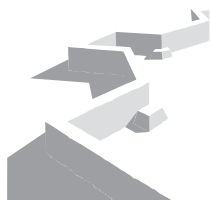




The Purpose, Elements, and Advantages of Shared Spirituality

Session 5

THE URBAN MINISTRY INSTITUTE,
a *ministry of* WORLD IMPACT, INC.



Study Title:
***Church Matters:
Retrieving the Great Tradition***

Foundations for Ministry Series

This material is excerpted from *Church Matters: Retrieving the Great Tradition*, pp. 107-119.

© 2007. The Urban Ministry Institute. All Rights Reserved. • www.tumi.org • TUMI is a ministry of World Impact, Inc.

Session 5

The Purpose, Elements, and Advantages of Shared Spirituality

Introductory Thoughts

Why You Need to Belong to and Always Be Informed by the Great Tradition: Menno Simons

Menno held to the evangelical Anabaptist position, as set out in the *Schleitheim Confession*. He opposed the revolutionary Anabaptists, holding to a firmly pacifist position, as do most Mennonites today. He also opposed the ‘spiritualist’ Anabaptists, who relied on the ‘inner light’ for special private revelations. Menno sought to base his teaching on the Bible alone. Like the Reformers, he held that Scripture alone is the supreme and final norm for all doctrine. *But he did not follow the Reformers in the deep respect that they retained for the writings of the early church Fathers (while insisting that they must be tested by Scripture).*

Menno illustrates the danger of neglecting tradition when one interprets the Bible. He held that Jesus Christ ‘did not become flesh **of** Mary, but **in** Mary’. In other words, while affirming that Jesus was truly human, he did not believe that his humanity was taken from Mary—who was only his ‘host mother’. This position had already been rejected as a heresy in the second century, and Menno illustrates the adage that those who neglect history are condemned to repeat it. *(To be fair, it must be remembered that the early Anabaptist leaders were wanted men, without the opportunity for leisurely study.)* The Mennonite churches have not followed Menno at this point [all italics mine].

~ Tony Lane. *Harper’s Concise Book of Christian Faith*. New York: Harper and Row, 1984. p. 140.

Session Outline

2 Tim. 2.1-2 (ESV)
You then, my child, be strengthened by the grace that is in Christ Jesus, [2] and what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.

1 Tim. 3.14-16 (ESV)
I hope to come to you soon, but I am writing these things to you so that, [15] if I delay, you may know how one ought to behave in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, a pillar and buttress of truth. [16] Great indeed, we confess, is the mystery of godliness: He was manifested in the flesh, vindicated by the Spirit, seen by angels, proclaimed among the nations, believed on in the world, taken up in glory.

Jude 1.3 (ESV)
Beloved, although I was very eager to write to you about our common salvation, I found it necessary to write appealing to you to contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints.

I. The Purposes of a Shared Spirituality (S²) Informed by the Great Tradition

Show me your authority. . . . If you are an ordinary Christian [not an apostle], believe what has been handed down to us. . . . That which had been handed down was true. For it has been transmitted by those whose duty it was to hand it down. Therefore, when you rejected that which had been handed down, you rejected that which was true. You had no authority for what you did.

~ Tertullian, c. 207
 (cf. David W. Bercot, ed. *A Dictionary of Early Christian Beliefs*. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1998, p. 28).

A. To reconnect our spiritual journeys to the Story of God

1. We need to *reconnect with the Judeo-Christian story* of salvation in Abraham.
2. We need to reconnect to *the historic Christian faith* as outlined in the book of Acts in the apostolic age, and through the history of the Church.
3. We need to reconnect with the “*tradition behind the traditions*” and rediscover the power of our faith in its purest, simplest, and clearest forms.

B. To reaffirm our common sacred roots to the historical orthodox faith

What Is the Meaning of Tradition?

The Greek word is *parádosis*, “a giving over,” either by word of mouth or in writing; then that which is given over, i.e. tradition, the teaching that is handed down from one to another. The word does not occur in the Hebrew Old Testament (except in

Jeremiah 39.4 (32); Jeremiah 41.2 (34), used in another sense), or in the Septuagint or the Apocrypha (except in 2 Esdras 7.26, used in a different sense), but is found 13 times in the New Testament (Matt. 15.2-3, 6; Mark 7.3, 5, 8-9, 13; 1 Cor. 11.2; Gal. 1.14; Col. 2.8; 2 Thess. 2.15; 2 Thess. 3.6).

~ "Tradition." *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, electronic ed.

1. We need to *reaffirm our affinity with the creeds and councils* of our faith (especially the first Four Ecumenical councils).
2. We need to deny the new movements towards a flattening of our theological and doctrinal landscapes to a kind of "all-religions-are-equally-valid" mode.
3. We need to unashamedly affirm the "scandal of particularity" rooted in our confidence in the final revelation of God in Christ, that which the creeds and councils all affirm.

C. To renew our personal and corporate walks by returning to the core beliefs, practices, and commitments of the Christian faith

1. Through S² we can renew our commitment to Christian spirituality as a shared journey, occurring in community.
2. Through S² we can revive in our personal and corporate lives the strength of the disciplines of Christian remembrance and celebration both alone and together.
3. Through S² we can rediscover the simplicity of devotion to Jesus Christ when expressed in community in liturgy, sacrament, and discipleship.

2 Thess. 2.15-17 (ESV)

So then, brothers, stand firm and hold to the traditions that you were taught by us, either by our spoken word or by our letter.

[16] Now may our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God our Father, who loved us and gave us eternal comfort and good hope through grace, [17] comfort your hearts and establish them in every good work and word.

II. The Elements of a Shared Spirituality Informed by the Great Tradition

Polycarp also was instructed by apostles, and he spoke with many who had seen Christ. Not only that, but by apostles, in Asia he was appointed bishop of the church in Smyrna. I also saw him in my early youth, for he lived a very long time. When he was a very old man, he gloriously and most nobly suffered martyrdom and departed this life. He had always taught the things which he had learned from the apostles, and which the church has handed down, and which alone are true.

~ Irenaeus, c. 180
(cf. David W. Bercot, ed. *A Dictionary of Early Christian Beliefs*. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1998, p. 648).

- A. S² of the Great Tradition is *Christ-centered*: All forms of theology ethics, and mission of lived spirituality in community focus on Jesus Christ as testified of in the Scriptures.

The truth may be adjudged to belong to us for we are the “many” who “walk according to the rule.” The church has handed this down from the apostles, the apostles from Christ, and Christ from God.

~ Tertullian, c. 197
(cf. David W. Bercot, ed. *A Dictionary of Early Christian Beliefs*. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1998, p. 649).

1. It is rooted in Scripture, the divinely authorized canonical story of God made plain in the Word of God bearing witness to the person of Jesus Christ as Lord.
2. It is summarized in the Nicene confession.
3. It is grounded on a faith articulated by the consensus of the ancient Church in all its legitimate traditions and awakenings.

2 Tim. 3.14-17 (ESV)

But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it [15] and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. [16] All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, [17] that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work.

4. It is celebrated in liturgy and sacrament through the Word and Table, and commemorated and enacted in the Christian year (a real time commemoration of the incarnation and ministry of Christ on a yearly basis).

- B. S² of the Great Tradition is *church-oriented*: the presence of God is usually and normally experienced in the context of Christian community which reflects and reenacts the life of Christ in the world.

Our Lord Jesus Christ is the Savior of our souls, the Governor of our bodies, and the Shepherd of the catholic church throughout the world.

~ *Martyrdom of Polycarp*, c. 135
(cf. David W. Bercot, ed. *A Dictionary of Early Christian Beliefs*.
Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1998, p. 146).

1. The Church in the world represents and continues the story of God's narrative, his story of promise and fulfillment of redemption in Jesus Christ.
2. The Church worships, celebrates, proclaims, and enacts God's narrative through Jesus Christ in the power of and gifting of the Holy Spirit every time it gathers in worship, in its daily and evening sacrifices, its ongoing commemorations, and through its service and mission.
3. The Church's spiritual formation embodies, defends, and sustains God's narrative in its evangelism and *catechism* (i.e., follow-up, discipleship).
4. The Church embraces and contextualizes its freedom in Christ through its shared observances based both on the Word of God and the tradition of believers down through the centuries.

Eph. 4.4-6 (ESV)

There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call—[5] one Lord, one faith, one baptism, [6] one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

Col. 1.12-13 (ESV)
... giving thanks to
the Father, who has
qualified you to
share in the
inheritance of the
saints in light. [13]
He has delivered us
from the domain of
darkness and
transferred us to the
kingdom of his
beloved Son.

C. S² of the Great Tradition is *Kingdom-focused*: all forms of theology, ethics, and mission focus on advancing the reign of God in Jesus Christ, both in demonstration and witness, in our life and work in the world.

The Christ of God shows his superiority to all rulers by entering into their various provinces and summoning men out of them to be subject to Himself.

~ Origen, c. 248
(cf. David W. Bercot, ed. *A Dictionary of Early Christian Beliefs*. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1998, p. 387).

1. We are called to *faith in Christ, baptism into the life of Christ and his body*, and to biblical holiness as members of God's pilgrim people.
2. We are called to be *unashamedly evangelical*, bearing witness to Christ and his Kingdom in our relational networks, locales, and globally, Matt. 28.18-20.
3. We are called to *do good works and give prophetic witness to Christ* and his Kingdom in our acts of mercy and justice, especially for the poor, Titus 2.11-14 (ESV) - For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, [12] training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, [13] waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, [14] who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works.

III. The Advantages of a Shared Spirituality Informed by the Great Tradition

We are but of yesterday, and we have filled every place among you—cities, islands, fortresses, towns, marketplaces, the very camps, tribes, companies, palace, senate, forum—we have left nothing to you but the temples of your gods.

~ Tertullian, c. 197

(cf. David W. Bercot, ed. *A Dictionary of Early Christian Beliefs*. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1998, p. 138).

A. *S² strengthens our identification with Christ and the people of God through time, and gives us a secure footing in the sacred roots of the olive tree of God's salvation.*

The peace of God is sent out from the heavens, where the church is, the typified ark.

~ Tertullian, c. 198

(cf. David W. Bercot, ed. *A Dictionary of Early Christian Beliefs*. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1998, p. 148).

Rom. 11.16-18 (ESV)

If the dough offered as firstfruits is holy, so is the whole lump, and if the root is holy, so are the branches. [17] But if some of the branches were broken off, and you, although a wild olive shoot, were grafted in among the others and now share in the nourishing root of the olive tree, [18] do not be arrogant toward the branches. If you are, remember it is not you who support the root, but the root that supports you.

1. It defines our *doctrinal, liturgical, communal, and missional distinctives*.
 - a. In sharing a spirituality, we can delineate our core doctrines and theology.
 - b. We can specify our liturgical emphasis.
 - c. We can articulate our missional distinctives.
2. It *outlines our story*, and prescribes the ways in which others may be grafted into it.
 - a. We can know our common narrative, and how it relates historically to the Church.

- b. It spells out our formative convictions and practices that the Spirit used to create “us” in the first place.
- c. It relates our individual stories to our larger church story, and then to the greatness of God’s Story.

3. It scripts out what it means to be “of us” and “not of us,”
 1 John 2.19 (ESV) - They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us. But they went out, that it might become plain that they all are not of us.

B. *S² enriches our participation in our tradition* as well as our ecumenical acknowledgment and affirmation of the entire global Christian community.

1 Cor. 12.4-7 (ESV)

Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; [5] and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; [6] and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone. [7] To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.

This is He who places prophets in the church, instructs teachers, directs tongues, gives powers and healing, does wonderful works, offers discrimination of spirits, affords powers of government, suggests counsels, and orders and arranges whatever other gifts there are of the charismata.

~ Novatian, c. 235
 (cf. David W. Bercot, ed. *A Dictionary of Early Christian Beliefs*. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1998, p. 302).

- 1. It builds community by articulating our *common roots, commitments, and vision*.
- 2. It builds community by shaping our corporate lives with *common themes, celebrations, convocations, and missions*.
 - a. We share a common theme and focus.

- b. We share common observances and practices, all centered on the person and work of Jesus Christ, and his calling on our lives.
 - c. We embrace a common schedule and life rhythm, numbering our days, weeks, and months together in spiritual discipline and worship.
3. It builds community by *holding leaders and members answerable to the truths and commitments* articulated by the community.

Preaching through countries and cities, the apostles appointed the first-fruits of their labors to be bishops and deacons of those who would believe afterwards. However, they first tested them by the Spirit.

~ Clement of Rome, c. 96
(cf. David W. Bercot, ed. *A Dictionary of Early Christian Beliefs*. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1998, p. 70).

- C. S² intensifies our passion for reproducibility and multiplication by enabling us to know what precisely it is that we believe, practice, and do, and what therefore is worthy of reproducing.

2 Tim. 2.2 (ESV)
... and what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.

“The more often we are mown down by you, the more in number we grow. The blood of Christians is seed. . . . For who that contemplates it, is not excited to inquire what is at the bottom of it? Who, after inquiry, does not embrace our doctrines?”

~ Tertullian, c. 197, *ibid.* p. 139.

Could it have come to pass without divine assistance that Jesus . . . could have been so successful that everywhere throughout the world, many persons—Greeks as well as barbarians, educated as well as ignorant—adopted His doctrine? In fact, they have even met death in its defense, rather than to deny it. No one has ever related the same thing to have been done for any other movement.

~ Origen, c. 248, *cf. ibid.*

1. Sharing a spirituality *makes plain what it is we hope to reproduce* in our witness and mission.

2. Sharing a spirituality *nourishes efficiency and identity by reproducing after kind.*
 - a. All things bear fruit according to their kind, Gen. 1.11 (ESV) - And God said, “Let the earth sprout vegetation, plants yielding seed, and fruit trees bearing fruit in which is their seed, each according to its kind, on the earth.” And it was so.

 - b. You reap the same in kind that you sow, Gal. 6.7-8 (ESV) - Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap. [8] For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life.

 - c. We reproduce who we are, not just what we say, Luke 6.39-40 (ESV) - He also told them a parable: “Can a blind man lead a blind man? Will they not both fall into a pit? [40] A disciple is not above his teacher, but everyone when he is fully trained will be like his teacher.

 - d. Missions is replicating the same faith, devotion, and hope that is experienced and treasured by the witnesses themselves!, 2 Tim. 2.2 (ESV) - and what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.

3. Sharing a spirituality supplies leaders and their congregations *models and blueprints for rapid reproducibility.*

4. Knowing *who we are, what we believe, what our commitments are, and how we intend to obtain it* eliminates waste and sets clear direction for us as we seek to expand our influence for the Kingdom, in Christ's name.

IV. Summary: The Indispensability of *Koinonia*

Acts 2.44 (ESV)
*And all who
 believed were
 together and had
 all things in
 common.*

[Tradition] is used by Paul when referring to his personal Christian teachings to the churches at Corinth and Thessalonica (1 Cor. 11.2; 2 Thess. 2.15; 3.6). In this sense the word in the singular is better translated "instruction," signifying the body of teaching delivered by the apostle to the church at Thessalonica (2 Thess. 3.6). But Paul in the other two passages uses it in the plural, meaning the separate instructions which he delivered to the churches at Corinth and Thessalonica.

~ "Tradition." *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, electronic ed.*