

THE TRADITIONS
OF THE
CHRISTIAN FAITH

The Traditions of the Christian Faith

Contents

Lesson One	A complete picture of God
Lesson Two	The contemplative tradition
Lesson Three	The holiness tradition
Lesson Four	The charismatic tradition
Lesson Five	The social justice tradition
Lesson Six	The evangelical tradition
Lesson Seven	The incarnation tradition
Lesson Eight	Critical turning points in church history

The Traditions of the Christian Faith

Lesson One

A complete picture of God

Jesus gave us a complete picture of God and demonstrated how we can experience vitality and fulness in our life with God.

Colossians 2:9. "For in Christ all the fulness of the Deity lives in bodily form, and you have been given fulness in Christ."

John 10:10 "I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full."

The historical Church despite its divisions and differences, has upheld the core characteristics of Christ's life through what we now call tradition.

Taken together, these traditions help us to envision a balanced spiritual life. They serve as a guide to help us take on the life of Jesus - to become like Jesus ourselves - and as a result to be transformed from the inside out into his likeness.

Living in this broken world

Jesus lived in this broken, painful world, learning obedience through the things that he suffered, tempted in all the ways we are and yet remaining without sin. We are, to be sure, reconciled to God by Jesus' death, but even more, we are "saved" by his life - saved in the sense of entering into his eternal kind of life, not just in some distant heaven but right now in the midst of our broken and sorrowful world.

When we carefully consider how Jesus lived while among us in the flesh, we learn how we are to live - truly live - empowered by him who is with us always to the end of the age. We then begin an intentional imitation of Christ, not in some slavish or literal fashion but by catching the spirit and power in which he lived and by learning to walk "in his steps."

1 Peter 2:21 "To this you have been called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps."

Ephesians 5:1. "Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God."

In this sense we can truly speak of the pre-eminence of the Gospels, for in them we see Jesus living and moving among human beings, displaying perfect unity with the will of the Father. And we are taught to do the same, taking on the nature of Christlikeness - sharing Jesus' vision, love, hope feelings and habits.

Over the centuries some precious teaching or vital experience of Christ's life have been neglected until, at the appropriate moment, a person or movement arises to correct the omission. Numbers of people come under the renewed teaching, but soon vested interests and a host of other factors came into play, producing resistance to the renewal, and the new movement is denounced. In time, it forms its own structures and community life, often in isolation from other Christian communities.

This phenomenon has been repeated many times through the centuries. The result is that various streams have been cut off from the rest of the Christian community, depriving us all of a balanced vision of life and faith.

In our study we will look at a number of these great traditions. Naming them is not perfect but it will give you the major thrust of these traditions:

- The Contemplative Tradition, or prayer-filled life.
Our hearts steady attention on God.
- The Holiness Tradition, or the virtuous life.
Responding with integrity.
- The Charismatic Tradition, or the Spirit empowered life.
Fuelling our lives from the presence and power of God.
- The Social Justice Tradition, or the compassionate life.
Extending compassion to every sphere of life.
- The Evangelical Tradition, or the word-centred life.
Living the life giving message.
- The Incarnational Tradition, or the sacramental life.
Encountering the invisible God in the visible world.

In reality these different traditions describe various dimensions of the spiritual life. We find their emphasis throughout the teachings of Scripture - from the Pentateuch to the prophets, from the wisdom literature to the Gospels, from the Epistles to the Apocalypse. And many are the lives that illustrate these themes: Abraham, Sarah, Jacob, Moses, Ruth, David, Hannah, Samuel, Mary, Peter, Paul, Lydia, John the list could go on and on throughout church history.

But no one models these dimensions more fully than Jesus Christ. If we want to see the Christian life in its complete form, it is to Jesus we must turn.

Imitating Jesus

When Jesus walked across the pages of humans history, people - astonished by what he did and what he said - exclaimed.

John 7:46. "No-one ever spoke the way this man does."

And it is appropriate to add, “Never has anyone lived like this!” Jesus captivates our imaginations and wins our hearts because he was, and is, the very Son of God with the power and the life to transform and empower our lives.

During his years in the flesh Jesus called out his disciples, saying, “Follow me.” That call had specific and immediate content, and it had specific and immediate results: those disciples left their nets and other business activities and literally followed Jesus. They travelled with him. They listened to what he taught. They watched what he did. And they tried to do things the way Jesus himself did them. They are his students, his apprentices in the life of the Spirit.

Jesus, alive and among his people today, calls to us exactly as he did those disciples so long ago, saying, “Follow me.” Now, we do not follow Jesus in precisely the same way those early disciples did. We cannot walk the dusty roads of Galilee with him. No, we follow him in the Spirit, but the basic principle and pattern is the same. This is why the study of the Gospel records is such a help to us. In their pages we see how Jesus lived and what he did. We see, for example, that he trained himself in prayer, solitude, worship, and like disciplines. And we are to imitate him in this, as in all central aspects of his living.

But it is here we face a problem. How can we imitate Jesus’ pattern for living when we do not live in first-century, rural Palestine? We repair cars or work at computer terminals or teach or raise children, and we have responsibilities and demands that simply were unheard of two thousand years ago.

We are not the only ones from a different culture and age who have wanted to imitate the life of Christ. Others - many many of them - have sought to imitate the way of Christ and to translate that way into their own settings and surroundings. We are helped immensely by looking at their efforts and learning from their stories. Their stories have been - and remain - a rich source of joy and inspiration. In our study we will turn to some of those stories.

Lesson Two

The Contemplative Tradition

The prayer-filled life

The Contemplative Tradition continually draws us into the love of God, reminding us that the Christian life is less like a rule book and more like falling in love. It stresses the value of silence, solitude and prayer as ways we engage with God's presence, whether we take a silent walk in the early morning, ride the bus to work, wash dishes while the kids nap, or even take a nap ourselves. As Teresa of Avila describes, contemplation is, "an intimate sharing between friends," in the time or manner that works best for you and God.

Put simply, the contemplative life is the steady gaze of the soul upon God who loves us.

Jesus our example

Nothing is more striking in Jesus' life than his intimacy with the Father.

John 5:19 "Jesus gave them this answer: I tell you the truth, the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing because whatever the Father does the Son also does."

John 5:30 "By myself I can do nothing; I judge only as I hear, and my judgement is just, for I seek not to please myself but him who sent me."

John 14:10. "Don't you believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in me? The words I say to you are not just my own. Rather, it is the Father, living in me, who is doing his work."

Prayer threads its way through Jesus' life. As Jesus was baptised by John he was praying.

Luke 3:21. When all the people were being baptised, Jesus was baptised too. And as he was praying, heaven was opened and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form like a dove.

In preparation for choosing the Twelve he went up a mountain alone and spent the night in prayer.

Luke 6:12. "One of those days Jesus went out to a mountainside to pray, and spent the night praying to God. When morning came, he called his disciples to him and chose twelve of them."

After an exhausting evening of healing and deliverance Jesus got up early in the morning and prayed.

Mark 1:35. "Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed."

Jesus was praying alone when he was prompted to ask his disciples who do the people say I am.

Luke 9:18. Once when Jesus was praying in private and his disciples were with him, he asked them, “Who do the crowd say I am?”

When Jesus took Peter, James and John up on a mountain to pray, it led to the great transfiguration experience, and Luke notes that the appearance of Jesus’ face was changed while he was praying,

Luke 9:28. “About eight days after Jesus said this he took Peter, James and John with him and went up onto a mountain to pray. As he was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became as bright as a flash of lightning.”

Jesus’ fiercest anger came out when he saw how people had turned the tables in the temple, which he said was a house of prayer, into a den of robbers.

Matthew 21:13. “It is written,’ he said to them, “My house will be called a house of prayer, but you are making it a den of robbers.”

It was after Jesus finished praying in a certain place that the disciples asked him to teach them to pray.

Luke 11:1. “One day Jesus was praying in a certain place. When he finished, one of his disciples said to him, :Lord, teach us to pray, just as John taught his disciples.”

Jesus taught them how to pray:

- How to come to God in the most intimate way, saying “ Abba Father.”
- He gave them parables about the need to pray always and not lose heart, Luke 18, the parable of The Persistent Widow.
- He taught them how to pray in secret.
- To pray for those who persecute you.
- When praying to forgive if you have anything against anyone.
- To believe what you say will come to pass.
- To speak to the mountain.
- To petition the Lord to send more workers out.

And the teaching was matched by continual practice.

Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness for forty days. He withdrew to deserted places by himself following the feeding of the five thousand and the beheading of his friend and cousin John. When his disciples were exhausted from the demands of ministry, Jesus told them to come away with him to a deserted place and rest a while.

Without question, the most intense and intimate of recorded prayers is Jesus' high priestly prayer in the upper room, the site of the Last Supper, the final meal Jesus held with his apostles. Here he poured out his heart to his Father on behalf of his disciples and also on behalf of those who will believe in him through their preaching. And of course culminating in Gethsemane, where Jesus' sweat became like great drops of blood and his anguished words.

The cursory look at Jesus' love and intimacy with the Father would stir within each of us a longing for a deeper, fuller experience of the divine atmosphere and environment of his presence.

Notable figures who serve as examples

Over two thousand years of church history there have been many key figures and significant movements in the traditions we are studying. In each section I have presented just two or three who have influenced my personal pilgrimage.

Brother Lawrence 1611 - 1691

Living most of the seventeenth century he wrote "The Practice of the Presence of God". He served as a lay brother and cook in his barefooted community, in a Carmelite monastery in Paris. He is remembered for the intimacy he expressed concerning his relationship to God. "The time of business does not with me differ from the time of prayer; and is in the noise and clatter of my kitchen,I possess God in as great tranquility as if I were at the blessed sacrament."

Frank Laubach 1884 - 1970

In 1915 Frank Laubach went with his wife to the Philippine islands as a missionary. After founding churches on the island of Mindanao, he established and became dean of Union College in Manila. In 1930 he returned to Mindanao to work with the Mohammedan Moios who regarded the Christian Filipinos as their enemies. Laubach, however, went with a heart filled with the presence of God and sought only to live among them, not trying to coerce them into Christianity, but live each moment with a sense of God's presence.

Henri Nouwen 1932 - 1996

Henri Nouwen gained world recognition as a teacher at several universities, born in Holland he spent his last years as a member of L'Arche Daybreak Community (a home for the mentally disadvantaged) near Toronto, Ontario, Canada. His numerous books continue to be best sellers, 2 million sold in the US, especially his spiritual journal "The Genesee Diary." Written during his seventeen month stay in a Trappist monastery in upstate New York, it contains Nouwen's honest transparent meditations on his time at

Genesee and challenges Christians to seek a deeper spiritual life through the practice of solitude.

Potential perils in the Contemplative Tradition

- 1) Guard against separating yourself from ordinary life. It is easy to wonder if the contemplative life is applicable or relevant to computer programmers and machinists and stay at home mums and dads. It is in the middle of everyday life where prayer and intimacy with God need to be developed. A subtle form of this same danger is seen in the way an intense focus upon the contemplative life keeps some people from serious engagement with the pressing social issues of our day.
- 2) Excesses are never good for us, so guard against “consuming asceticism.” There are many examples in church history of these excesses and they appall us today. St Ciaran mixed his bread with sand. St Kevin remained in a standing posture for seven years.
- 3) Heart-faith is good but not if it leads to devaluing intellectual effort. In the past various mysticisms have divorced themselves from solid theology. We have all experienced cold theology that does not touch the heart. However, in our attempt to correct intellectualism devoid of life, we must not debunk the necessity of right reason and clear thinking.
- 4) If the contemplative tradition leads to a neglect of the community life and an individualism “God and me” it will not end well. The vast majority of us are not meant to live out our faith in isolation. We need the community of faith, the body of Christ.

Practicing the Contemplative Tradition

- 1) Take a one day silent retreat. Fellowship with God as you commute or travel. Rise at 2,00am and for an hour sit in solitude.
- 2) As you read the Bible take time to pray the Scripture in your life.
- 3) Practice ‘holy leisure’ take a walk not for any reason but the sheer joy of walking. Stop praying for a day and listen. Sit in silence, doing nothing, having nothing, needing nothing.

Lesson Three

The Holiness Tradition

A virtuous life

The Holiness Tradition emphasises the re-formation of our hearts so that we are able to respond appropriately to the challenges of life. The word 'holiness' has some negative connotations today, but the original Greek meaning of the word is simply "to function well."

Virtuous life is not about rules or judgement, perfectionism or some kind of merit gained by good deeds. It encourages us to the ultimate goal: not to "get us to heaven, but to get heaven into us." It is attentiveness to the source of our action, to the condition and motives of the heart, and taking on new patterns of life that flow naturally from within.

We see Jesus consistently doing what needs to be done when it needs to be done. We see in him such deeply ingrained 'holy habits' that he is always 'responsible', always able to respond appropriately. This is purity of heart. This is the virtuous life.

Jesus our example

We cannot understand the holiness and ingrained virtue in Jesus without carefully examining those forty days of temptation in the wilderness. Throughout those forty days Jesus fasted from food so that he could all the more fully enter the divine feast. Then when his spiritual resources were at their maximum, God allowed the Evil one to come to him with three great temptations - temptations that Jesus undoubtedly had dealt with more than once in the carpentry shop and that he would face again throughout his ministry as a Rabbi. Yet these were not just personal temptations; they were temptations for Jesus to access for his own use the three most prominent social institutions of the day - economic, religious, political.

The economic temptation was for Jesus to turn stones into bread. This was more than a taunt to ease private hunger pangs; it was a temptation to become a glorious miracle baker and provide 'wonder bread' for the masses. But Jesus knew how short-lived all such solutions are and rejected the live-by-bread-along option.

Matthew 4:4. Jesus answered, "It is written: Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God."

The religious temptation was for Jesus to leap from the pinnacle of the temple and, by having angels catch him in mid-flight, receive God's stamp of approval of his ministry. Divine certification inside the sacred boundaries of temple territory would surely have guaranteed the fervent support of the priestly hierarchy. But Jesus saw the temptation for what it was, and he directly confronted institutionalised religion - not only here in the wilderness but throughout his ministry. He knew that in his person, "something greater than the temple is here."

The political temptation was the promise of “all the kingdoms of the world and their splendour” in exchange for Jesus’ own soul.

Matthew 4: 8-10. “Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendour. “All this I will give you,” he said, “if you will bow down and worship me.” Jesus said to him, “Away from me Satan! For it is written: Worship the Lord your God and serve him only!”

The mountain temptation represented the possibility of worldwide political power - not only coercive force, but also the glory and claim of sitting on the world’s highest pinnacle or influence and status. It was a temptation that fit perfectly the messianic hopes of the day for a Saviour who would cast off the oppressive Roman occupation. But Jesus knew that domination and force were not God’s ways. He intended to demonstrate a new kind of power, a new way of ruling, Serving, suffering, dying - these were Jesus’ messianic forms of power. What we see in his rejection of Satan’s offers is he understood with clarity the way of God and he had the internal resources to live in that way, instinctively and without reservation. Jesus’ actions were a living embodiment of holiness.

But action, by itself, is not enough. It needs to be accompanied by adequate teaching on the virtuous life to lead ordinary people into genuine progress in holiness. Jesus clearly understood this - hence his abundant instructions on life as it is meant to be lived.

The heart of his teaching is the Sermon on the Mount, and the heart of the Sermon on the Mount is the law of love - the “royal law”, as James calls it. Nothing more fully or more beautifully describes the life of holiness. Love is so compact a word that it needs unpacking and this is what Jesus does in his famous sermon. The life of virtue reflected in that teaching is governed by the maturity of love rather than the immaturity of binding legalism. It is a teaching that takes us beyond the “righteousnessof the teachers and Pharisees.”

Matthew 5:20. “For I tell you unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven.”

Now, the righteousness of the teachers and Pharisees consisted primarily in externals that often involved manipulative control of other people. Instead of this sort of righteousness, Jesus points to an inner life with God that transforms the heart and builds deeply ingrained habits of virtue. If we develop those habits we will have the spiritual and moral resources with which to respond righteously when we are faced with temptations of any and every sort, as Jesus was in the wilderness.

Jesus’ life is an expanded commentary on The Sermon on the Mount. Jesus walked among people, healing the sick, giving sight to the blind, bringing good news to the oppressed. Always appropriate. Always able. Always giving the touch that was needed. Always speaking the word that was needed.

We see Jesus consistently doing what needs to be done when it needs to be done. We see in him such deeply ingrained “holy habits” that he is always “response-able”, always able to respond appropriately. This is purity of heart. This is a virtuous life.

This brief look at the holiness of Jesus calls out to us. It calls us to a more consistent life, a more obedient life, a more fruitful life. Jesus, who lived fully every teaching of The Sermon on the Mount long before he taught it, shows us the way.

Notable figures who serve as examples

Again, there are many key figures and movements we could study but the three I have chosen to talk about who have ministered into my life are Thomas a Kempis, Richard Baxter and John Wesley.

Thomas a Kempis 1379 - 1471

Ordained a priest by a Windersheimer congregation in the Netherlands, was the best known member of the renewal movement known as the Brothers and Sisters of the Common Life. Author of sermons, chronicles and devotional work, he distilled the holiness teaching of the movement in “The Imitation of Christ.” Excluding the Bible, that volume is the most widely read book of Western Christianity.

Richard Baxter 1615 - 1691

Baxter was ordained by the Church of England but allied himself with the Puritan cause two years later. Though self-educated, he was eloquent, and his preaching drew large crowds. His moderate stance led him to seek reconciliation between political and theological enemies, even though that stance led to imprisonment. Of his two hundred writings, “The Saints Everlasting Rest,” one of the most widely read books of the seventeenth century, continues to provide motivation, assurance and a method of meditation to those people of God seeking “rest”.

John Wesley 1703 - 1791

On the 24th May 1738, after a disastrous missionary and pastoral trip to the United States, the Anglican Wesley went to a Moravian meeting in Aldergate Street, London and there had a life changing experience: “I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone for salvation. What followed was a life poured out in service to God. Wesley’s efforts - travelling over a quarter-million miles to preach over forty-two thousand sermons, publishing over two hundred books, pioneering or participating in most of the social causes of the day - helped save England from the chaos of a revolution like the one that devastated France.

Potential perils in the Holiness Tradition

1) **Legalism.** This comes when we turn our attention away from the heart and on to the externals. Usually these externals are tied to particular standards of culture or modes of behaviour. Now external actions are important, which is why this matter is often confusing to people. Righteousness, holiness, the life of virtue is primarily a matter of the “heart.” This is why Jesus gave such attention to the rightness of the heart out of which flow the issues of life.

2) **Pelagianism**, attempting to attain righteousness by means of our own works. The things we do can never make us righteous because that has been imputed to us. God has assigned all that he has saved as righteous. Salvation has put us on the path of discipleship where we learn to “grow in grace.” We become apprentices to Jesus so that slowly but surely we begin to “follow in his steps.”

So there are things to do, but what we do does not make us righteous. We could imitate the life of Christ down to the minutest detail and still not be righteous. Our actions, in and of themselves, contain not a single iota of righteousness. All that the actions of discipleship do is place us before God so that he can begin to build the righteousness of the kingdom within us. Purity of heart, unconditional love, peace that transcends understanding - these, and so much more, are the things built into the heart of the disciple.

This work is God’s work alone. We simply can’t programme our heart, only God can do that.

3) **Perfectionism**. This is almost routinely understood in legal terms. In order to know who is perfect and who is not, we need an external criterion by which we can judge others. This leads to a rigid, condemning, judgemental spirit.

Now, the impulse to be perfect is not wrong. But no matter how far we go into perfection, there will always remain room for growth.

Paul captures this paradox in his letter to the Philippians.

Philippians 3: 12 - 15. Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining towards what is ahead. I press on towards the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenwards in Christ Jesus. All of us who are mature should take such a view of things.

To deal then with the perils in the Holiness tradition we must replace legalism with love. Pelagianism with grace and perfectionism with growth.

Practicing the Holiness Tradition

1) We train. Rather than tackle the issues of virtue and vice head-on, we undertake activities of body, mind and spirit that in time will build spiritual resources within us to act appropriately when the situation demands it. As athletes of God we plan a regimen of spiritual disciplines that will stimulate our growth in grace. If we struggle with pride, we learn service. If we need hope, we learn prayer and meditation. If we want faith we learn worship, which shows us the Lord high and lifted up.

2) We invite others to travel the journey with us. Such persons become both companions and mentors. They provide us with discernment, counsel and encouragement. Often we are too close to our training plan to see that we are overachieving and setting ourselves up for failure. Or to see that sloth is setting in and we need encouragement to venture out of the depths.

3) When we stumble and fall, we get up and start again. Appropriate confession and restitution are always in order, but we never spend too much time lamenting our failures and shortcomings. Where we are not yet perfect, we know that we have a perfect friend who will never leave us, never forsake us. Besides, we are in this for the long term. We are looking ahead to the perfection that is coming and is to come. We keep pressing on.

Stumbling is part of our growing. Our mistakes and failures teach us the right way to live. And after stumbling it is no small thing for us to start at the beginning once again. We are learning that by starting again and again and again something firm and lasting is being built into us.

Lesson Four

The Charismatic Tradition

Life in the Spirit

While the Holiness Tradition centres upon the power to 'be', the Charismatic Tradition centres upon the power to 'do'. While the distinction is important, we must not make too much of it, for these two traditions are most healthy when they refuse to function independently of one another. The Charismatic stream of Christian life and faith focuses upon the empowering charisma or gifts of the Spirit and the nurturing fruit of the Spirit. This Spirit-empowered way of living addresses the deep yearning for the immediacy of God's presence among his people.

Jesus our example

Jesus lived and moved in the power of the Spirit. As Jesus rose out of the baptismal waters:

Luke 3:22. "The Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven: "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased."

Directly on the heels of this charismatic event:

Luke 4:1. "Jesus full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the desert."

Then. After the temptation encounters:

Luke 4:14. "Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit."

Such is the refrain that echoes down through his entire ministry: "full of the Holy Spirit"..."led by the Spirit."..."filled with the power of the Spirit."

Jesus moved among people, exercising spiritual charisma (a divinely inspired spiritual gift that God bestows upon individuals for the good of the community of faith and the advancement of the Kingdom of God upon the earth) with ease and assurance. The charisma of wisdom - people listening to his teaching were amazed.

Mark 1:22 "The people were amazed at his teaching, because he taught them as one who had authority, not as the teachers of the law.:"

When Jesus taught he spoke life into his listener's hearts and souls. What he imparted transformed people's lives.

The charisma of discernment is another of the gifts Jesus used frequently.

John 2:25. "He did not need man's testimony about man, for he knew what was in a man."

When the paralytic was brought to Jesus and lowered down from an opening made in the roof, Jesus first forgave his sins. This angered the teachers who heard him, they were thinking, "What makes Jesus say these things, does he think he can forgive sins?"

Mark 2:8. "Immediately Jesus knew in his spirit that this was what they were thinking in their hearts."

This discernment was the evidence of a Spirit empowered life.

Then the charisma of miracles. The miraculous catch of fish. The multiplying of the loaves and fish. Turning water into wine. The cursing of the fig tree to teach a lesson in faith. He walks on water. And most amazingly the transfiguration of Jesus and the appearance of Moses and Elijah with him.

Deliverance is another charisma Jesus exercised, the expelling of demons. Again and again Jesus discerned evil spirits controlling people and commanded them to leave.

The link between deliverance and healing is seen frequently in the Gospels, but it is the charisma of healing that is by far the most prominent spiritual gift we see in Jesus' ministry. He heals the centurion's servant. He heals the paralytic. He raises Jairus's daughter from death. He heals the man born blind. He heals Peter's mother-in-law. He heals two blind men. He heals a mute demonic. He heals the man with the withered hand. He heals the Gerasene demonic. He heals the deaf man with a speech impediment. He heals the blind man of Bethsaida. He heals the epileptic boy. He heals the woman suffering with haemorrhages. He heals the man with dropsy (edema). He healed ten lepers. He healed the blind beggar Bartimaeus. He healed Lazarus, raising him from the dead. And more than once great crowds came to him and he healed them all.

At a critical point in his work Jesus commissioned seventy disciples to go ahead of him, preaching the good news of the kingdom and healing everywhere. This they did, returning with the astonishing news that:

Luke 10: 17-21. "Lord, even the demons submit to us in your name." He replied, "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. I have given you authority to trample on snakes and scorpions and to overcome all the power of the enemy; nothing will harm you..... At that time Jesus, full of joy through the Holy Spirit, said, "I praise you Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children. Yes, Father, for this was your good pleasure.

The expression 'full of joy through the Holy Spirit' means literally 'exalted', 'elation rapturous emotion' or 'to leap for joy'. Jesus was leaping for joy in the Spirit, for now it was clear to him and others that the power ministry of the promised Holy Spirit was transferable too ordinary disciples.

And Jesus' definitive teaching of the last supper, informs us that the Holy Spirit will come alongside Christ's disciples as Advocate, Helper, Comforter and Strengthener. We learn that he will be our Teacher, guiding us into all truth.

For those disciples so long ago, Jesus' departure was a great sadness. But it was necessary for ushering in the fullness of the Spirit.

John 16:7. "But I tell you the truth: It is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Counsellor will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you."

On the last day of the Festival of Tabernacles or Booths, Jesus cried out:

John 7: 37-39. "If anyone is thirsty let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him." By this he meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were later to receive. Up to that time the Spirit had not been given, since Jesus had not yet been glorified."

The fullness of the Spirit had to await Jesus' death, resurrection and ascension. Those events have since occurred, Jesus has been glorified, and the fullness of the Spirit is now available to all. This is the great heritage of the Charismatic Tradition, the Spirit-empowered life.

Notable figures who serve as examples

Because my feet are firmly planted in the Charismatic stream, although I have benefitted and enjoyed the refreshing of the other streams, there are many who have influenced my life. I will only speak of three I drew from a much longer list: Apostle Paul, Francis of Assisi, George Fox, William Seymour, Evan Roberts, Aimee Semple McPherson, Kathryn Kuhlman, Demos Shakarian, Derek Prince, Dennis Bennet, Oral Roberts, John Wimber, David Yonggi Cho etc.,

The Apostle Paul 1st century

He is without doubt one of the finest models of the Charismatic Stream in the entire Bible. He had an amazing balance between the rational, objective understanding of the gospel and the experience of a mystical self-transcendent, subjective anointing of the Spirit. He could boldly declare that he spoke in tongues more than all while at the same time confess that without love in his heart he was only a clanging cymbal. He gives us both the most carefully reasoned theological treatise in the New Testament - Romans - and the finest practical teaching on exercising the spiritual gifts - 1st Corinthians.

Derek Prince 1915 - 2003

Derek Prince travelled extensively in ministry. He is the author of 51 books, 600 audio and 100 videos, many of which have been translated and published in more than 60 languages. As a Pentecostal, he believed in the reality of spiritual forces operating in the world, and of the power of demons to cause illness and psychological problems. His logical and structured approach to teaching and his charisma experience made him a very accomplished expositor of God's word.

David Yonggi Cho 1936 - 2021

Converted from Buddhism as a young man, Cho, pastor of the Yoido Full Gospel Church in Seoul, knows the full importance of the Great Commission and relies on prayer, home cell groups and lay ministry to carry it out. In the power of the Holy Spirit, neighbour takes the gospel to neighbour. This winning combination has not only helped give birth to the dynamic Korean prayer movement, but has grown the largest single Christian fellowship in the world with 800,000 in attendance.

Potential perils of the Charismatic Tradition

- 1) It is easy for us to become excited by the signs and wonders. Without thinking we can focus on the gift and not the giver. At times we must bear with certain excesses for the greater good. Throughout, a clear teaching must emerge that the gifts are not an end in themselves.
- 2) The second peril is the danger of rejecting the rational and the intellectual because the Charismatic emphasis is focused on the emotive side of our faith, and it should. Emotion and reason are not opposites that we must choose between. The charismas of the Spirit do not offend our rational facilities even though they are not confined by them. We love God with both mind and heart.
- 3) The third peril is the danger of divorcing the gifts of the Spirit from the fruit of the Spirit. This was the problem with the Corinthian church. It is possible to move in the realm of spiritual gifts without the maturing that the fruit of the Spirit brings, but to do so will almost always lead to trouble.
- 4) It is a danger linking our walk in the Spirit to highly speculative end-time scenarios that lack theological foundations.

Practising the Charismatic Tradition.

- 1) Draw near to those who have some history and experience in this area of life and learn from them. Invite those who have experience in the charisma to lay hands upon you and pray for you to enter more deeply into the life and joy of the Spirit. Or deepen your experience of charismatic worship by attending meetings known for their strength in this area.
- 2) Follow your leaders without fear, especially in the area of spiritual gifts. Have a kind of dissatisfied satisfaction - glad for all the good God has given you and yet longing for more. Perhaps you feel drawn to pray for someone. Or to prophesy, or to lay hands on the sick. If so, step out knowing God is with you.
- 3) Rest easy with your fear that some aspect of what you are doing is in the flesh. We will not be totally free from that problem until heaven. But God can still use us. We should not be afraid to step out and exercise the gifts that we feel God has given us.
- 4) Regularly test your leadings and experiences in the Spirit with those you trust. Allow their spiritual discernment to encourage, correct and refine you. Remember what Paul said, "since you are eager to have spiritual gifts try to excel in gifts that build up the Church."

Lesson Five

The Social Justice Tradition

The compassionate life

Social justice is where the central issue in the Holiness Tradition - love - meets the road. Dag Hammarskjöld wrote, "The road to holiness necessarily passes through the world of action." And so the supernatural resources to live appropriately - to live the virtuous life - now extends out into our relationships with people and with social structures. While in our mind we often separate the secular from the sacred in life they flow together so the world can see that God is present with us in the world.

Jesus our example

The Spirit of the Lord is on me

Luke 4: 18-19 The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight to the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour.

These words which Jesus took from Isaiah, are rooted in the prophetic vision of the Hebrew Year of Jubilee. In his message and person Jesus was, in effect, announcing a perpetual Jubilee in the Spirit. The social ramifications of this were profound indeed: the land was to be healed, debts were to be forgiven, those in bondage were to be set free, capital was to be redistributed. With these words Jesus delivered a war cry for social revolution. No wonder his friends and neighbours- who understood perfectly well what he was saying - were "furious" and wanted to "throw him down the cliff."

Jesus' shorthand for his perpetual Jubilee life is the cryptic message, "Repent for the Kingdom of heaven is near." And Jesus fully intends that this "Kingdom of Heaven" will constantly confront and pull down the kingdoms of this world. His is an alternative social vision - a vision of an all-inclusive people, gathered in the power of God, filled with the love of God, and empowered to do the works of God. It is a vision of Jubilee sharing, Jubilee caring and Jubilee compassion for all who are crushed and broken by social and economic structures.

Jesus underscores the incompatibility of his Jubilee life with the institutional structures of this world when he says:

Luke 5: 37-38. "And no-one pours new wine into old wineskins. If he does, the new wine will burst the skins, the wine will run out and the wineskins will be ruined. No new wine must be poured into new wineskins."

Jubilee life demands Jubilee structures

In the Beatitudes we see the Jubilee inversion in which Jesus takes all those kinds and classes of people that in the natural order of things are thought to be unblessed and unbleisable and shows that in the forgiving, receiving, accepting life of God's kingdom they too are blessed. He tells us "bless those who curse you", "love your enemies", "lend, expecting nothing in return", "do not judge", "do not condemn", "forgive" "give." What kind of a vision is this? What kind of a life? An impossible ideal, a utopian dream?

Perhaps, and yet this is exactly how Jesus himself lived. Notice his compassion in cleansing the leper and healing the paralytic, people who were outcast of his day. Look at his relentless tenderness in healing a centurion's slave and in raising a widow's only son from the dead. Note too the response of the people.

Luke 7:16. "They were filled with awe and praised God. "A great prophet has appeared among us," they said "God has come to help his people."

When John the Baptist sends two of his followers to find out from Jesus whether he embodies the messianic expectation. Jesus responds.

Luke 7: 22-23 "Go back and report to John what you have seen and heard: The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is preached to the poor. Blessed is the man who does not fall away on account of me."

Yes, says Jesus, the messianic kingdom of perpetual Jubilee is indeed coming, but in a way that no one would have guessed. People, especially the zealots, had been looking for military conquest. But Jesus flatly rejects the zealot option and shows instead another kingdom and another power - the kingdom of love and the power of the divine community.

Notice how Zacchaeus embraces this Jubilee life, accepting its call to generosity. Notice too the Jubilee attitude of the widow who puts her two very small copper coins in the temple treasury, "out of her poverty."

Look at the Jubilee events in the Upper Room; they are rich in social righteousness. Jesus begins by showing the Jubilee inversion of greatness with a towel and a basin. Next he helps his disciples see that the primary social structure God uses to change the power structures of this world is the divine community. Finally, he offers up the uniting Jubilee prayer for the divine community:

John 17:21 "That all of them may be one. Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have set me."

We dare not omit the struggle in the Garden. It too helps us understand social justice. Remember, Jesus could have called down ten thousand angels to obliterate the political structures of his day. The Zealots were hoping he would. But in the Garden Jesus gives his final rejection of the Zealot option and turns his face toward the cross. And in the cross we see the Jubilee way of conquest by suffering.

The Jubilee vision of Jesus culminates in the Apocalypse that last book of the Bible where justice and righteousness prevail, where the divine community lives in a new heaven and a new earth, and where God:

Revelation 21: 4. "Will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away."

This is Jesus' social vision of perpetual Jubilee. It embodies all we mean and desire when we speak of the Social Justice Tradition.

Jesus' living out justice and peace challenges our vested interests. It rebukes our rugged individualism and self hoarding. And it invites us to be the end of people in whom justice and compassion flow freely. Jesus, who lived in the virtue and power of that Jubilee life that pulls down the kingdom of this world, points the way.

Notable figures who serve as examples

My selective examples of those who have influenced me to live this way are Jackie Pullinger, missionary to Hong Kong in the 1960s. William Booth the co-founder of the Salvation Army with his wife Catherine and Mother Teresa who set to work helping the poorest of the poor in Calcutta, India.

Jackie Pullinger 1944 -

At the age of 22 Jackie went to Hong Kong following the advice of her friend Richard Thomas. She arrived knowing no one, with \$10 in her hand. She found work as a primary school teacher in the Kowloon Walled City, which in the 1960s was not policed and consequently had become one of the worlds largest opium producing centres, run by Chinese criminal Triad gangs. Later she established a youth centre that helped the drug addicts break free from their addiction through the power of the Holy Spirit. The ministry expanded and grew to be one of the most successful drug rehabilitation centres in Hong Kong. She pastors a thriving charismatic church with an emphasis on the power and work of the Holy Spirit.

William and Catherine Booth (1829-1912) (1829-1890)

Co-founders of the Salvation Army, the Booths married in 1855, left the Methodist New Connection denomination (where William was a minister) five years later, and started a philanthropic and evangelistic mission in the East End (Whitechapel district) of London in 1865. Basic to their ministry was first meeting physical needs through the network of social relief and rehabilitation agencies and then filling spiritual voids through gospel preaching and lively worship. Both William and Catherine were effective preachers, and William served as the Army's general.

Mother Teresa 1910-1997

Mother Teresa, honoured in the Catholic Church as Saint Teresa of Calcutta, was an Albanian born nun and missionary. She founded the Missionaries of Charity an order that dedicated themselves to caring for the destitute and dying. In 1979 she received the Nobel Peace Prize. She set up soup kitchens, a leper colony, orphanages and a home for the dying destitute. She treated the lepers, educated the poorest of the poor, and fed the homeless. She treated them like family

Potential perils of the Social Justice Tradition

1) Perhaps the greatest danger is the tendency for the Social Justice Tradition to become an end in itself. The needs of poverty are so immediate and the demands of justice are so great that they can consume all our energies. Many organisations have begun with a wholehearted commitment to minister to both physical and spiritual needs, only to end up with a kind of social salvation that leaves people in spiritual despair and alienated from God.

We must face the fact that, on a strictly human level, the state has more resources for providing social services than the Church does. And we should most certainly urge the state in just such efforts. But the Church has deeper reasons for its existence and ministry, reasons that are fundamentally spiritual in nature.

2) A second peril is strident legalism. After the Holiness Tradition it is the stream most prone to rigidity and judgementalism. We can quickly and harshly condemn people who differ from us choosing a simpler lifestyle. Standards of who is in and who is out, who is right and who is wrong become more and more narrowly defined.

3) Thirdly, we can become too closely identified with a particular political agenda. Our faith is political, and it does make valued judgements on political concerns. But this political link needs to be handled in such a way that we are never co-opted by any political persuasion or for any political agenda. The Church must forever stand as the conscience of the state, insisting that it fulfils its divinely appointed function of providing justice and order in society.

Practising the Social Justice Tradition

1) We can open ourselves to the possibility that God may want to use us in a significant way. History is full of ordinary people who were called to a position of influence far beyond their intentions.

2) We can get the facts. We become global citizens when we care enough to be informed about what happens to our neighbours in Syria and Myanmar, in Beijing and Johannesburg.

3) We can become advocates of the powerless and exploited.

4) We can support relief agencies in their good work both financially and through volunteer efforts.

5) We can get involved politically and influence public policy.

6) We can use our literary skills in the cause of the poor.

7) We can take the work of prayer into the social arena to defeat the demonic principalities and powers incarnated in so many institutional structures.

A word of caution: do not try to answer every cry of human need or respond to every instance of injustice. It would simply do you in. While it is important for us to take up some task of justice, we are not to take up every task of justice. God knows we are finite human beings and he does not ask us to do more than we can bear.

Lesson Six

The Evangelical Tradition

The Word-centred life

The work of social justice is most complete when it is intricately connected to authentic evangelical witness. These two traditions are at their best when they function together. The Evangelical Tradition of Christian life and faith focuses upon the proclamation of the Gospel, the good news of salvation. We are enabled by the power of the Holy Spirit to take the word of the gospel into our hearts in such a transforming way that others, seeing this, want it for themselves. This faith stream addresses the crying need for people to see the good news lived and hear the good news proclaimed.

Jesus our example

Jesus, the Christ, came proclaiming the good news of the Kingdom of God and was in very person the embodiment of the good news of the Kingdom of God.

And what is this good news? All people can enter into a living and abundant life with God in his kingdom of love now, and that this reality will continue on, and indeed intensify, after death. How is this possible? It is not that God's kingdom of love did not exist before Jesus, or that it had been postponed somehow. But before the incarnation its availability had, in the nature of things, been restricted and mediated through a special people, the nation of Israel. In Jesus' person all that changed. In Jesus doors were thrown wide open: "Whoever will may come." The Kingdom of God's love has been made available to all. Whenever, wherever, whoever. In Jesus' person.

Jesus himself was absolutely clear about these matters. "I am the way, the truth and the life," he declared: "I am the bread of life." "I am the light of the world." "Before Abraham was I am." "I am the good shepherd." "I am the true vine." The good news is that in Jesus himself the way has been opened for you and for me to come freely into God's great kingdom of love.

How? By grace through faith we receive God's love for us and enrol as Jesus' disciples. That means we follow him in all things, learning from him, receiving his strength, and living as he would live if he were in our place. By grace through faith.

Jesus went about proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and its availability to all. He also demonstrated the reality of its presence. This dual action of proclaiming and demonstrating is found throughout the Gospels.

Matthew 4:23. "Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the Kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people."

He gave the same commission to the twelve.

Luke 9: 1-2. "When Jesus had called the Twelve together, he gave them power and authority to drive out all the demons and to cure diseases, and he sent them out to preach the Kingdom of God and to heal the sick."

Again proclamation and demonstration. He gave exactly the same mission to the larger group of seventy-two.

Luke 10:9. "Heal the sick who are there and tell them, "The Kingdom of God is near you."

In this dual action we catch a glimpse of how the Evangelical Tradition is integrated with the Charismatic Tradition. (Of course, in Jesus all the Traditions function as one.)

In Matthew's Gospel we read:

Matthew 11:12. "From the day of John the Baptist until now, the Kingdom of Heaven has been forcefully advancing, and forceful men lay hold of it."

Jesus had brought people such great news that they were all but knocking down the doors to get in! They had found the treasure in the field and were willing to sell everything they had to get it. They had seen the pearl of great price and nothing would stop them from having it.

Zacchaeus came rushing in. When the word of the Gospel penetrated his heart, it opened up a great river of generosity that compelled him to give away half of his goods to the poor and repay four times over anyone he had defrauded.

Mary Magdalene came rushing in. When Jesus freed her of seven demons, her life was forever changed. She gathered with the little band at the foot of the cross, watching and waiting and praying. Then, after the burial stone was put in place, entombing Jesus, she stayed there with 'the other Mary', sorrowing. But that sorrow turned to joy when, on the third day, Easter morning, Mary was the first witness to the resurrection, and the first to be addressed by the risen Christ, who called her by name "Mary!"

Nicodemus came rushing in. At first he came under cover of darkness, but even this act threatened his position and standing among the leaders. And later, when the religious authorities were about to seize Jesus, Nicodemus posed just the right question to stop them in their tracks.

John 7: 50-52. "Nicodemus, who had gone to Jesus earlier and who was one of their own number, asked, "Does our law condemn a man without first hearing him to find out what he is doing?" They replied, "Are you from Galilee, too?" Look into it, and you will find that a prophet does not come out of Galilee."

By now it is clear that Nicodemus is a supporter of the Christ. Then following the crucifixion Nicodemus provided the spices for Jesus' burial. Nicodemus had nothing to gain by his action but much to lose. But the touch of Jesus upon his life had been so transforming that he risked all in the simple act of courtesy.

There were so many others. The woman at the well in Samaria came rushing in.

But not everyone. The rich young ruler held back. He had great wealth, but more importantly his great wealth had him.

The leader of one of the synagogues held back. When Jesus went to the synagogue to teach, a woman who had been crippled for eighteen years was amongst the crowd.

Luke 13:12. "When Jesus saw her, he called her forward and said to her, "Woman you are set free from your infirmity."

In response to this miracle you would think everyone would be praising. But not the leader of the synagogue.

Luke 13:14. Indignant because Jesus had healed on the Sabbath, the synagogue ruler said to the people, "There are six days for work. So come and be healed on those days, not on the Sabbath."

The rigid religious observances of this leader kept him from entering into God's great Kingdom of love.

Judas held back. He had charge of the money for the apostolic band, and that money had eaten a hole in his heart. In addition, he was a Zealot, and he had hoped to force Jesus' hand to join the Zealot cause. If Jesus were to be confronted by a violent force, surely he would respond with supernatural violent force, or so Judas thought. So he betrayed his Master.

Jesus welcomed all to a great banquet of God's love, but some declined the offer. Their excuses for refusing the invitation of love were lame indeed - new land, new oxen, new bride. So Jesus turned from them and went out into the streets and lanes, the highways and byways, and welcomed in the outcasts.

Luke 14: 21-24. "Go out quickly into the streets and alleys of the town and bring in the poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame. 'Sir', the servant said, what you ordered has been done, but there is still room.' Then the master told his servant, 'Go out to the roads and country lane and make them come in, so that my house will be full.'"

This then is the evangelical message of Jesus. He calls all who follow him to share his invitation with others. "Go", he says, "and make disciples of all nations." Notice that he calls us not to make converts but to make disciples. And part of the task of making disciples is:

Matthew 28:20. "Teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you."

This is our call and our commission. And it is the great heritage of the Evangelical Tradition

Notable figures who serve as examples

Limiting my choice to just three figures who are influencing my life from the Evangelical tradition has been difficult. I have finally settled with Charles Haddon Spurgeon, C.S.Lewis and Billy Graham.

Charles Haddon Spurgeon 1834-1892

One of the most magnetic and successful preachers in nineteenth-century England, Spurgeon began preaching at the age of sixteen. By twenty he had been asked to pastor a Baptist church in London, and his preaching drew such large crowds the church had to build an extension. He preached at a public hall while the space was being added, but it soon proved too small. Finally, the church built a five-thousand-seat auditorium to accommodate the large crowds, and Spurgeon preached there until just before his death.

C.S. Lewis 1898 - 1963

A tutor and fellow at Magdalen College, Oxford, Lewis wrote some of the most popular and creative books of the twentieth century. But it is in 'Mere Christianity', which explains and defends the belief that has been common to nearly all Christians at all times, that Lewis shines. Beside Lewis's own writings (30 books translated into 30 languages and having sold million of copies) there are numerous biographies and two movies - an English and American version of Shadowlands - well worth watching.

Billy Graham 1918 - 2018

Born in 1918 his life spanned eleven decades. 35 million Americans heard Billy Graham preach in person. More than 3.2 million people responded to the invitation to receive Christ into their lives at his crusades. He preached in 53 countries and via satellite reached audiences in more than 185 countries and territories. Twice he preached to a crowd of more than 1 million in South Korea in 1973 and 1984. 2 million people heard him speak during his twelve-week crusade in London in 1956. Graham preached in huge physical spaces. Perhaps it is time for the next generation to learn how to use the even bigger platform of the digital realm to get the gospel message out to the masses.

Potential perils of the Evangelical Tradition

- 1) The first peril is the tendency to fixate upon peripheral and non-essential matters. This danger emerges when, out of a proper concern for truth and sound doctrine, people are unable to distinguish matters of primary importance from matters of secondary importance. The matters of primary importance are those related to the events of Christ's life - his birth, life, death and resurrection.
- 2) The second peril grows out of the first. A concern for the purity of the church - purity of doctrine, purity of conviction, purity of practice. The problems arise when the desire for purity turns legalistic, for then it becomes narrow, rigid and doctrinaire. Nor is it balanced by the equally important biblical concern for the unity of the church.
- 3) There is a tendency to present too limited a view of the salvation that is found in Jesus Christ. Christ has come to save the whole of a person's life not just to get him to heaven. One's salvation becomes individualistic neglecting social responsibility.
- 4) Evangelicals have a tendency towards bibliolatry - excessive devotion to or reliance on the Bible. This problem emerges out of an evangelical strength - namely, the desire to hold a high view of Scripture. But we are to worship God, not the Bible. Donald Bloesch writes, "The ultimate final authority is not Scripture but the living God himself as we find him in Jesus Christ."

The Bible is authoritative because it points beyond itself to the absolute authority, the living and transcendent Word of God.

Practicing the Evangelical Tradition

1) Let us get to know our Bible. We need to read it in substantial doses. Study topics and books, become familiar with bible teachers, read their books and let them open up the Scriptures to you.

2) Let us get to know those around us. Those we live near, those we work with and those we meet in the market place. Pay attention to them - learning their interests, needs, hopes, hurts, dreams, fears. Our lives will preach Christ and our words will confirm and make specific the message of our lives.

Lesson Seven

The Incarnational Tradition

The sacramental life (every moment lived with God)

Religion is not to be confined to the church, or closet, nor exercised only in prayer and meditation, but that everywhere we are in God's presence. So our every word and action have a moral content. All happenings in life good and bad prove useful and beneficial. All things are instructive and offer an opportunity of exercising some virtue and daily learning and growing towards the likeness of Christ.

Jesus our example

Incarnation is right at the heart of the Jesus story. The wonder and glory and majesty of Christmas is that at one point in history the great God of the universe stooped to take on human form. God came to us as a baby in swaddling clothes in a manger in an obscure village in a backwater of civilisation. Incarnation!

We are given very little information about the growing-up years of Jesus. Following the birth events we are told quite straightforwardly that:

Luke 2:40. "And the child grew and became strong; he was filled with wisdom, and the grace of God was upon him."

A parallel statement is given later, following Jesus' interaction with the leading teachers in the temple when he was twelve;

Luke 2:52 "And Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and men."

Most instructive of all is the simple comment of Luke after Joseph and Mary had found Jesus in the temple:

Luke 2"51. Then he went down to Nazareth with them and was obedient to them.

Jesus grew up under the tutelage of his parents, Joseph and Mary. And while Joseph is not heard from again, we can be confident that Jesus learned the carpentry trade from him and worked in that trade until he began his public rabbinic ministry at roughly the age of thirty.

We do well to ponder these years Jesus spent as a carpenter, working in what we call today a blue-collar job. Where do you imagine Jesus learned to walk in perfect harmony with his heavenly Father? Where do you suppose he learned to "give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you?" Where do you imagine he came to experience such a life of single-minded devotion to God that he knew that "no-one can serve two masters?" Where, I ask you, did he learn such a deep intimate life of prayer that he could confidently teach us, "Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be

opened?” Where do you think he learned to live out the word, “In everything, do to others what you would have them do to you?” Where did he learn all these things and so much more?

He learned them in his carpentry work and at home with his parents and his brothers and sisters. Jesus did not all of a sudden one day start spouting nice sayings about God. No, when he started his public ministry, he was speaking out of a life that had been tested and tried. He had proven the teaching to be true over and over again as he sawed wood and assembled chairs and built cabinets.

It is important that we understand the significance of this. Today we tend to confine Jesus and his work to stained glass, and high altars and silent retreats, or perhaps to intercessory prayer work and revival meetings. And clearly there was a specifically religious or liturgical dimension to Jesus’ incarnation living. He went to the synagogue “as was his custom.” As a faithful Jew he recited the Shema twice a day: “Hear O Israel; The Lord our God, the Lord is one.” In addition, he observed the three hours of prayer that were part and parcel of Jewish practice; morning, afternoon and evening.

But as good and essential as these things were (and are), we must recognise that the majority of Jesus’ life - and of ours - is found in our family and home, in our work and play, among our neighbours and in our everyday surroundings. This tangible world is the place we most fully express the meaning of incarnation living. This is where we experience the outflow of love, joy, peace and all of the fruit of the Spirit. It was true for Jesus; it is true for us. This is the Incarnational Tradition.

This way of sacramental (all things are sacred) living calls out to us. It calls us to make all our waking and sleeping, all our working and playing, all our living and loving flow out of the divine wellspring. It can; Jesus points the way.

Notable figures who serve as examples

I have chosen two figures from the seventeenth century a man and a woman, John Milton an English poet and parliamentarian and Susanna Wesley a mother and educator. And one from the 19/20th century the missionary James Hudson Taylor.

John Milton 1608 - 1674

Milton was one of England’s greatest poets, and his life and work followed the same rhythm. During the first period of his life he became a Puritan and wrote poetry in Latin, Italian and English. He was a political independent, serving the people of Cornwall. Milton’s last period from 1660, was his greatest, even though he was blind, he had suffered the death of two wives and two children, and he had lost his government position. During that final period he wrote the epic poems Paradise Lost, Paradise Regained and Samson Agonistis.

James Hudson Taylor 1832 - 1905

James Hudson Taylor’s grandparents were influenced by John Wesley, his father had a deep concern for the spiritual needs in China, and his mother prayed unceasingly. By the age of five Taylor had indicated an interest in being a missionary to China, and, though with frail health, he studied medicine, theology, Latin and Greek as a young man.

Upon arrival in China he adopted local customs and dress and worked tirelessly to enculturate the gospel into Chinese life. When he discovered that his sponsoring mission organisation was operating on borrowed money, he founded the interdenominational China Inland Mission (CIM). With half of the missionaries in China affiliated with the CIM by the turn of the century. Taylor's contribution to the church in China was immense.

Susanna Wesley 1669 - 1742

Susanna was one of 25 children born to Dr Samuel Annesley on 20th January 1669. She had 19 children in a span of 20 years. Nine of these children did not survive infancy, but the remaining seven girls and three boys received loving care as Susanna educated them in a home school environment. Susanna was completely immersed in the detail of daily life: finding God in the details and serving God through these same details. Susanna represents the millions of people who have learned to do ordinary things with a perception of their enormous value. Susanna was the mother of John and Charles Wesley the revivalists of the eighteenth century and founder of Methodism.

Understanding the potential perils

- 1) The first pitfall is idolatry. When we confess that God is made manifest to us in and through the created universe we can be tempted to take the next step of identifying God with the universe. This in turn will lead to the worship of it. We must never fail to distinguish between a sacred object and the spiritual reality it signifies. A point in case is I have been scolded for putting my Bible on the floor.
- 2) The second great peril is we seek to manage God through externals. To say, if you really want God you must come through the ritual system in our church this is an example of trying to manage God through externals. The writer of Hebrews in 6:1 calls them "acts that lead to death."

Practising the Incarnational Tradition

- 1) Invite God into every area of your life, do nothing without recognising his presence. In the home, in the workplace, in our study, play and socialising.
- 2) All work is a spiritual activity. If this world is God's world, any true work for the improvement of human life is a sacred undertaking.
- 3) Our marriage is one flesh with God and our family is intrinsically a religious institution and the family table is the centre of the home.
- 4) Our homes should be places of shared life. A school, a hospital, a workshop, a church, a club all rolled into one.

Lesson Eight

Critical turning points in church history

“I have a dream”

The streams of faith that have been described - Contemplative, Holiness, Charismatic, Social Justice, Evangelical, Incarnational are flowing together into a mighty movement of the Spirit. They constitute, as best I can understand it, the contours and shape of the church, Christ's bride.

Although we may identify with one particular stream we know something of all the streams flowing through our heart.

The bride of Christ spans the centuries and when Christ returns he comes for one bride formed by millions from many cultures and different periods in history.

I am reminded of the speech of Martin Luther King that he delivered on 28 August, 1963 in Washington, DC “I have a dream”. In his address he spoke of a day when: all men would be equal. Former slaves and former slave owners would be able to sit down together at the table of brotherhood. There would be freedom and justice for all. Where people would not be judged by the colour of their skin. And black and white children would join hands and play together.

Although the church has been divided and bitterly fought with itself over the years, God will make us one. We will be together, obedient, disciplined, freely gathered people who know the life and power at the kingdom of God.

A people of cross and crown, of courageous action and sacrificial love.

A people who are combining evangelism with social action the Lordship of Jesus and the suffering servant.

A people buoyed up by the vision of Christ's everlasting rule, not only imminent on the horizon, but already bursting forth in our midst.

A rural priest embracing a suburban pastor.

A Catholic monk standing alongside a Baptist evangelist.

A social activist from the urban centre of Hong Kong joining with Pentecostal preachers from the barrios of Sao Paulo weeping together over the spiritually lost and the plight of the poor.

Labourers from Soweto and landowners from Pretoria honouring and serving each other out of reverence for Christ.

Hutu and Tutsi, Serb and Croat, Republican and Unionist, African-American and Anglo-American, all sharing and caring and loving one another.

The sophisticated standing with the simple, the elite standing with the dispossessed, the wealthy with the poor.

A people from every race and nation and tongue and stratum of society, joining hearts and hands and minds and voices declaring.

“Hallelujah! For our Lord God Almighty reigns. Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory! For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready. Fine linen, bright and clean, was given her to wear.”

Church history in brief

In the brief overview of the last two millennia we will get a sense of the sweep of church history. I hope this will provide us with a grid through which we can evaluate the faith streams we have studied.

Today, after two thousand years, Christianity is the faith of one-third of the earth's population. From a handful of fishermen, tax collectors and farmers in an obscure province in Judea, the faith has spread over the globe to claim the loyalty of over two thousand million inhabitants of our planet.

The Age of Catholic Christianity (70-312)

The Catholic Christianity, which accepted the truth about Jesus, spread rapidly throughout the Mediterranean world. The early Orthodox Bishops guarded the apostolic writings confronting alien ideas. At the same time Christians faced persecuting power from Rome and dared to die heroically as martyrs. The seed of martyr's blood, as Tertullian called it, eventually bore abundant fruit in the conversion of the Empire.

The Age of the Christian Empire (312-590)

The Imperial Age began in 312 when Constantine caught a vision of Christ. Before the fourth century closed, Christianity became the official religion of the sprawling Roman state.

Under the emperor's tutelage the church learned to serve the seats of power by formulating the faith for the masses. Hence the age of great councils. Those Christians who feared that the purity and truth of Christianity was being compromised headed for the wilderness in search of another way to grace. Revered hermits soon found themselves in the vanguard of a movement, monasticism, the wave of the future.

The Christian Middle Ages (590-1517)

In the East the marriage between the Christian church and Roman state continued for a millennium. A mystical piety flourished under the protection of Orthodox Emperors until 1453 when invading Muslim Turks brought the Byzantine Empire to its final ruin. The fall of Constantinople, however, meant the rise of Moscow, the new capital of Eastern Orthodoxy. In the West it was a different story. After the fifth century, when barbarian Germans and Huns shattered the Empire's defences and swept into the eternal city of Rome itself. We call these centuries "medieval" or middle ages. People who live in them considered them "Christian". The reason lie in the role of the Pope, who stepped into the ruins of a fallen empire in the west and proceeded to build the medieval church

upon Rome's bygone glory. As the only surviving link with the Roman past, the Church of Rome mobilised Benedictine monks and deployed them as missionary ambassadors to the German people. It took centuries, but the popes, aided by Christian princes, slowly pacified and baptised a continent and called it Christendom, Christian Europe.

Baptised masses, however, meant baptised pagans. By the tenth century spiritual renewal was an obvious necessity. It started in a monastery in central France called Cluny and spread until it reached the papacy itself. The greatest of the reforming popes was Gregory VII. No longer the cement of the Roman Empire, the church of the twelfth century was itself a kind of empire, a spiritual and earthly kingdom stretching from Ireland to Palestine. The crusades and scholastic philosophy were witnesses to this papal sovereignty. Power, however, corrupts. The church gained the world but lost its soul. Amid the strife for earthly power the evidence of barren religion in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, many Christians turned to the Bible for fresh vision and renewal.

The Age of the Reformation (1517-1648)

Reform came with a fury. Martin Luther sounded the trumpet, but hosts of others rallied to the cause. The period we called the Reformation marks the mobilisation of Protestantism: Lutheran, Reformed, Anglican and Anabaptists. By the mid-sixteenth century the Reformation had shattered the traditional unity of Western Europe and had bequeathed to modern times religious pluralism. The Church of Rome resisted this attack upon tradition sending fresh waves of missionaries to Asia, Africa and Latin America. She waged war in France, the Netherlands and Germany. But in the end, Christendom slipped into yesteryear. In its place arose the denominational concept of the church, which allowed modern nations to treat the churches as voluntary societies separated from the state.

The Age of Reason and Revival (1648-1789)

Novel schools of thought filled the seventeenth century. None was more powerful than reason itself. It asked, "who needs God?" "Man can make it on his own." Christians screamed their objections, but the idea spread until secularism filled the public life of western societies. God remained, but only as a matter of personal choice. Christians could no longer appeal to the arm of power to suppress such heresies. So many of them turned instead to the way of the apostles - prayer and preaching. The result was a series of evangelical revivals: chiefly Pietism, Methodism and the Great Awakening. By preaching and personal conversions, evangelicals tried to restore God to public life.

The Age of Progress (1789-1914)

The Age of Progress saw Christians of all sorts wage a valiant struggle against the advance of secularism. Out of the evangelical awakenings came new efforts to carry the Gospel of Christ to distant lands, and to begin a host of social service ministries in industrialised Europe and North America. In spite of Christians' best efforts, however, Christianity was slowly driven from public life in the Western World. Believers were left with the problem we recognise in our own time: How can Christians exert moral influence in pluralistic and totalitarian societies where Christian assumptions about reality no longer prevail.

The Age of Ideologies (1914-present time)

The depth of the problem was apparent in the Age of Ideologies, when new gods arose to claim the loyalties of secular people. Nazism exalted the state; Communism worshipped the party; and Democracy revered the individual's rights. Supposed enlightened, modern nations waged two global wars in an attempt to establish the supremacy of these new deities. When no single ideology prevailed, a cold war of co-existence settled upon the once Christian nations. Through these troubled times the denominations struggled over orthodox and liberal theologies, sought fresh ways to recover a lost unity, and reflected a new hunger for apostolic experiences.

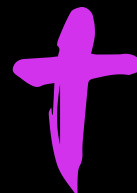
After World War II, vigorous new Christian leadership emerged in the Developing World, offering fresh hope for a new day for the old faith. Had missionaries from the Neopagan nations of Europe and North America succeeded in giving Christianity a stake in the future by carrying the gospel to Africa and Latin America? Only time will tell.

But Christians can hope because faith always reaches beyond earthly circumstances. Its confidence is in a person. And no other person in recorded history has influenced more people in as many conditions over so long a time as Jesus Christ. The shades and tones of his image seem to shift with the needs of people: the Jewish Messiah of the believing remnant, the wisdom of the Greek Apologist, the Cosmic King of the Imperial Church, the Heavenly Logos of the orthodox councils, the World Ruler of the papal courts, the monastic model of apostolic poverty, the personal Saviour of evangelical revivalists.

Truly, he is a man for all time. In a day when many regard him as irrelevant, a relic of a quickly discarded past, church history provides a quiet testimony that Jesus Christ will not disappear from the scene. His title may change, but his truth endures for all generations.

19 Wellington Square, Hastings, East Sussex, TN34 1PB
info@arise ministry.org.uk | www.arise ministry.org.uk

Founder P.J. Edwards T/A Arise Ministry UTR 5162287642
Copyright 2022 @ Arise Ministry. All Rights Reserved



Arise Ministry