

The Sacred Roots Movement: Urban Christians Retrieving the Great Tradition

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Rev. Dr. Don L. Davis, August 30, 2007

Remember the former things of old; for I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me. – Isa. 46.9

I will remember the deeds of the Lord; yes, I will remember your wonders of old. I will ponder all your work, and meditate on your mighty deeds. – Ps. 77.11-12

Remember me, O Lord, when you show favor to your people; help me when you save them, that I may look upon the prosperity of your chosen ones, that I may rejoice in the gladness of your nation, that I may glory with your inheritance. – Ps. 106.4-5

Remember the days of old; consider the years of many generations; ask your father, and he will show you, your elders, and they will tell you. – Deut. 32.7

If the dough offered as firstfruits is holy, so is the whole lump, and if the root is holy, so are the branches. – Rom. 11.16

The *Sacred Roots Movement* refers to a loose association of evangelical Christians who are working to renew the Church-at-large by reasserting their confidence in God's revelation and redemption in Jesus Christ, that which is testified in Scripture and handed down through the people of God. We are dedicated to the idea that a rediscovery of the biblical story of God's salvation in Christ articulated in the ancient Christian tradition can enrich and empower the contemporary urban church. Inspired by the *Chicago Call* of 1977, and the more recent *Call to an Ancient Evangelical Future*, documents both penned and inspired by the late Dr. Robert Webber and his supporters, the *Sacred Roots Movement* seeks to retrieve in broad outline the Christian faith and practice developed from the Scriptures from the time of the Lord Jesus Christ to the middle of the fifth century. We seek to understand this tradition as the



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sacred roots of our Christian identity, and are committed to exploring ways that this tradition may renew evangelical faith and mission in the cities among the poor.

In the life, ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ we find the core roots of all authentic Christian theology and worship. As the fulfillment of God's ancient covenant promise to Abraham and the patriarchs, Jesus of Nazareth inaugurated and now represents the reign of God present in history—in him all the prophets bore witness, all the apostles gave testimony, and all the Scriptures testify.

In a similar vein, the taproots of the Church's worship, spirituality, theology, and mission are found in the primary truths of Christian faith in the biblical writings of the apostles, articulated by the Fathers, and expressed in the Nicene Creed. Today, this common tradition undergirds our various historical denominational traditions, and we believe, it has the power to both enrich and empower them for new vistas in urban mission and justice. Reaffirming our shared, sacred heritage of faith can empower us to affirm the Church of Jesus as *one* Church, helping us ward off the effects of historical sectarianism and bitter rivalry.

In the *Sacred Roots Movement* our deliberate attempt is to draw together urban churches, pastors, and associations in order to recover the Bible's own salvation history in Abraham and the people of Israel, to regain the prophetic and apostolic witness to Jesus Christ about which that history articulates, and to recenter our worship and witness in the roots of Scripture informed by the Great Tradition. These roots are sacred, that is, in them and them alone do we come to know God's story of love in Christ, and by faith in him, we make that story (his-story) our own. These roots, when retrieved and embraced, can renew and refresh all branches of urban spirituality and mission. Contemporary urban church worship, discipleship, and mission can be enriched

and transformed as it reestablishes the wisdom embodied in the ancient Church's theology, liturgy, and mission.

Those who share an affinity with the *Sacred Roots Movement* seek to encourage urban Christian leaders, congregations, associations, and denominations to rediscover the power of the *Christus Victor* motif of the Great Tradition, and to restore in their worship and mission the insight and passion of the ancient Church. This rich legacy of faith, theology, and action is the spiritual heritage of all believers, predating the distinctions of Roman Catholic, Orthodox, and Protestant thought, and unashamedly affirms the prophetic and apostolic confession of the Scriptures of God's acts in history in the person of Jesus Christ. This includes the history of Abraham and the patriarchs, the nation of Israel, the life of Jesus and the apostles, and the ancient Church of God.