

PARADISE OF THE HEART
by
Jean Amos Comenius (1592 –1670)

“They wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented... of whom the world was not worthy. They wandered in deserts and mountains, in dens and caves of the earth”

Editor’s Introduction

The reality of the spiritual substance of the New Covenant, secured in the life and death of the Lord Jesus Christ, has never been lost or mitigated in the Christian church. It has continued in His faithful remnant since the Apostolic era. Driven underground and denied access to State-controlled means of historical preservation, only bits and pieces of true church history have survived. Not many “mighty and noble” according to the flesh are called into the grace of God, and of those few, there are fewer yet whose labors have been chronicled for posterity. Jean Amos Comenius, the last surviving bishop of the Moravian Unity of the Brethren Church was not only a giant in the true Christian faith but a peerless pioneer in education: according to Jean Piaget, “the first to conceive a full scale science of education”. He wrote 154 books in his lifetime, including the first picture book for children. Cotton Mather, in his *Magnalia Christi Americana*, said that Comenius was invited to become the first president of Harvard College.

A casualty of the 30 Years War, after the defeat of the Protestant armies in the Battle of White Mountain, he barely escaped with his life while his house was burned down by enemy soldiers. His young wife and two small children died of the plague. For seven years he lived the life of a fugitive in his own land, hiding in deserted huts, caves, and hollow trees. Early in 1628 he joined one of the small groups of Protestants who fled their native Moravia to await better times in Poland. He never saw his homeland again. For 42 years of his long and sorrowful life he roamed the countries of Europe as a homeless refugee, always poor. His second wife died also, leaving him with four children to care for. British Lord Protector Oliver Cromwell offered Comenius and the Moravian exiles land in Ireland. But they did not accept, since they expected to return to their homeland. Cromwell also organized a collection to aid the exiles. Comenius died Nov. 1670 in Amsterdam, homeless and penniless.

When Comenius led his exiled band from their homeland to Poland in January, 1628, they stopped and knelt at the border where Comenius led them in prayer that God would preserve a “hidden seed” of his Brethren. This prayer was heard, answered and fulfilled in May, 1722, when Count Zinzendorf gave the Moravian Brethren refuge in his estate in Herrnhut. The prayers, piety and sacrificial self-giving of the Moravian Brethren had a powerful influence on key evangelists (both Whitfield and the Wesleys) and the fruits of their labors in the 18th century spiritual awakening, especially in respect to its *spiritual* life (in contrast to the *doctrinal* life, which was drawn more from the Reformation).

The noted allegory by Comenius, *The Labyrinth of the World and The Paradise of the Heart* has often been compared to Bunyan’s *Pilgrim’s Progress*, and reads something like a blending of Bunyan’s allegory and Ecclesiastes. But the Labyrinth was written in 1623, while Comenius was in hiding, and this was *five years before Bunyan was born*.

The Pilgrim or narrator in the *Labyrinth* is a young man trying to find his way through the world with two guides, Searchall and Delusion. He comes upon a walled city, surrounded by a great abyss (the earth). He finds nothing it but delusion, deception, darkness, selfishness, dishonesty, greed, fraud, meaningless emptiness. The religious system, Jewish, Moslem and “Christian” alike, is as hollow and wicked as the rest of the world, filled with nothing but fraud, pretense, unbelief, and empty symbols. While observing all this, the pilgrim notices a small tattered group of people, without a chapel, fleeing and disappearing behind a curtain. He wants to follow these people and find what is behind the curtain, but is whisked away by his guides. Eventually, the discouraged pilgrim goes to the realm of death and sees only blackness, at the edge of the abyss.

But a voice calls him to “Return!” He retreats to a room inside himself and there he meets Christ, in dazzling light. All else is meaningless, but in Christ there is truth. He is ushered back to the tattered folks who disappeared behind the curtain. There he finds things working as they should: free from pride, greed, and lust...a community committed to its Lord. This is the Paradise of the heart.

The following are some selections from *Paradise of the Heart*.

God’s Laws Are Brief

Free, indeed, the Lord God wishes His children to be, but not willful. Therefore has He hedged them in by certain regulations in a fashion better and more perfect than anything that I had ever beheld in the world. There, everything was full of disorder, partly because they had no certain rules, partly because, as I saw, even when they had rules they did not heed them. But those who dwelt behind the curtain had most noble rules, and also obeyed them. They have, indeed, laws given by God Himself that are full of justice, and by which it is decreed: 1. That everyone who is devoted to God should acknowledge and know Him as the only God. 2. That he should serve Him in the spirit and in the truth without vainly imagining corporal things. 3. He should use his tongue, not for the purpose of offense, but for the glorification of God’s holy name. 4. The times and hours that are ordained for God’s service he shall employ for nothing but His inward and outward service. 5. He shall obey his parents and others whom God has placed over him. 6. He shall not injure the life of his fellow-men. 7. He shall preserve the purity of his body. 8. He shall not seize the property of others. 9. He shall beware of falsehood and deceit. 10. And lastly, he shall maintain his mind within the barriers and the ordained boundaries.

A Summing-up in Two Words

The summa of everything is that everyone should love God above all things that can be named, and that he should sincerely wish well to his fellowmen, as to himself. And this summing-up of the contents of God’s Word was, as I heard, greatly praised; indeed, I myself found and felt that it was more valuable than the countless worldly laws, rules, and decrees, for it was a thousand times more perfect.

The True Christian Requires Not Copious Laws

To him who verily loves God with his whole heart, it is not necessary to give many commandments as to when, where, how and how often he should serve God, worship and honor Him; for his hearty union with God, and his readiness to obey Him is the fashion in which he honors God best, and it leads a man to ever and everywhere praise God in his mind, and to strive for His Glory in all his deeds. He also who loves his fellow-men as himself requires not copious commandments as to where, when and wherein he should serve them, how he should avoid to injure them, and return to them what is due to them. This love for his fellow-man will in itself tell him fully, and show him how he should bear himself towards them. It is the sign of the evil man that he always demands rules, and wishes to know only from the books of law what he should do; yet at home in our heart God’s finger shows us that it is our duty to do unto our neighbors that which we wish that they should do unto us. But as the world cares not for this inward testimony of our own conscience, but heeds external laws only, therefore is there no true order in the world; there is but suspicion, distrust, misunderstanding, ill-will, discord, envy, theft, murder, and so forth. Those who are truly subject to God heed but their own conscience; what it forbids them they do not, but they do that which it tells them they may do; of gain, favor, and such things they take no care.

There Is Unanimity Among True Christians

There is therefore equality among them, and great similitude also; as if they had all been cast in one mold; all think the same things, believe the same things, all like and dislike the same things, for all are taught by one and the same spirit.

And it is worthy of wonder that...as I here saw with pleasure...men who had never seen each other, heard each other, and who were separated by the whole world, were quite similar the one to the other: for as if one had been in the body of the other, they spoke alike, saw alike, felt alike. Thus, though there was

a great variety in their gifts, just as on a musical instrument the sound of the strings or pipes differs, and is now weaker, now stronger, yet a delightful harmony resounded among them. This is the purpose of the Christian unity, and the foretoken of eternity, when everything will be done in one spirit.

Sympathy Among True Christians

From this equality, sympathy among them arises; thus all rejoiced with those who rejoiced, were sorrowful with those who had sorrow. I had in the world seen a most evil thing that had grieved me not once: if one fared ill, the others rejoiced: if he erred, the others laughed; if he suffered injury, the others sought gain therefrom: indeed, for the sake of their own gain, pleasure, and amusement, they themselves led a fellow-man to his downfall and injury.

But among the holy men I found everything otherwise; for every man strove as bravely and as diligently to avert unhappiness and discomfort from his neighbors as from himself. Could he not avert it, he grieved not otherwise than if the misfortune had befallen himself, and he grieved because all were one heart, one soul. As the iron needles of a compass, when once they have been touched by the magnet-stone, all point to one and the same direction of the world, so the souls of all these men, touched by the spirit of love, all turn to one and the same direction: in case of happiness to joy, in case of unhappiness to sorrow. And here also did I understand that those are false Christians who indeed busy themselves carefully with their own matters, but care not for those of their neighbors. They steadfastly turn aside from the hand of God, and preserving carefully their own nest, they leave the others outside in the wind and rain. But different, far different, I found things here. If one suffered, the others did not rejoice: if one hungered, the others did not feast: if one was warring, the others did not sleep: everything was done in common, and it was delightful to behold this.

There Is Community in all Good Things among True Christians

As regards possessions, I saw that, though most of them were poor, had but little of the things the world calls treasures, and cared but little for them, yet almost everyone had something that was his own. But he did not hide this, nor conceal it from the others (as is the world's way): he held it as in common, readily and gladly granting and lending it to him who might require it. Thus they all dealt with their possessions not otherwise than those who sit together at one table deal with the utensils of the table, which all use with equal right. Seeing this, I thought with shame that with us everything befalls in contrary fashion. Some fill and overflow their houses with utensils, clothing, food, gold, and silver, as much as they can: meanwhile others, who are equally servants of God, have hardly wherewith to clothe and feed themselves. But, I must say, understood that this was by no means the will of God: rather is it the way of the world, the perverse world, that some would go forth in festive attire, others naked: that some should belch from overflowing, while others yawn from hunger: some should laboriously earn silver, some vainly squander it: some make merry, others wail. Thence there sprung up among the one, pride and contempt of the others: and among these again, fury, hatred, and misdeed. But here there was nothing such. All were in community with all: indeed, their souls also.

There is Intimacy among True Christians

Therefore is there great intimacy among them, openness, and holy companionship: therefore all, however different their gifts and their callings may be, consider and hold themselves as brethren: for they say that we have all sprung from the same blood, have been redeemed and cleansed by the same blood, that we are children of one Father, approach the same table, await the same inheritance in heaven, and so forth. Except as regards non-essential matters, one man hath not more than another. Therefore I saw that they surpassed each other in kindness and modesty, gladly served one another, and each one employed his own powers for the benefit of the others. He who had judgment counseled: he who had learning taught: he who had strength defended the others: he who had power maintained order among them. If one erred in some things they admonished him. if he sinned, they punished him: and each one gladly

accepted admonition and punishment, and was ready to amend everything according to what was told him, and even forfeit his life when it was shown to him that it was not his own.

Everything Is Light and Easy to the Hearts that Are Devoted to God

Nor is it bitter to them to conform to such orders; rather is it their pleasure and delight, while I had seen in the world that each man did unwillingly what he had to do. Verily, God had deprived these men of their stony hearts, and placed in their bodies fleshy, pliant ones that were obedient to the will of God. The devil, indeed, with his crafty suggestions, the world with its scandalous examples, the body with its innate tardiness on the right path, troubled them much. But this they heeded not. They drove away the devil by the artillery of their prayers: they guarded themselves against the world by the shield of resolute will: they compelled their bodies to obedience by the scourge of discipline. Thus did they joyfully perform their duties, and the spirit of Christ that dwelt with them gave them such strength that they were wanting neither in goodwill nor in good deeds (within the limits of earthly perfection). Here, then, did I truly see that to serve God with your whole heart is not labor, but joy, and I understood that those who lay too much stress on the weakness of man do not understand the strength and value of their new birth, and have, indeed, perhaps not attained it. Let them then take heed of this. I saw not that anyone among them claimed absolution from his sins because of the weakness of the flesh, or excused his evil deeds by the frailness of his nature. Rather did I see that if a man had devoted his whole heart to his Creator, who had redeemed him and consecrated his body as a temple, then following his heart, his other limbs also freely and gradually took that direction to which God willed them. Oh, Christian, whoever and wherever thou art, free thyself from the fetters of flesh! See, know, and understand that the obstacles which thou imaginest in thy mind are far too small that they could impede thy will, if it be but sincere.

I saw also that not only to do what God commands, but to also suffer what God imposes, is easy. Here no few were slapped, spat on, whipped by the worldly ones: yet they rejoiced, and lifting their hands heavenward, praised God that He had thought them worthy of suffering somewhat for His sake: for not only did they believe in Him who was crucified, but they also, they said, were crucified for His sake. Some who fared not thus envied the others with holy envy, fearing God's wrath if they received no correction, and separation from Christ if they had no cross. Therefore they kissed the rod and stick of God wherever they touched them, and gratefully took His cross upon them.

Now, all this sprang from their complete subjection to the will of God; thus they desired to do nothing, to be nothing, but what God wished. Therefore are they certain that whatever befalls them comes to them from God, according to His providential decree. Nothing unexpected can, indeed, befall such men; for they count wounds, prison, torture, and death among God's gifts. To live joyfully or dolefully is indifferent to them. Except that they consider the former more dangerous, the latter safer. Therefore they delight in their troubles, wounds and stripes, and are proud of them. In all things they are so hardy in God's faith, that if they suffer not somewhat, they imagine that they are idling and losing time. But let all hold their hands aloof from these men; the more willingly they offer their back to the stripes, the more difficult it is to strike them; the more similar they are to fools, the more dangerous it is to mock them. For they are not their own masters, but belong to God; and all that is done unto them God considers as done to Himself.

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