

Holier-Than-Thou

Karen De Vos

Letters...

Dear Mr. Editor:

Much as I respect and like you, Bob Decker, Jim Jonker, and the other members of our staff with whom I am acquainted, I simply must register my protest against much of what appears in your magazine, Beacon Lights.

I think that I have never seen in any other church paper such a condescending, unloving, "holier-than-thou" attitude toward other churches and other Christians.

I respect you and your associates immensely for your interest in your church, your faith, and your theology. I am impressed by your determination to remain faithful to what you believe to be the truth. I should like to see more of these qualities among other young people. However, there are other Christians in the "holy, catholic church," there are other people who can honestly participate in the "communion of the saints." I think you would do well to respect their membership in the body of Christ even if you cannot respect their theology or their way of life.

I have written this letter in hopes of shedding abroad some small measure of Christian love. Hoping I have not offended, I am

Sincerely yours,
Karen De Vos

Dear Mrs. De Vos,

Your charges are as serious as they are vague. I wish you would send me a list of the articles which are "condescending, unloving, 'holier-than thou'." You will not be hard pressed to find articles critical of other Churches. Criticism, however, does not, de facto, imply the attitudes – motives – which you ascribe to us. Common membership in the body of Christ demands intolerance of cancerous doctrines and pestilent morals. That is not the same as your "unloving" and "condescending," i.e., hateful and proud. You would not sit idly by while infection ravages your hand because you respected your hand's membership. To do so on the symbolical scale is just as tragic. The entire body is infected and the "tolerated" hand lovingly rots away.

I suppose the question resolves into a debate over what is important. When three quarters of Protestantism denies the divinity of Christ, a diatribe against common grace may appear ludicrous. Whether it is calls for investigation and discussion. This is certain. What the diatribe is a long argument which becomes abusive or bitter, the author had better check himself for a lack of (highly prized) love. And repent.

But you offer no proof, just an impression you have. One certainly cannot be accused of a holier-than-thou attitude just because of attempts to pull his neighbor out of the way of a speeding truck.

Whether I "respect" someone's theology and way of life is not essential. But a "respectable" theology and way of life is the sine qua of "honest" participation in Christ's body. In so far as one's theology and way of life is not "respectable," he is a dishonest participant. Such a situation demands correction, in ourselves and others. And I agree with you that the Christian must do this as everything else, humbly and with love. Not, however, lukewarmly or with lack of firmness.

As much as I must try to keep from being offensive, so much should I try to keep from keeping the truth inoffensive.

Sincerely (and unoffendedly),

David Engelsma

P.S. I like you too.

Originally Published in:
Vol 21 No 2 March 1961