we ever seem to talk about is the inner life – things like listening for the voice of Christ during preaching, meditating on the Scriptures, having personal dealings with the Lord, keeping a spirit of prayer alive in our hearts, and things like that.

Yes, those are the subjects that are closest to my heart. But go on.

Well, in my conversations with others, we mostly talk about 'issues' – such things as how to 'do church' in the twenty-first century; or the advance of LGBT+ ideas in our culture; or moral questions relating to abortion, euthanasia, assisted suicide, and so on; or discussion relating to the Covid-19 pandemic. Aren't you interested in such things?

I am very interested in such issues. They are part and parcel of the world and the times in which the Lord has called me to live. I find out as much about them as I can and I do my best to keep abreast of new developments. Part of my daily prayer life is specifically set apart to pray about such things.

But, important as these issues are, they will never be at the top of my agenda. To me, cultivating a closer walk with the Lord is infinitely more important.

So, what shall I say to my friends who tell me that these things are the real issues of our times, that we Christians must address them, and that we must do so robustly?

I can't tell you what to say to other people! But I can tell you how I see things personally. If you are going to address a subject in a truly godly way, you must be a godly person yourself. It is possible, I believe, to closely examine the Scriptures, to come up with clear biblical responses to current issues, and yet to be unconverted.

What is the good of that? It is also possible, I believe, to come up with exactly the right understanding of current issues, but to present the biblical answers to them in an unspiritual way – maybe even in a way that drives your opponents away from Christ, rather than draws them to Him.

To live right, the heart must be right. The inner life is all important.

I can see where you are coming from. But did you know, Mr O, that many of my friends speak about you rather disparagingly? They call you ‘a pietist’ – though I’m not exactly sure what that is!

In the Lutheran church of the seventeenth century many people began to react against what they saw as ‘dead orthodoxy’, that is, just believing the right things without having a living relationship with Christ.

This was not an organised movement, but a lot of people began to stress the importance of praying together, of studying the Bible together, and of really knowing the Lord.

This movement gave new energy to a group called the Moravians, whose missionary zeal had a large influence on George Whitefield and the Wesley brothers.

This led, in turn, to a new awakening of missionary vision, especially in the English-speaking countries of the world.

The resulting preaching of the gospel led to the conversion and transformation of millions of people. It is the gospel that purifies nations, not moral crusades!

Wow! I need to read some church history. I didn’t know any of that.

So, you see, I don’t really mind being called ‘a pietist’. But, for the sake of balance, I should stress that pietism has its dangers. It is possible to be so preoccupied with your individual experience of God that you let the great doctrines of the gospel slip into the background. We must never allow such a thing to happen.

That is a further reason why I recite the Apostles’ Creed and part of the Shorter Catechism every day. Fire without fuel will soon go out. Fuel without fire leaves everyone cold. It is not either/or. It is both/and.