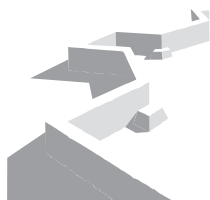




Sowing Good Seed:
First Steps in Recapturing the Great Tradition through
Shared Spirituality
Session 7

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. 141-153.

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

Session 7

Sowing Good Seed: First Steps in Recapturing the Great Tradition through Shared Spirituality

Introductory Thoughts

Put the Apostolic Faith and Spirituality into Practice— Right Where You Are

Acquiring physical habits, as everyone knows from their own experience, requires practice (repeated experience). No one can just decide to keep her eye on the ball, however much she is convinced that is the thing to do. The least controversial point about parallels between physical and mental habits is that the need for practice holds for both. It takes practice to become fluent in a language or a new piece of mathematics or a new concept. And it is particularly hard to learn a new habit when that habit competes with (requires displacing) one already routinely cued in the relevant context.

~ Howard Margolis. *Paradigms and Barriers*.
Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1993, p. 13.

If you put these things before the brothers, you will be a good servant of Christ Jesus, being trained in the words of the faith and of the good doctrine that you have followed. Have nothing to do with irreverent, silly myths. Rather train yourself for godliness; for while bodily training is of some value, godliness is of value in every way, as it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come.

~ 1 Tim. 4.6-8 (ESV)

Session Outline

I. Make Life in the Gathered and Gift-sharing Assembly of God the Center of Christian Confession, Spirituality, Service, and Mission.

For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. [13] For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit.

~ 1 Cor. 12.12-13 (ESV)

- A. Celebrate the Christ event in the worship of the gathered assembly (in Word, prayer, and the Lord's Supper).
 - 1. *Shift conception and allegiance of dynamic spirituality in Christ from individual lone-ranger faith to royal priesthood in community.*
 - 2. Rediscover *biblical image of the "Tent of Meeting"* (Tabernacle) understanding of relationship with God (church as antitype of the Tabernacle): reclaim the gathering as the heart of biblical spirituality.
 - 3. Emulate the passion of the early Church for constancy in the Gathering.
 - a. Worship and Prayer
 - b. The Word of God
 - c. The Celebration of the Eucharist (the Lord's Supper)
- B. Nourish discipleship in *personal and family disciplines shared by all* in the Church of God.
 - 1. Reclaim individual devotions and family altars in the context of *the shared spirituality of the entire gathered assembly.*
 - 2. Develop the disciplines individually through *the "alone together" model of spirituality* (e.g., the celebration of the Passover in families alone, but together as a nation).

3. Concentrate on *simultaneous experience and shared emphasis*: ensure opportunities for disciplined effort as individuals, families, and as a community.
 4. Refuse to define authentic spirituality in the Barna-esque fashion: i.e., the Church is not necessary for “Revolutionary” faith.
- C. Flesh out Christian community in *small groups* of disciples using their gifts to care for one another in love.
1. Provide space for ongoing application of “one anothers” in *viable small (or cell) group* connection for every member of the assembly.
 2. Encourage *the small group as the prototype, womb, and instrument of Christian catechism*, discipleship, and gift inventory.
 3. Ensure and reward effort for *service projects and spiritual enrichments in the context of the small group* (i.e., days of prayer, retreat, Scripture memory, fasting, silence, etc.).
- D. Challenge: *Shift your understanding and practice of authentic spirituality from individual pursuit of God alone to both personal and shared spirituality in the body of Christ.*

Acts 2.42-47 (ESV)
 And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. [43] And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. [44] And all who believed were together and had all things in common. [45] And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. [46] And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, [47] praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.

II. Enrich Spiritual Formation through a Disciplined Observance and Practice of the Christian Year, i.e., Journeying Alone and Together in the Christ Life

- A. Recognize the roots of our shared spiritual observance in the divinely mandated practice of the Jewish sacred year and the practice of the early Church: *the cosmic drama of redemption*.
 1. The observances *recall God's mighty acts of revelation* and salvation within the history of his people.
 2. The observances *reinforce our origins and connections* with the people of God, those constituting our sacred roots and spiritual foremothers and forefathers.
 3. The observances drive home *the lessons and graces of the life and person of Jesus Christ*, serving to deepen our affection and devotion through disciplined celebration and action.
- B. Acknowledge the power of Christ-centered spiritual observance in the rhythmic cycle of day, week, month, and Christian year celebration.
 1. Recognize that the Church year, in and of itself, contains no power or grace; the power is always in the *abiding in Christ*, and the year is a means to make that connection real.
 2. Connecting spirituality to the calendar is "*every person's way*" (not simply the mystic's, theologian's, or prophet's way) to set our affection on things above in the natural flow and context of our schedule and days.

3. Concentrate on the *Christ-centered nature of the Church year* in seeking to incorporate its major observances into your personal, family, small group, and congregational life.
 - a. It allows for renewal of his life and remembrance of its key milestones.
 - b. It provides for the rediscovery and critical reflection upon the meaning of the Christ-event for our lives together.
 - c. It can serve as a means to reappropriate the power of Christ's life in our faithful worship, testimony, and obedience based on the themes of the year.
 - d. It is easily reproducible and contextualizable within distinct cultures and settings (e.g., note the distinctives in most liturgical and sacramental settings).
- C. Share, Re-enact, Remember, and Communicate Christ through the *cycle of the Church year*.
1. Take full advantage to *train members through the "order of service" (liturgy), to participate* and grow in shared spirituality (i.e., readers, worship leaders, word givers, confessors, celebrants, etc.).
 2. Encourage each *family, small group, and congregation* to express creatively their own devotion through the making of new liturgies, services, celebrations, and applications of discipline.

3. Develop and employ *a simple model* to evaluate resources and practices: *Checklist*:
 - a. Are we clear on the event and its meaning?
 - b. How does this practice/resource reenact or remember this event in the life and ministry of Jesus?
 - c. Has this practice/resource been effective in communicating Christ in a real way with the various groups represented in our fellowship?
 - d. How might we augment this practice/resource to gain maximum impact on helping others know Christ and make him known in this celebration or commemoration?
4. Take full advantage of the *liberty you have in Christ* to make spiritual formation through a disciplined observance of the Church year meaningful.
 - a. Understand the significance of shared discipline.
 - b. Revel in the liberty we have in Christ.
 - c. Set your affections on the life, work, and calling of the risen Lord.
 - d. Allow for everyone to learn, participate, and grow.
 - e. Take nothing for granted; do your homework and understand each observance as deeply as possible.

- D. Challenge: *Allow your participation with others in the body through the Christian year to form you and others spiritually, living the disciplined life of Christ together in your daily, weekly, monthly, and seasonal remembrances and emphases.*

III. Structure Your Life Together around the Privilege and Responsibility to Give Living Demonstration of the “Already/not Yet” Kingdom.

Acts 20.35 (ESV)
In all things I have shown you that by working hard in this way we must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he himself said, “It is more blessed to give than to receive.”

- A. Recognize and affirm *the power of discipline and structure* in developing spirituality in community.
1. Learn from the example of God and his people (Exodus-Deuteronomy).
 2. Stress the preparation for baptism (*Catechumanate*) as rich orientation to the essential nature of Christ-centered discipleship in the Church (membership through baptism).
 3. Ensure *small group pastoral oversight* for every member of the body (small group and/or cell as elemental structure of discipleship and service in the Church).
 4. *Restore tradition as identity* in the ongoing life and governance of the Church.
- B. Embrace *tradition as a primary means by which God has multiplied the scope and influence of the Gospel* (seven critical propositions, cf. *Traditions* in the Appendix).
1. The concept of tradition in Scripture is essentially positive.

2. Godly tradition is a wonderful thing, but not all tradition is godly.
 3. Apart from the Spirit and the Word, tradition will eventually lead to dead formalism.
 4. Fidelity to the Great Tradition (i.e., the Apostolic Tradition) is the essence of Christian maturity and mission.
 5. The Great Tradition can be appealed to for support in both spiritual and doctrinal practices.
 6. When a congregation uses received tradition to remain faithful to the Word of God, the apostles commend them.
 7. Tradition may be the simplest, safest, and sanest way to ensure the reproduction of the Great tradition against the threats of heresy, schism, and indifference.
 8. No religious Jew could come close to matching his religious fervor based on his own pedigree and religious zeal and discipline.
- C. Connect communication of Christ to both the *oikos* and the *shared spirituality* you share in your assembly—extend your witness through your life together in Christ.
1. Equip all members to communicate Christ in *the context of the lived and shared spirituality they experience communally in Christ* (this includes evangelism, follow-up, and discipleship).

2. *Practice hospitality, generosity, and service projects* in connection with your church year celebrations and inspirations within your body and community.
3. Find ways to link *personal evangelism, outreaches, and other missional activities to church themes and practices* (this link itself will serve as a further witness of what you experience together in the body of Christ).

IV. Final thoughts and suggestions

As I look back upon my course, I seem to myself as one who, ascending the dark staircase of a church tower and trying to steady himself, reached for the bannister, but got hold of the bell rope instead. To his horror, he had then to listen to what the great bell had sounded over him and not over him alone.

~ Karl Barth. *Church Dogmatics*, foreword.

- A. Commit to the spiritual discipline, structure, and freedom of a biblical tradition that is anchored on the canonical tradition (i.e., the Holy Scriptures) and emulates the Great Tradition.
- B. Rediscover the power of *Spirographic reinforcement* of shared spirituality (tracing the swirls, ellipses, and spirals of the life of Christ in real time through the days, months, and years of our shared life together), adapted from Vicki K. Black, *Welcome to the Church Year*.

The repetition is the key to their gift of grace in our lives. Like the Spirograph's layers of single ellipses combining to form intricate spirals, the cycle of the repeating and overlapping cycles of the feasts and fasts of the church year create patterns of meaning in our lives giving shape and direction to the events that mark our days.

~ V. Black. *Welcome to the Church Year*.
Harrisburg, PA: Morehouse Publishing, 2004, pp. 1-2.

- C. Familiarize yourself with the power of the Great Tradition (read R. Webber's *Ancient Evangelical Future* series).
- D. Stay tuned at TUMI's web site (www.tumi.org) for info, discussions, and forums dealing with the *Sacred Roots* forum and *The Koinonia Book*.
- E. Rediscover and re-embrace (or identify) *your tradition of shared spirituality*, and trace its history back to its interaction, engagement, and transformation by the Great Tradition with its emphasis on both shared spirituality, cultural integrity, and missional strategy.
- F. *Begin small and simple*. Gain knowledge in the general schema of the Church Year, and explore ways in which a recovery of this kind of shared spirituality may enhance the spiritual enrichment of your family, small group, or church.
- G. Reacquaint yourself with the wisdom and cogency of *the ecumenical councils and the Nicene Creed*, especially their ability to ground and equip a new generation of urban leaders for Kingdom-advancing ministry for the Church.
- H. Shift your understanding, paradigm, and allegiance from exclusive, *individualized spirituality* to a more biblical and robust nature of *spirituality as growth in the body of Jesus Christ*, where each member uses his/her gifts to strengthen the whole, all for the glory of God.
- I. Finally, do not stifle the Holy Spirit: let him lead you back to the future, 1 Thess. 5.19-21 (ESV) - Do not quench the Spirit. [20] Do not despise prophecies, [21] but test everything; hold fast what is good.

Retrieving the Great Tradition Means Changing Our View of History

How should we view the past? There are two ways to approach history. Some people treat history as a mirror, in which they admire their own faces. By studying only selected periods and people they recreate the past in their own image in order to glorify themselves. But we see our own ugly mugs in the past only by turning history into a distorting mirror. The proper approach is to treat history like a window. A window is there to look outside, to see something different. We can learn from history, because like foreign travel it shows us that ours is not the only way to do things. If we are humble we will not claim, as Job's friends did, that 'we are the people and wisdom will die with us.' Karl Barth observed that the correct attitude to our theological forbears is summarized in the fifth commandment: honor your father and mother. This command remains binding on children even when they have left home. But for an adult to honor his parents is not always to obey them. There are times when we should say, 'we must obey God rather than men.' *We should listen with respect to the voice of the past, but we are not bound by it [italics mine].* The teaching of the past must be tested: not by our prejudices; not by its applicability to our situation today (for which it was not written); but by the word of God, the Scriptures.

~ Tony Lane. *Harper's Concise Book of Christian Faith*.
New York: Harper and Row, 1984, p. 7.