

Tradition, Scripture, and the Church

by David Bolton

I. Tradition and Scripture

With anticipation, and not a little trepidation, I am wading into a subject that I believe cannot be over-emphasized as to its significance regarding the Church, past, present and future. I would venture to say that the two most influential forces ever at work in her long history, and those largely responsible for who she is today, are Scripture and Tradition.

If only the marriage of these two were a match fully made in heaven, what an incomparable force they would be for God in the earth! The reality is, however, that they are a heaven-and-earth mixture, an unholy union of divine and human ways, a complex matrix of good, bad and ugly. If ever a love/hate relationship existed, it is here between these two obstinate “soul mates”. Theirs is a marriage marked by the sweetest of affections and the most ardent of conflict. Theirs is a relationship of immense loyalty and honor and also of constant warring for dominance and final authority. As friends they are close; as enemies they are closer. This is the complex and confusing nature of the marriage of Tradition and Scripture as they have danced their way through the pages of Church history.

In the wisdom and purpose of God, the preeminent of these two is Scripture. This is the one ordained to lead in the “dance”, while Tradition is to follow. Scripture has an authority backed by Heaven itself. Tradition has an authority only when backed by Scripture. Its influence, however, is self-promoting and self-propagating and often takes on a life of its own. When it does, it challenges Scripture’s authority and has the power to supplant it in the lives of those who come under its influence. As such, it has become one of Scripture’s most seductive and seditious rivals.

The Church is the marriage bed and the battleground of these two powerful entities... and will be to the end.

In this series, I will seek to peel back the layers of the interplay between these two eminent forces with a primary focus on the nature, place and power of Tradition in the Church. Unless we clearly discern its proper and powerful role, and also, in contrast, its often deceptive and dominating influence, we will never be free to become what God desires us to be as His people. An honest and informed look at the Church today clearly shows that we have all but failed in our discernment and judgment on both sides of this matter.

“Tradition”

Before we go further, we will need to get a basic definition of the word “tradition”. We will then look at three basic types of “traditions” as they stand in relation to Scripture.

The Greek Word translated “tradition” in the New Testament is “*paradosis*” which generally means, “*giving up, giving over*”, and more specifically when translated as “*tradition*”, “*a giving over which is done by word of mouth or in writing, i.e. tradition by instruction, narrative, precept, etc..*” (*Strong’s Greek Dictionary*)

English dictionary definitions for the word, “tradition” include: “*an inherited, established, or customary pattern of thought, action, or behavior (as a religious practice or a social custom)*” (Merriam-Webster online edition) and, “*the handing down of patterns of behavior, practices, and beliefs that are valued by a culture.*” (Bing Dictionary)

“Tradition”, therefore, is that which is passed on or handed down especially from one generation to the next by written or oral instruction, individual or collective example and/or spiritual or cultural influence. These “traditions” can encompass teachings, beliefs, values, experiences, behaviors, customs and practices.

As we consider this matter of “tradition”, it is important to understand that in and of itself, it is a spiritually and morally neutral force. It is neither inherently good nor bad, right nor wrong, positive nor negative. It is only the content and means of its transmission that determine a specific tradition’s spiritual and moral character. It is important, therefore, as we look into this subject to maintain a balanced view of its full range of expression and effect. The Church falls into error when it is either too heavily weighted on the positive side of tradition, or, conversely, on the negative side. Truth apprehends both aspects in balance.

We will now consider three basic categories of “traditions” as they stand in relation to Scripture.

“Biblical Traditions”

Scripture itself speaks *positively* in regards to “tradition” in innumerable places either directly or by inference.

In the New Testament, for instance, Paul speaks directly of the importance of “tradition” in regards to the Church in a number of his epistles.

He said to the Corinthian believers, “*Now I praise you because you remember me in everything and hold firmly to the traditions, just as I delivered them to you.*” (1 Cor. 11:1-2)

And similarly to the Thessalonian church, “*So then, brethren, stand firm and hold to the traditions which you were taught, whether by word of mouth or by letter from us.*” (2 Thess. 2:15)

And, “*Now we command you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you keep away from any brother who is walking in idleness and not in accord with the tradition that you received from us.*” (2 Thess. 3:6)

Furthermore, there are also innumerable instances in Scripture where the faithful are exhorted to hand on and hand down the truths, experiences and practices of the faith. Scripture, therefore, fully endorses the handing down of those traditions that are wholly in accord with its true teachings, practices and examples. This is the proper and right

place for “tradition” in relation to Scripture and the Church. In fact, this is *the primary way* that the faith is transferred from one to another, and from one generation to another. The Church is exhorted to employ all manner of godly living, example, speaking, writing, singing, serving, sacrament, custom, culture, creative arts and the like to propagate and pass on the faith. All of these are to be in accord with the whole counsel of Scripture, rightly divided, and carried out in and through the immediate working of the Holy Spirit.

This handing on of the faith includes not only the *external* matters of Scriptural doctrine and practice, but also, and more importantly, the *internal, spiritual* matters of Scripture such as intimacy with God, the spiritual formation of Christ within His people, and the manifold working of the Holy Spirit. True Biblical tradition is a *spiritual* matter first and foremost, and not merely a “soulish” or cultural one. In fact, apart from the working of the Spirit, even though a tradition may have the outward form of being “Biblical”, it is in reality “UN-Biblical, for the Bible condemns all that is carried out in the power of the flesh.

“Biblical traditions”, therefore, are not to be judged by mere outward appearances, but also by their inward, spiritual character being, “*of*”, “*through*” and “*to*” God. (*Rom. 11:36*)

This passing on of “Biblical tradition”, then, is essential to the calling and mission of the Church as it is carried out in and by the Holy Spirit.

“Non-Biblical Traditions”

The second category of “traditions” are what may be called “non-Biblical traditions”. The prefix “*non-*” means “*not*” and is used primarily to imply, “...*the absence of something (rather than the opposite or reverse of it, as often expressed by un-*.” (*Dictionary.com*)

Non-Biblical traditions are those that stand outside of the scope of Scripture and are neither in violation of, nor an affirmation of the teachings and examples of the Bible. Whereas “Biblical traditions” are *positive* in regards to both the content and intent of Scripture, “Non-Biblical traditions” are *neutral* in regards to both the letter and the spirit of the Word.

Some examples of this type of tradition found in our society might be, for instance, driving on the right-hand (or left-hand) side of the road, giving a standing ovation for a rousing performance, wearing green on St. Patrick’s Day, etc... The Bible neither commends nor condemns these practices and followers of Christ are free to practice them or not according to their own interests and desires as long as they do not cause harm, undue offense or another to stumble in their faith (i.e. in the spirit of Romans 14.)

The Scriptures are comprehensive as to the fundamental principles and issues of life, however. So when we come to those traditions which are not clearly addressed by the words and witness of Scripture, we need to proceed with caution, especially when they

are embraced and practiced within the Church. There may be underlying motives, principles or effects that come into play, as well as factors that are dependent on culture or the individuals affected by them, that put them in another category. (For instance, driving on the right-hand side of the road in the USA is not a problem, but in the UK ???! :-() If “Biblical traditions” represent a “green light”, this category represents a “yellow light.”

We now come to the third major category of “traditions”, the “red light” category...

“Un-Biblical Traditions”

The prefix “un-” also means “not”, but in the stronger sense of “*giving negative or opposite force...*” (*Dictionary.com*) Because of this, the prefix “anti-” (meaning “*against*”, “*opposite of*”...) may also be used to describe this type of tradition. “Un-Biblical / anti-Biblical traditions”, therefore, are those which *negate, oppose* or in some way *stand against* the teaching and testimony of Scripture.

This category contains many blatant teachings and practices which are clearly denounced by the Word of God and are generally recognized as “un-Biblical” by the Church. More importantly, it also contains many subtle and deceptive beliefs and practices which may appear to be “non-Biblical” or even “Biblical” in nature... but in reality are not. Traditions that comprise this more deceptive group regularly go unrecognized and undiscerned for what they truly are. As such, they are much more readily accepted and incorporated into the fabric of Christian faith, practice and culture than the more obvious ones. Furthermore, because God often works where these are present *inspite of them*, rather than *because of them*, they can appear to have God’s endorsement and blessing upon them. With apparent “Divine backing”, these can be the most deceptive and dangerous traditions in the Church of all, and the most difficult to expose and uproot.

These are the type of traditions that Jesus was constantly coming up against and confronting in the religious system of His day. In fact, it seems that He wasted no opportunity to break these traditions right under the noses of those who revered them the most, the Pharisees and teachers of the Law. Whether it was picking grain..., healing..., or telling a man to pick up his bed and walk...*on the Sabbath*, touching, and allowing Himself to be touched by those who were “*unclean*” (the dead, a bleeding woman, lepers), allowing a prostitute to touch Him, as well as anoint and kiss His feet, conversing with and teaching a *Samaritan woman*, eating with “*publicans and sinners*”, or eating with “*unwashed hands*”, Jesus seemed to constantly be waging war on the man-made, “un-Biblical”, “*traditions of the elders.*”

In His incisive discourse with the Pharisees concerning His disciples not eating with ceremonially clean hands, He reveals the true nature of these human, “anti-Biblical” traditions.

“The Pharisees and some of the teachers of the law who had come from Jerusalem gathered around Jesus and saw some of his disciples eating food with hands that were “unclean,” that is, unwashed. (The Pharisees and all the Jews do not eat unless they

give their hands a ceremonial washing, holding to the tradition of the elders. When they come from the marketplace they do not eat unless they wash. And they observe many other traditions, such as the washing of cups, pitchers and kettles.)

So the Pharisees and teachers of the law asked Jesus, “Why don’t your disciples live according to the tradition of the elders instead of eating their food with ‘unclean’ hands?” He replied, “Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you hypocrites; as it is written:

‘These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. They worship me in vain; their teachings are but rules taught by men.’ You have let go of the commands of God and are holding on to the traditions of men.”

And he said to them: “You have a fine way of setting aside the commands of God in order to observe your own traditions! For Moses said, ‘Honor your father and your mother,’ and, ‘Anyone who curses his father or mother must be put to death.’ But you say that if a man says to his father or mother: ‘Whatever help you might otherwise have received from me is Corban’ (that is, a gift devoted to God), then you no longer let him do anything for his father or mother. Thus you nullify the word of God by your tradition that you have handed down. And you do many things like that.” (Mark 7:1-13 NIV – emphasis added)

The Greek word rendered “nullify” in the last verse is “*akuroō*” and means, “to render void, deprive of force or authority, to invalidate.” It is therefore translated by some versions, “of no effect” (KJV), “making void” (ESV), “setting aside” (YLT) and “invalidating” (NAS).

Here we see the powerfully seductive and seditious nature of “un-Biblical” traditions. They have the ability to creep into the hearts and minds of even those most committed to the Scriptures, and, through their blinding presence and binding power, simply “render void” the commandments of God. When we consider just what it is that they are able to “nullify”, the very words and commandments of God, we know we are in the presence of a truly uncanny enemy. Anything that can make null and void that which God says “...shall not return to me void” (Isa. 55:11) is a force to be reckoned with.

Not only was and is this a problem in Judaism, the same propensity to create and pass on man-made “un-Biblical” traditions is likewise rampant in Christianity, and it has had two-thousand years to become fully entrenched. The problem has not gone away, in fact, it has intensified and spread from one nation...to every nation.

Discerning Traditions

By taking even a brief look at these three categories of traditions, we can see how simultaneously *complimentary*, *indifferent* and *conflicted* this indissoluble union is between Tradition and Scripture. With the vast and complex range of dynamics at work

between them, it is clear that razor-sharp discernment and plumb line judgment are absolutely necessary for us to walk in the full wisdom and will of God concerning them.

We, likewise, cannot turn a blind eye to the complex matrix they have woven and pretend it either doesn't exist, doesn't matter or is beyond our ability to respond to in a spiritually and Biblically incisive way. Both the powers of Heaven and the powers of Hell know what is bound up with this matter. This is arguably *the crucial battle line* in the war over the Church, and the Enemy would love have us lay down our arms and become spiritual pacifists in this regard. That's not what Jesus did, and neither should we.

As we engage in this war, as in any war, two essential areas of knowledge are essential: First, we must know who our *allies* are. Second, we must know our *enemy*. In this spiritual war, "Tradition" is *BOTH!*

II. The Psychological Power of Tradition

In this and the next section, I will seek to answer one basic question: "*Why is tradition such a powerful force in influencing the human soul and shaping human culture?*" We will look at the individual, "psychological" power of tradition first, and the collective, "sociological" power of tradition next. Both of these aspects work together to make Tradition one of the most powerful forces on earth shaping all of human history.

When it comes to the Church, Tradition and Scripture stand as the two eminent forces influencing her historic development. As has been shared, tradition's relationship to Scripture is a complex one, though, and runs the full gamut of being "*Biblical*" (according to Scripture), "*non-Biblical*" (indifferent to Scripture) and "*un-Biblical*" (contrary to Scripture.) As we look into its unique power to influence the soul and shape culture, especially in regards to the Church, we need to keep this balanced perspective in view. We should also understand that what makes Tradition so compelling is essential to its nature, and is not contingent on the form it takes. What will be shared in these two sections, then, applies to the full range of Tradition's expression and effect.

Before we dive in, though, I have a simple disclaimer to make: I am writing on these matters as a simple Christ-follower and not a trained psychologist or sociologist. I have had only a basic education in these subjects, and so I am wading in "feet first" rather than diving in "head first". What I share comes from my own experience, observations and musings. I've done a bit of research on what the "experts" in these fields do have to say about the psychological and sociological power of "Tradition", and have found very little as of yet. So I am merely sharing my thoughts and conclusions as I have meditated on and prayed over this subject for a good many years.

Tradition and the Human Soul (Psyche)

The question we want to zero in on in this post is "*WHY is tradition so powerful in influencing the human soul?*" There must be something in the nature of Tradition that the human psyche gravitates towards, esteems and faithfully adheres to so as to come

under and be shaped by its powerful influence. That “something” is what we want to seek out. As I have mused on this subject, the following are some of my thoughts and conclusions. I offer them for your consideration.

- **The Power of the Familiar** - What I do know of how the brain works is that as we learn and as we experience life, (electrochemical) connections are made within our brains that form “neural pathways” which tend to track us. Like pathways through the woods, the more these are used, the more developed they become. Consequently, the familiar becomes more attractive and navigable to us than the unfamiliar. A number of conscious and emotional factors also contribute to our tendency towards the familiar. For instance, the familiar lessens our fear of the unknown, presents the simplest, “go to” choice, gives us a sense of confidence in managing it, is often accompanied by positive memories and has more predictable outcomes than that which is unfamiliar. Tradition is the handing down of “the familiar” and as it is embraced and practiced, “the power of the familiar” grows. When we are daily faced with choices between following that which is traditional or that which is unconventional, we tend to gravitate towards the familiarity of the traditional. Tradition draws much of its strength from the “power of the familiar.”
- **The Power of Meaningful Structure** - Closely related to this is our need as humans to have a certain degree of structure in our lives. We need basic frameworks to fill our days, weeks, months and years to help bring order, stability and balance. This gives us a degree of security and peace in an otherwise chaotic, changing and uncertain world. Very often this is where tradition comes in to fill the void. Because traditions are usually the embodiment of some time-tested value, belief, or ideal, when they become established in our lives to meet this need for structure, they also bring with them meaning and purpose. As those who have been made in God’s image, these are some of the most powerful needs and desires in the human heart. We were created to live with meaning and purpose, and without them the human heart begins to wither and die. When tradition, therefore, provides us with meaningful structure in our daily lives, we embrace it as one of our most desired and cherished “possessions”.
- **The Power of Generational Honor** - Added to this is the love, esteem and honor that we have for those from whom we’ve received the traditions that we embrace and practice. “Tradition” by definition is that which is “handed on” or “handed down”, especially from one generation to another. Because many of our traditions come to us from our parents, grandparents, posterity in general, and/or culture we belong to, whatever honor and esteem we have for those from whom we’ve received them, we tend to ascribe to the tradition itself. This is similar to the way in which we ascribe special honor and value to material possessions that are handed down to us. Take for instance, Great-Grandma’s china set, Grandpa’s old hand saw, a piece of military gear from WWII, a tattered book inscribed in the 1700’s, etc... These things take on special meaning simply because of the esteem we have of our heritage and our history. Traditions, likewise, build in force the older they are and the more closely they come to us from those we love and esteem. This exponentially adds to the “psychological power of tradition” as it is built into our lives.

- The Power of Childhood Formation - Following closely on the heels of this is the fact that many of the traditions incorporated into our lives have been handed down to us during our most formative years of childhood. Children have an amazing capacity for wonder and learning. A bug crawling across the floor can utterly fascinate them. They stare at and study faces in the supermarket. They laugh and giggle at the simplest things. They are constantly absorbing their world with eyes and ears wide open and the impressions that are left are magical and lasting. These are the formative years and the morals, values, habits, experiences, routines, practices, teachings, and the like that regularly fill their lives become ingrained in them and form the basis of who they are and are becoming. Many traditions become deeply woven into the fabric of our being from the very first breath that we breathe. These handed-down beliefs and practices become hardwired into our psyche and serve to form and shape our very perceptions and paradigms of life. Traditions of this nature take on a power to influence the soul that is hard to over-estimate.

- The Power of Cumulative Associations - Because traditions do not affect our lives in isolation, all that is related to our practice of them tend to become associated with them in our soul. If they are regularly practiced with other people, our love and esteem for those people tend to become incorporated into our love and esteem for the tradition itself. If they are regularly practiced in a specific place, the significance and specialness of that place becomes associated with the significance and specialness of the tradition within our soul. If there are pleasant and meaningful experiences connected with the practice of a specific tradition, those memories become incorporated into our overall affection of and attraction to the tradition. Sometimes it is the sensory experiences of sights, smells, sounds, and tastes that fill and surround a particular tradition that become the strongest emotional and sentimental connections we have with it.

Furthermore, this aspect of “accumulated associations” takes on “Divine dimensions” when the context is religious and/or spiritual in nature. Traditions that are practiced in such contexts accumulate to themselves all the significance and sanctimoniousness of the Deity they are directed towards. Whatever religious atmosphere surrounds them or spiritual encounter accompanies them, even if it is not a direct result of the particular tradition, becomes associated with it in our soul. As a result, the tradition can take on the significance, power and authority of Divine endorsement and engagement. It is not hard to see why these types of traditions become the most devoutly held to and staunchly defended if they are ever challenged.

The more a tradition is practiced, the more these types of accumulated associations continue to multiply and thereby magnify our overall perception and estimation of the tradition. Sometimes the accumulation of secondary associations, in the end, even becomes the primary reason for the carrying on of the tradition. Like a snowball rolling down hill, they gain more and more momentum as they accumulate more and more “mass” and “weight.” This is the power of “cumulative associations” which is just one more reason why tradition is such a powerful force in influencing the human soul.

- The Power of Collective Endorsement - Most of us seem to subconsciously believe that humanity in general, over time, is a reliable “vetting mechanism” for determining that which is good, right, meaningful and true. When something has passed down to us

having survived this “sieve”, we tend to accept its validity and value without even questioning it. We reckon that its weaknesses, faults and/or errors have already been found out and exposed long before it got to us, and so we tend to blindly trust the collective opinion. In this way traditions are handed on to us with a tacit, collective endorsement that holds a surprising amount of weight.

What we fail to realize, however, is that all of those individuals who make up that larger collective are likewise giving the rest of the collective the benefit of the doubt. This, combining with the other factors already mentioned, give traditions the ability to take on a life of their own. Drawing from the snowball analogy again, once it picks up mass and speed rolling downhill, it becomes all but impossible for an individual or a select group of people to stop it. The power of collective endorsement is a major factor in the soul-influencing power of tradition.

- The Power of Personal Identity - Since traditions often embody and represent the core values, meanings, morals and ideals that mean the most to us, they often find a place in our lives close to the core of who we are. As such we identify intimately with them, and, in turn, can readily take our identity *from* them. This is especially true if the traditions we most closely associate with come to us from that which we already derive our personal identity: family, nationality, ethnicity, culture, religion, etc.. When tradition reaches the point where it begins to define our self-concept and personal identity, it has reached one of its most powerful places of influence in and over our souls. At this point it is extremely difficult to extricate from our lives for it has become engrafted into our very identity as a person.

- The Power of Conformative Development - Finally, and in summary, tradition has an inexplicable power to influence the human soul because of a process that may be called: “conformative development”. This, I believe, is the most unrecognized factor, and yet is the most powerful, for it draws on the influence of all the others.

To illustrate this process, I’d like to consider the poem, “[The Calf Path](#)” that I posted as a prelude to this series. What this poem describes, in essence, is the process of “conformative development.” It traces the progression of the meandering trail of a lone calf, which progressively becomes a path, then a lane, a road, a village street and, finally, a city thoroughfare. During this process, a village and then a city develops along its winding way, and eventually becomes a booming metropolis. The “footprint” of the original wandering calf, however, never changes and ends up determining not only the course of the final highway, but also the configuration of all that develops and grows up around it. This is what the process of “conformative development” is all about.

What is significant about this process is that though the original cause determines the shape and contour of what develops around it, once the conforming complex around it is established, it “locks in” the original cause from ever changing, at least not easily. If later, change is desired, not only does the “highway” need to be changed, but also the “metropolis” that developed around it.

This gives us a rough picture of what takes place internally within our souls as “neural pathways” are formed and as innumerable “synaptic connections” develop in association with them. Over time these “pathways” become “roadways” and then “highways” and what develops around them becomes a vast neurological “metroplex” within our soul. This “metroplex” in turn tends to “lock in” the “highways” so that changing them later on becomes almost impossible.

This explains many difficulties we have with changing long-standing behaviors or giving up undesirable, old thought patterns. It is why it is said, “Old habits died hard.” and “You can’t teach an old dog new tricks.” It is why winning an argument often doesn’t change the other person’s thinking in the long run, or why people go just so far in a disagreement before they snap emotionally. The changing of the “highway” requires too much of the “city” to be deconstructed and so the very threat of it evokes a strong rational or emotional defense.

Traditions are the bulldozers and pavers of these psychological roadways. All of the aforementioned aspects of their influence synergize together to build the super-highways of our soul. Around, and in conformity to them, grows and develops an intricate neurological matrix of thoughts, feelings, perceptions, beliefs, values, morals, perspectives, experiences, emotions, sensations, expectations, fears, memories, hopes, dreams, likes, dislikes, preconceptions, prejudices, assumptions, associations, intentions, convictions, and the like. Once established, this conformative matrix gridlocks the highways, as well as the traditions that created them, in place.

In the follower of Christ, “Biblical traditions” have carved and paved some of these “highways” according to the roadmap of Scripture. The “City of God” has accordingly been built up around them within their inner man. Many “un-Biblical traditions”, however, have also forged “highways” within their soul, and “stronghold cities” have built up around and according to their twisted ways. As the Lord advances and takes command of more and more of the “land”, the Word of God continues to challenge the “highways” and conforming “metroplexes” of un-Biblical traditions within the soul. Some of these fall before its divine power, but others just won’t budge. This is the ongoing battle within the soul of the believer.

This process of “conformative development” is possibly the most firmly-rooted factor why Tradition is so powerful in influencing the human soul, and why, as Jesus said, it has the potential to “*make the Word of God of none effect.*” (*Mark 7:13*)

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When we consider, therefore, how these eight factors all synergize together to give Tradition its soul-influencing force, we can begin to grasp why it is such a powerful force to be reckoned with, both for God and against Him.

And this, believe it or not, is merely half of the story. In the next section, we will consider the rest of the story: “the sociological power of Tradition.” This is where Tradition goes on steroids! :-)

III. The Sociological Power of Tradition

We will now seek to answer the second aspect of the question we posed in the last section: “*Why is Tradition such a powerful force in influencing the human soul and shaping human society?*” In addition to the individual, “psychological” side, we must also consider the collective, “sociological” side. These two aspects are inextricably bound together and give Tradition its incomparable power to shape the whole of human experience. We cannot get the full picture of its mighty influence until we consider both aspects.

The Synergistic Nature of the Collective

I ended the previous section by saying that when it comes to the “sociological” aspect, “Tradition goes on steroids.” There is a synergistic nature to the “collective” which causes its most basic factors and effects to multiply exponentially from those which exist merely within the individual. This is explained, on the one hand, in that the “collective” is the pooling together of all the “*psychological*” dynamics of the individuals involved. This is additive in nature, and alone accounts for a significant degree of this phenomenon. On the other hand, the “collective” is also the compounding together of all of the “*sociological*” dynamics that develop within a group. This is multiplicative in nature as inter-relational dynamics form, compound and interweave in all directions and on all levels. When all of the personal dynamics are mixed with all of the interpersonal dynamics, the synergistic power of the collective multiplies exponentially.

Tradition and the “Collective Soul”

Each aspect of Tradition’s influence which powerfully works within the individual soul also has its collective counterpart. These help to shape what I will call the “collective soul.” In calling it this, I’m not trying to be “New Age-y mystical” or something, but merely referring to the combined psychological and sociological factors of those involved which together form a common way of thinking, feeling, and acting that permeates the collective body. Just as the individual soul is comprised of *mind*, *will*, and *emotions*, so the “collective soul” could be said to have its “*collective mind*” (common views, beliefs, perspectives, understandings, etc.), “*collective will*”(united desires, goals, purposes, pursuits, etc.), and “*collective emotions*” (shared loves, joys, sorrows, etc.). These combine together to create a unique corporate “persona” that has its own distinctive soulish features and is similar to the individual soul in the way it forms, develops, and expresses itself. All of the factors which

influence the individual soul in regards to Tradition, likewise permeate and influence the “collective soul”.

Let us consider briefly, then, the psychological factors mentioned in the prior section, as they, likewise, come to bear *sociologically* upon the “collective soul”:

- The Power of the Collective Familiar – Even as on a personal level, “the familiar” forms neural pathways within the individual soul, so on an interpersonal level, “the familiar” forms “social pathways” within the “collective soul”. These tend to forge and shape a group’s shared beliefs and common practices. The collective familiar is an attractive, influential force in that it works to maximize social harmony, cooperation, and success, while minimizing social strife, dissension, and failure.

As was shared concerning the psychological dynamic of this factor, *“the familiar lessens our fear of the unknown, presents the simplest “go to” choice, gives us a sense of confidence in managing it, is often accompanied by positive memories,, and has more predictable outcomes than that which is unfamiliar.”* These same effects, likewise, work within the “collective soul”, only in a compounded, exponential way!

To give a simple example of this, consider the changing social dynamics that would exist among a group of people as they repeatedly seek to navigate their way through a corn maze together. The first time through the maze, everything is unfamiliar and the group dynamic is marked by uncertainty, hesitancy, and perplexity, along with a certain level of disagreement, dissension, and strife. With each successive trip through, however, there is a notable difference in their social dynamic. The group becomes marked by increased levels of confidence, competence, decisiveness, unity, and joy. By the third or fourth time through, they move together as a perfect unit and with efficiency and ease. The difference between these experiences is simply the increased levels of the “collective familiar.”

A corn maze is a static entity, but life is not. Life has enough unexpected and unfamiliar twists, turns and crossroads in it to more than satisfy our need for adventure. When navigating it together with others, familiarity is a welcome commodity.

This accounts for much of the impetus behind groups adopting, developing, and jealously guarding certain traditions as foundational to their collective make up. Traditions provide a familiar roadmap which settle an untold multitude of options that would otherwise call for unified decision-making, and possibly gender strife. We are much more successful, and happy when navigating a “maze” together we are

familiar with, than one which is unfamiliar. Tradition helps to supply this socially desirable dynamic and force.

- The Power of Collective Meaningful Structure – In addition to this, no group is able to flourish and function without the two essential elements of meaning and structure. Meaning brings purpose to a group, and structure provides a basic framework for cooperative function. (You would be hard-pressed to find a meaningless group that is flourishing, and a structureless group that is functioning.) Tradition is a principle that provides both elements in one, and therefore becomes foundational, in some form, in most groups. This helps to bring stability, balance, order, functionality, and purpose to the group.

When thinking of “Tradition”, I often think of the opening song from the movie, *Fiddler on the Roof*. In the narrative that accompanies the song, the main character, Tevye, shares the importance of “tradition” and the stability that it brings. Excerpted from his narrative, he asks, “*And how do we keep our balance? That I can tell you in one word! Tradition!*”; “*...Because of our traditions, we have kept our balance for many, many years.*”; “*...You may ask, ‘How did this tradition get started?’ I tell you. I don’t know. But it is a tradition and because of our traditions every one of us knows who he is and what God expects him to do.*”; “*...Without our traditions, our lives would be as...as....as shaky as a fiddler on the roof.*” (You can [click here](#) for a YouTube video of the complete song from the movie.)

This narrative speaks to the stability that meaningful structure brings to any social group through the incorporation of... (sing with me...) “TRADITION!” :-)

- The Power of Collective Generational Honor – Most traditions adopted by a group do not originate within the group but are inherited from another source. Generally, they are taken from an esteemed and established social entity which the group feels a special connection with. Whatever honor and esteem they have for the source of their traditions, they invariably transfer to the traditions themselves. This makes them even more valued and cherished than they would be simply on their own merits, and adds to the sociological power of the traditions within the group.

This tendency is also fed by the common desire to belong to something larger than oneself. This is not only true for individuals, but also for groups. By incorporating and honoring the traditions of a greater, more established group than ourselves we strengthen our sense of belonging to it and thereby to something larger than ourselves. Shared traditions often become the connecting bonds of these associations.

- The Power of Collective “Childhood” Formation – Every group has an early formative stage in its development when its fundamental “DNA” is established. As was just shared, this “DNA” is often inherited from other sources and includes some form of “passed on” beliefs and practices. These become engrafted into the fabric of the group early on and shape its vision, purpose, values, beliefs, and practices. Once these are established, they become extremely difficult to eradicate for they define the very nature and character of the group. The “collective soul” develops similarly in this regard to the individual soul in its “childhood formation”.

- The Power of Collective Cumulative Associations – The collective practice of traditions becomes a powerful force not only for their immediate, primary benefits to the group, but also for their secondary benefits of providing accumulated, shared experiences and memories. This becomes exponentially greater on the social level than it does on the mere personal level.

Consider, for instance, the difference between going to a restaurant alone and going with a group of friends. In both cases you would enjoy the same atmosphere of the restaurant, and the same great food, but in the second case you would share the experience with others. Also, added to the experience would be all of the social interactions that would take place during and after the outing. How much greater this increases the enjoyment and meaningfulness of the event! All of the sights, sounds, tastes, smells, and feelings of the evening are shared and savored by the group together. This is why dining out is primarily a social event. The same is true for, say, going to an amusement park, attending a sporting event, or even going for a hike.

When given the choice, we rarely choose to do these activities alone!

The same dynamic is, likewise, at work in the practicing of traditions together. It is often the shared secondary experiences and memories that, in the end, become the primary reason for the continued practice of them. With each successive experience, the secondary associations accumulate and give the tradition ever-increasing substance and significance to the group.

As was noted on this point concerning the individual soul, this takes on “Divine dimensions” when the traditions are practiced in a religious or spiritual setting for sacred purposes. The collective associations of (even perceived) divine endorsement and engagement infuse a transcendent authority to these traditions which puts them in a category all their own. Because of this, they are, rightfully or wrongfully, hallowed with collective devotion and defended with religious zeal.

- The Power of (Collective) Collective Endorsement – Individual groups generally look to larger, more established social entities to both supply and authenticate their own beliefs and practices. The more they are in line with established social customs and norms, the safer and more legitimate they feel. When traditions are widely shared, they bear a tacit collective authority that is a powerful and sometimes blinding force. We give great weight to those traditions that have survived the vetting process of history and come stamped with society’s “collective endorsement”.

- The Power of Collective Identity – Furthermore, every group develops some form of collective identity that is shaped by, and in turn solidifies, their own self-perception. This identity also defines their public image and designation. Because traditions become engrafted into the very fabric and fiber of a group’s nature through the collective power of “the familiar,” “meaningful structure”, “generational honor”, “childhood formation”, “cumulative associations”, and “collective endorsement”, they often become the foundation of a group’s “collective identity”.

As Tevye said in *The Fiddler on the Roof*, “because of our traditions every one of us knows who he is...” This is true individually, and it is also true collectively. As with “the power of personal identity”, when traditions penetrate and permeate a group to the point where the group draws its identity and social distinction from them, Tradition has reached the pinnacle of its power to shape, mold, and hold that collective. At that point, it becomes very difficult to ever alter or extricate.

- The Power of Collective Conformative Development – This final dynamic, as with its psychological counterpart, is, likewise, “*the most unrecognized factor, and yet is the most powerful...*” If we are going to fully grasp the sociological power of Tradition, we must understand this final factor.

As a group forms and develops with traditions built into its foundational structures and interwoven into its ongoing life, every aspect of the group’s existence and expression begins to take its contour from the shape of the traditions it embraces. Built upon and around the core of its established beliefs and practices, a complex matrix of social interactions, activities, experiences, expectations, goals, protocols, taboos, values, habits, ideas, ambitions, visions, philosophies, organizational structures, leadership dynamics, physical assets, public images and reputations, and the like, begins to form and develop. This “conformative matrix” takes its shape from the “formative core” of the traditions it is built upon and around. The more that time goes on, the more established and complex this matrix becomes.

As with the psychological process of “conformative development” within the individual soul, the sociological process has the same effect within the “collective soul”. Once the surrounding matrix is established, it in turn “locks in” the “shape” of that which it is formed according to. If an attempt is made later on to change some aspect of the “formative core”, it is most difficult, if not impossible, for it pulls and strains against the “conformative matrix” that surrounds it and ever wants to keep its original shape. If change is forced, there are usually tears in the encircling enmeshment which have significant consequences for the unity and harmony of the entire social construct.

This is the nature of how social groups and institutions of all kinds form and develop, and it is all but inevitable that they follow this progression. It is imperative, then, that the utmost consideration be given to the foundational principles and practices that a group is founded upon, so that they serve the group well for its intended purpose, various stages of development and full lifespan. It is also wise to consider this final factor when considering the nature and cost of change to an established group when it comes to addressing well-established fundamental beliefs and practices. There is much more involved, and the cost is much greater than that which may initially appear.

This final factor completes Tradition’s “tour de force” in its sociological power to shape the “collective soul”.

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All of these eight factors which come to bear upon both upon the individual and the “collective soul”, begin to give us a handle on the psychological and sociological power of Tradition. Taken together, with all of their synergistic energy and interplay, they are truly an indomitable force in “*influencing the human soul and shaping human society!*”

IV. Tradition and Apostasy

In this and the final portion of this teaching, we will consider the power and place of Tradition in the Church as it relates to the two primary principles that will define the Church at the end of the age. First, we will consider it in the light of the principle of *apostasy*, and, secondly, in light of the principle of *restoration*. These are the two major movements that will mark the Church in increasing measure unto the end. It is essential that we understand the primary role that Tradition will play in both!

“Back to the Future”

If we are to understand both the process of apostasy and of restoration as they each come to their final culmination and manifestation at the end of the age, we must first go back to the beginning to see the genesis of them both. In God’s economy, the beginning

governs the end, and the end is the fulfillment of the beginning. As we go back to the beginning, then, we are, in essence, going “back to the future.” Here are found the roots of both full-grown trees.

In regards to the Church, apostasy and restoration also find their unique meaning in relation to God’s original intention for the Ekklesia. Apostasy is the movement *away from* that original intention, and restoration is the movement *back to* it. As a starting place for understanding both of these principles, then, we must go back to the beginning.

“In the Beginning...”

God’s original intention and pattern for the Church can be summed up in one word... “CHRIST!” The Church is simply the corporate expression of Christ on earth (and in heaven.) Every aspect of it is to be the manifestation and representation of Him. He is its Heavenly Pattern and all things must be conformed to Him. Whatever is of and according to Christ, therefore, is of and according to God’s original intention and pattern; Whatever is not of and according to Christ, is not of and according to God’s original intention and pattern. The Church is very simply “CHRIST”! (1 Cor. 12:12) Now that is the general revelation God has given concerning His Church, but that breaks down into many specific aspects that become immensely practical. I will focus on just four of them that lie at the very core of the Church’s calling to manifest and represent Christ. It is my conviction, that when these four core principles are established according to Christ, the entire Church takes on the “DNA” of Christ and becomes fashioned according to Him in all respects.

These four formative aspects, then, are as follows:

1. Christ is to be the *unrivaled Center* of the Church – The One around, for and to whom the Ekklesia is fashioned and gathers.
2. Christ is to be the *unifying Identity* of the Church – The One who alone unifies and identifies the Ekklesia in His Person and by His Name.
3. Christ is to be the *sole Foundation* of the Church – The One who alone establishes, unifies and defines the Ekklesia in and through His Person and Work.
4. Christ is to be the *uncontested Head* of the Church – The One who directs, governs, and supplies all things to the Ekklesia through His immediate authority, power and presence.

According to the God’s original intention, Christ is to be the *Center, Identity, Foundation* and *Head* of the Ekklesia. When we look into the New Testament, this is what we see the apostles laboring to establish in the local assemblies they founded and oversaw.

When a church is established according to Christ in this way, the “conformative development” of its corporate life, functioning and expression takes on the “shape and contour” of Christ in all things. As this “conformative matrix” develops, it serves to “lock in” the four core principles that it is built according to, solidly establishing the church according to Christ in all respects.

Not only so, this entire body also takes on the nature and character of Christ throughout. In this regard, there are four distinctive characteristics that will be found ever-increasing in the church that is thus established. These attributes spring naturally from Christ being established as the formative *Center, Identity, Foundation and Head* of the body.

These distinctive characteristics are:

1. *unity*
2. *fullness*
3. *purity*
4. *balance*

These are essential attributes of Christ and will be organically manifested in an assembly which is rightly and fully established according to Christ. The presence or absence of these characteristics, then, also become a “fruit test” as to whether Christ is, in reality, in His rightful place or not in that corporate expression.

This then is a brief sketch of God’s original pattern, plan and desire for His Church, and is what we see being established by the apostles in the churches of the first century.

Apostasy

The word, “apostasy” comes from the Greek word, “apostasia” which literally means, “*apo-*” = “*away from*”, and “*-stasis*” = “*a standing*”... i.e. a “*standing away from*”. It is, likewise, translated as, “*falling away*” (2 Thess. 2:3) which identifies it accurately as a process of *moving away*.

From the earliest times, there has always been a “*moving away*” from God’s original design and intention for His Church. The carnal pull of the natural man, the spirit of the world, and the persistent working of the enemy have all combined to draw the Church off-center and away from Christ being all that He is ordained to be in the Ekklesia.

In this process, two basic principles are at work: *supplementation* and *supplantation*. The first is *supplementing* Christ with other things, as if He is not all-sufficient, in and of Himself, and needs to be added to. The second is *supplanting* Christ with other things, as if He is not all-essential, in and of Himself, and can be readily replaced.

In the New Testament, we see some of the first seeds of this “moving away” taking root in some of the local assemblies, and also the apostolic response to re-center and re-

fashion them according to Christ alone, once again. The church of Corinth and the churches of Asia Minor (Revelation 2-3) are good examples of this.

Historically, however, with the passing of the original apostles, a major shift took place in the Church that became *universally* accepted and practiced, and was zealously *promoted* by the prevailing leadership. Whereas in the first-century church, the local ekklesiae were overseen by a *plurality of co-equal elders*, by the middle of the second century, the *monarchical bishop* had arisen as the single, supreme leader of each city church. In this shift, this single, set-apart man, in essence, became a human, earthly substitute for Christ. He became the cohesive *center* of the local church's gathering; He became the representative *identity* of the church; He became the defining *foundation* of her authenticity and unity; He became the functional *head* of her assembly. In practical reality, the Bishop became the *center, identity, foundation* and *head* of the local church in substitution of Christ.

Out of that shift, the entire Roman Catholic system developed. The pinnacle of that system, and the ultimate embodiment of its substitutionary principle, is found in the Pope who unashamedly bears the title of "*Vicar of Christ*", which literally means, "*Substitute of Christ*". Although the Lord Jesus Christ was still worshiped, preached, believed in, followed and served to a great degree, He was now mediated through a set-apart man, and eventually an authorized class of men, and no longer held the immediate, unmediated, unmitigated place of centrality, supremacy and all-sufficiency that the Father had ordained for Him in His Church.

The "conformative development" of that system, and the substitutionary principle that formed it, have dominated Christianity ever since. Even the Protestant Reformation did not break its stronghold, but merely gave the prevailing church structure a "Protestant make-over". It substituted the Bible and the pastor/preacher in the place of the Eucharist and the bishop/priest as its central and primary principle and developed its "conformative matrix" according to that fundamental change. Due mainly to the psychological and sociological power of Tradition, however, the essential nature of the *church structure* was relatively unchanged from the Roman Catholic system to the Protestant one, and its fundamental principles and forms continue on to this day in both streams.

As a result, throughout all of the Christian world, Christ has essentially been supplemented and supplanted in the Church in the four primary ways the Ekklesia was originally established according to, with Christ alone as her *unrivaled Center, unifying Identity, sole Foundation, and uncontested Head*. Not only so, but the corresponding attributes of *unity, fullness, purity and balance*, have also been systemically replaced with *disunity, diminishment, impurity and imbalance*.

The principle of apostasy that runs throughout all the various streams of Christianity can trace its source back to that early universal shift of the second century.

Tradition and Apostasy

This lays the groundwork for now addressing the question that specifically concerns us in this post, *How does Tradition relate to the principle and process of apostasy?*

In reality, it would be hard to overestimate the significance of Tradition in this process of apostasy, for it is, arguably, the primary force at work. When we understand the complex dynamics of its psychological and sociological power, we can begin to comprehend why this is so.

As has been stated, the process of apostasy begins when a portion of the Church begins to *move away* from Christ's centrality, supremacy and all-sufficiency in all things concerning its spiritual life and practical expression. Whenever HE begins to be supplemented or supplanted in any way, especially in any of the four primary roles that have been already mentioned, that expression of the church begins to move away from the place where all *unity, fullness, purity, and balance* are found.

Consequently, as it moves away from the place of true *unity*, division and schism begin to creep in; from the place of all *fullness*, diminishment and limitation begin to set in; from the place of all *purity*, corruption and deception begin to find their foothold; from the place of spiritual *balance*, excess and distortion begin to be embraced and promoted.

To counter these negative effects, which become more and more evident over time, further supplements and substitutes for Christ are embraced and employed to make up for the spiritual lack, offset the imbalances, force the desired results, and secure allegiances. For example, authoritarianism, legalism, sectarian pride, soulish manipulation, religious hype, worldly entertainment, sensory attractions, the "edifice complex", and the like, are employed, with a "Scriptural" veneer, to attempt to accomplish what only Christ Himself can do.

This, over time, leads to further spiritual *diminishment, defilement, distortion and disunity*, and the process continues to deepen. With each layer, *teachings* and *practices* are adopted, incorporated, and passed on which foster and facilitate the pseudo-solutions which are employed. These "*traditions*" have great psychological and sociological power to shape the individual mind-sets and collective norms of the group. All of the dynamics described in the earlier portions of this teaching begin to work their synergistic effects on the individual and corporate levels. Eventually the developing "conformative matrix" of the group "locks in" the supplements, substitutes and traditions which have been embraced. The longer this process goes on, the more multi-layered, enmeshed, fortified, incorrigible and apostate it becomes. Tradition strengthens its death grip on the whole construct and won't let go. Eventually all spiritual life goes out of it and rigor mortise (or as I call it, "reli-gor mortise") sets in:-)

As movements follow this predictable progression and become increasingly apostate, new movements spring up, generally from within, which find it necessary to break with the external systems they have been a part of. The residual "new wine" in the old system seeks a new "wineskin" to contain it. These upstart groups are generally reactionary in

nature, however, and seek to counter-balance and overcome the weaknesses of the prior systems with their newly formed visions and convictions. Because it is easier for a man to come out of the system than it is for the system to come out of the man, it is extremely rare for these fledgling groups to properly discerning the true root of the problem, i.e. the supplementing and supplanting of Christ in the four core areas we've discussed. Instead, they come up with a new set of supplements and substitutes for Christ as the *center* around which they are formed and gather, the *identity* by which they are associated and known, the *foundation* upon which they are built and unified, and the "*head*" by which they are governed and resourced. Thus, from the very beginning, these groups are built on faulty and false presuppositions which tend away from true unity, fullness, purity and balance. It is not long until they, in turn, add further supplements and substitutes to their "conformative matrix" in order to "makeup for the spiritual lack, offset the imbalances, force the desired results, and secure allegiances." These are fortified further with pseudo-Scriptural teachings and practices (i.e. un-Biblical traditions), and, you guessed it, the process repeats itself over and over and over again.

In fact, this larger pattern of starting new groups and movements, each with their own set of secondary formative core principles, becomes so oft-repeated throughout the Christian world that it, in and of itself, becomes a "tradition" that carries with it the tacit "collective endorsement" of the mass of Christendom. It becomes so accepted and promoted that no one even bats an eye at it or seriously calls it into question. Those who do, are dismissed as being "eccentric" and "out there", while, in reality, it is the mass of Christendom that has become "eccentric" (out-of-Center) and "out there"(apostate)!

Unto the End

This process of apostasy, fueled and fortified by the psychological and sociological power of Tradition, will continue unto the end. It will eventually culminate in a one-world, false, religious/political system, Mystery, Babylon the Great, Mother of Harlots and Abominations of the Earth, which will be ruled over by the *Anti-Christ*, the ultimate "*Substitute of Christ*". The process of apostasy will then be complete.

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That is not the whole Story, however! God will also have His original intention come to ultimate fulfillment and culmination in the last days. He will perfect His overcoming remnant Bride, the Wife of the Lamb, who will be lovingly ruled over by Christ, her triumphant Bridegroom King. He will be fully restored to His rightful place in her midst, and the Church will once again embody and display forth the glory, sovereignty, centrality, supremacy and all-sufficiency of the Lord Jesus Christ in all things. This restoration is the second principle that will define the Church in the last days!

In the final portion of this teaching, we will look at how the process of restoration will work to accomplish God's ends, and how it, likewise, will be fueled and fortified by the psychological and sociological power of... Tradition!

V. Tradition and Restoration

There are two major movements that will mark the Church in the last days: apostasy and restoration. Tradition will not only be a major player in the process of apostasy, it will also be a primary force in the process of restoration.

The Root of Restoration

Restoration is the recovery of what once was, and was lost. As we saw last time, what was, and was lost was simply, CHRIST. HE became supplemented with, and supplanted by, lesser things in the Church. In particular, we saw that He was substituted for and displaced from His central, supreme and all-sufficient place as the unrivaled *Center*, unifying *Identity*, sole *Foundation* and uncontested *Head* of the Ekklesia. The local expressions of the church consequently moved away from the place of *unity*, *fullness*, *purity*, and *balance* and began to be marked by *disunity*, *diminishment*, *impurity*, and *imbalance*. The work of apostasy that developed over the ensuing centuries and millenia can be traced back to these fundamental shifts and changes that began very early on.

These four facets of Center, Identity, Foundation, and Head are especially significant because they each represent a core element of what constitutes any established and functioning social unit. Any free-will association, be it spiritual or natural, will have four core components that are essential to its constitution. These will vary in nature and content from one group to another, but they will all be present in some form or another, and will be the primary factors determining the ultimate nature, form, and function of the group. I call these four core components, the “formative core” of a group. They are:

1. An “attractional center” – This is the primary purpose, passion, or person that the group coalesces around. This is what primarily draws and holds the group together and is the main reason for its existence.
2. A “unifying identity” – This is what designates the group as a distinct entity and distinguishes it from every other association. This unifying identity is very often derived from the group’s “attractional center”, and/or serves to succinctly communicate something essential about the group and becomes the banner under which the group is unified.
3. A “foundational base” – This is what fundamentally establishes, unifies, and defines the group. Six foundational questions need to have a source by which they are answered concerning the groups basic nature, form, and function: who?, what?, when?, where?, why?, and how? The recognized and accepted source by which those six questions are answered becomes the “foundational base” upon which it is built.
4. A “governance principle” – This is the principle as to how the group is governed. This principle determines how the group is led, decisions are made, where authority lies, and how people or things that are detrimental to the group are handled. Every group encounters these matters and of necessity adopts some form of “governance principle” to manage them.

The “formative core” of every established group, then, consists of an “attractional center,” a “unifying identity”, a “foundational base”, and a “governance principle”. These are the four core principles that every free-will association is established according to and coalesces around. Whatever “shape” this “formative core” takes, the “conformative matrix” that develops around it becomes fashioned according to its nature and “contour”. As was previously shared in this series, once this “conformative matrix” is established, it serves to “lock in” the shape and contour of the “formative core” that originated it so that any change that is made to the “core” later on, comes up against the resistance of the “matrix” that surrounds it. This is the fundamental nature of how a group forms, develops, and becomes established.

When it comes to the Ekklesia, the same is found there as well. When a local expression of the Ekklesia is established according to God’s eternal purpose, Christ is given the preeminence in all things. (Col.1:18) Therefore, in the New Testament we see the apostles, in essence, establishing the local churches with Christ as their:

1. “Attractional Center” – HE is the primary purpose, passion, and Person that the church coalesces around. He is that which primarily draws and holds the church together and is the main reason for her existence.
2. “Unifying Identity” – HE is what unifies the Church as a distinct entity and distinguishes it from every other association on earth. The Church is called by His Name, which is in keeping with her “attractional center” and also communicates that which is most essential about her origin, constitution, and purpose.
3. “Foundational Base” – HE is the One who fundamentally establishes, unifies, and defines the Church by His Person and work. He is, likewise, God’s comprehensive Answer to the fundamental questions of: who?, what?, when?, where?, why?, and how? concerning the nature, form and function of the Ekklesia.
4. “Governance Principle” – HE is the principle as to how the Church is governed. He, through His Headship, is how the ekklesia is to be led, how decisions are to be made, where authority lies, and how people or things that are detrimental to the group are handled.

This, then, is the “formative core” of the Ekklesia as it is fashioned according to God’s eternal purpose. Christ Himself is it’s “Attractional Center”, “Unifying Identity”, “Foundational Base”, and “Governance Principle” (i.e. Center, Identity, Foundation and Head.) When the local church coalesces around and is established according to Christ in these four aspects, she grows and develops according to God’s design for her. The “conformative matrix” that develops around this “formative core” takes the nature and “shape” of Christ, and eventually “locks in” the nature and “shape” of these four core aspects of Christ in the ekklesia. If later on, change to this Christ-established “core” is attempted, it runs up against the resistance of the Christ-established “matrix” that surrounds it. This, then, is fundamentally how the Ekklesia forms, develops, and is established according to God’s eternal purpose.

We have in this simple explanation, then, the essential pattern of the Church according to God's eternal purpose, with Christ Himself being central, supreme, and all-sufficient as her unrivaled Center, unifying Identity, sole Foundation, and uncontested Head, and the entire life, function, and form of the Ekklesia taking its nature and expression from these four core aspects of Christ being established. It is the *substance* of this Christ-centered pattern which the Church once had, and lost.

The movement away from this Christ-centered original intention for the Church is the root of apostasy, as was discussed in Part 4. *The recovery of this Christ-centered original intention for the Church, then, is the root of restoration!*

The Fruit of Restoration

After defining the "root of restoration", it is also important that we define the "fruit of restoration". Many different aspects of the character, ministry, and works of Christ could be elaborated on here, for the entire "conformative matrix" of the restored Ekklesia will be filled with and expressive of the fullness of Christ. These innumerable facets of the fruit of Christ, however, can be identified by certain characteristics themselves. In fact, these characteristics mark the entire "tree", root to fruit. When Christ is restored as the Root of the tree (i.e. as its "Formative Core"), the entire tree will be marked by four essential characteristics of Christ: *unity*, *fullness*, *purity*, and *balance*. These will develop naturally as a result of Christ being re-established as the true Center, Identity, Foundation, and Head of the Ekklesia. This is what I will define as the fruit of restoration. (All four of these can be deduced from Paul's description of the fully matured Body of Christ in Ephesians 4:13-17, and elsewhere.)

The Futile Way and the Fruitful Way

To understand God's way of restoration, it is vital to discern the difference between the "*root of restoration*" and the "*fruit of restoration*". It is the confusing of these two aspects that has caused much failure in the past on the part of God's people as He has sought to restore His Church. By developing a clearer understanding of them, we will be able to discern more fully God's way of restoration, which will be vital for the Church going forward.

The fact is, there are two ways that restoration can be pursued... one *futile*, the other *fruitful*.

Throughout history, the majority of restoration-type movements have tragically followed the former of these. This is the more popular, less costly way, which ends up, itself, succumbing to the process of apostasy due to its fundamentally flawed basis. (This was touched on in the previous post, but I will elaborate further on it here.)

The *futile way* is to focus on "*fruit*" while ignoring or dismissing the "*root*". This is the natural way, for fruit is much more visible and seemingly valuable to man than roots are. There is, therefore, a much greater awareness of and motivation to focus on fruit issues than there is on root issues. It is also, seemingly, less costly to attempt to remedy

specific fruit problems than it is to try to fix systemic root problems. Movements, therefore, much more readily develop around a particular *fruit focus*, than they do around a *root focus*.

If the various restoration movements throughout history were to be examined closely, most would be seen to have centered around some aspect of the “fruit of restoration” i.e. promoting some aspect of Christian *unity*, of spiritual *fullness*, of doctrinal, personal or ecclesiastical *purity*, and/or of spiritual *balance* in some regard. Whatever their primary focus and purpose was, this became their “attractational center”, and it most likely helped to form their “distinctive identity”. (Think “Holiness Movement”, “Pentecostal Movement”, “Healing Movement”, “Faith Movement”, “Ecumenical Movement”, “Church Growth Movement”, and the like...)

Not dealing radically with the root (“formative core”) issues, however, these movements invariably ended up adopting some form of the “old wineskin” to seek to contain their “new wine”. Their “foundational base” and “governance principle” subsequently became adopted and adapted from the prevailing “substitutionary” system. This gave them a “formative core” that was centered around and identified by a specific “fruit focus” instead of CHRIST as unrivaled Center and unifying Identity, and was founded on and governed by some other construct and principle other than CHRIST as sole Foundation and uncontested Head. Although it seemed that they were making radical advances from prior expressions of the Church, in reality, they were merely giving the same old, Christ-supplanting “woman” a “facelift”. The very *roots* of the system that gave rise to the bad *fruit* that they were trying to counter continued to be the *roots* of the new “tree”. It was only a matter of time until a new form of the “*fruit of apostasy*” began to grow on their branches. This was inevitable!

This failing “fruit-focused” way of pursuing restoration has repeated itself so many times throughout history, it has proven itself to be a fundamentally flawed and *futile way*.

If we discern the difference between the “*fruit*” and the “*root*” of the problem, we can understand quite clearly why this is so.

Jesus said,

“Do people pick grapes from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? Likewise every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.” Matt.7:16-19

He, likewise said,

„Make a tree good and its fruit will be good, or make a tree bad and its fruit will be bad, for a tree is recognized by its fruit.” Matt. 12:33

In fact, this is the only way there will be true and lasting restoration. The “root” of the Ekklesia, the “formative core”, in all four of its essential components, must become simply, and exclusively...CHRIST! Only then will the fruit of the tree be CHRIST, and the entire tree be restored to God’s original and ultimate intention.

First and foremost, therefore, all energies and focus must be directed at the radical restoration of CHRIST to the place of unrivaled *Center*, unifying *Identity*, sole *Foundation*, and uncontested *Head* of the Ekklesia. All four areas must come into uncompromised conformity to the centrality, supremacy, and all-sufficiency of CHRIST, that the entire tree will be according to God’s eternal purpose and that it will bring forth the full-blown fruit of CHRIST in *unity, fullness, purity, and balance*. This way, and this way alone, is the *fruitful way* of restoration.

A Radical Returning Remnant

This process of restoration is a much more difficult process than apostasy. Apostasy is the natural course of things in this fallen world. It takes no more effort to propagate than a boat exerts in drifting untethered from its mooring. Restoration, on the other hand, is a swimming against the tide, a constant uphill climb, a rebuilding in the midst of perpetual opposition, a straining against a resilient and resistant psychological and sociological “web”. It is truly a work of God, and He has called a stalwart breed of men and women to participate with Him in it.

Martin Luther once said, *“Learn from me, how difficult a thing it is to throw off errors confirmed by the example of all the world, and which through long habit have become a second nature to us.”*

His life is a poignant example of that, and yet he didn’t even deal radically with the full “formative core” of the existing Church structure! The Anabaptists were much more radical in this regard, and they endured a bloodbath of persecution and martyrdom from both the Catholic and the Protestant camps.

The reality is, that once the “formative core” of a religious movement or system becomes established and the “conformative matrix” sufficiently develops so as to “lock it in”, it is virtually impossible for that movement or system to ever be radically changed. Change from the core out is strongly resisted by the tensile strength of the surrounding matrix, and change from the matrix in is strongly resisted by the established core, where the authority base lies. This resistance, in both directions, comes not only from the sociological constructs that have developed, but also from the psychological mindsets that it has spawned, driven, in both regards, by the insidious and ubiquitous power of Tradition.

Those who choose to remain in such a movement or system, aware of the fruit of apostasy within it, have but a few options. I have identified the main ones here by personifying them as distinct groups of people.

- “Resigners” – These resign themselves to the situation as it is, figure they can’t change it, look pragmatically at the good that is being done, and assume that if God is in any

way blessing it, He must also be endorsing it. This is the easiest and most popular group to belong to.

- “Revivalists” – These feel that the real problem is that there just isn’t enough of God’s Spirit and power at work in their system. These are constantly preaching and praying for “REVIVAL” (i.e. for God to pour out His “new wine” into their “old wineskin”.) This approach, however, never deals with the underlying root of why they are corporately dying in the first place. Unless that is radically dealt with, the deadness will remain, or quickly return after a temporary “visitation.”
- “Reformers” – These hold out hope that the system can be reformed, either from the top down, or the bottom up, or as was just said, from the inside out, or the outside in. If changes are actually brought about, they will invariably be partial and generally short-lived because of the resilient nature of the “formative core”/“conformative matrix” construct.

Other groups move out of the systems they are a part of to find or create new institutional or “organic” alternatives. These can be categorized as “Revisionists”, “Reactionaries”, “Rebels”, “Refugees”, and “Recluses”, each with their own nuance of approach to the problem of apostasy. As was discussed earlier, these are essentially reactionary in nature, seek to remedy the fruit of apostasy without dealing radically with its root, and, in the end, perpetuate the problem all over again. (See also the series, [“Rebels, Refugees, and a Returning Remnant”](#))

The psychological and sociological power of Tradition is so blinding, and so binding, that most never think, or dare to seriously consider, that the foundational elements that are universally taken for granted as to what constitutes a legitimate “church” may actually be un-Biblical, being substitutionary in nature, rather than substantive....i.e. CHRIST.

Those who would dare to declare such a thing are considered rebels, heretics, or worse. As one has said, *“When a well-packaged web of lies has been sold gradually to the masses over generations, the truth will seem utterly preposterous and its speaker a raving lunatic.”* -Dresden James

However, God’s purpose and program in the light of such root-level apostasy is to raise up one final group, a radical, returning Remnant. These are those who are willing to leave the confusion of the present system (“Babylon”), return to the God-ordained “land”, re-lay the age-old foundations, and rebuild the House of God according to God’s pattern and original intention. This is the only way for the “tree” to be made “good”, from the roots up. It is with this final group that God’s hope of full and final restoration lies.

Tradition and Restoration

Given the massive complexity of all of the conformative matrices of an untold multitude of apostatizing religious systems, and all the man-made traditions that it has spawned,

how is this returning remnant going to fight its way back through all the rubble and confusion and re-establish, once again, the “Formative Core” of CHRIST in the Ekklesia?

Ironically, I believe it will be primarily through the power of...you guessed it... “*Tradition!*”

Even as un-Biblical traditions are a primary driving force in the process of apostasy (as discussed in Part 4), so Biblical traditions are, and will be, a primary driving force in the process of restoration. Biblical traditions originate out of a paradigm where CHRIST is in His rightful place in all things, and they powerfully work to secure and guard that place for CHRIST alone. These are the apostolic and prophetic teachings and practices that have been handed down to us through the Holy Scriptures, and are implemented in and by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Ultimately, the true issue with the Church is not the fact that it adheres to ancient traditions, but that it adheres to man-made traditions and fails to adhere to the most ancient traditions of all in the Church...the traditions of the apostles. All Biblical traditions pre-date the un-Biblical traditions that have enslaved the Church for nearly two millennia. If these apostolic traditions had been faithfully held to, there would have been no place for the un-Biblical traditions to have gotten in and taken root. As God is now working to restore the remnant of His people back to His original pattern, He will do so by restoring these ancient Biblical traditions, and through them, uproot and supplant (“sub-plant”) the un-Biblical ones that have predominated for so long.

As much as I would like to believe that this full restoration will take place within the established movements and systems of Christendom, given the psychological and sociological power of tradition, and the interlocking nature of the “formative core”/”conformative matrix” dynamic, that is highly unlikely. Much more in keeping with Biblical precedent and teaching, is that God will do a work within individual hearts and then call them out of these apostatizing systems. After a time of testing and purging in the “wilderness” (to get the “system” out of them), these will then be used to establish fresh testimonies that are founded from the very beginning on CHRIST alone, central and supreme in all things.

Those Biblical traditions that will, and must be, most firmly and faithfully adhered to by this returning remnant will be those apostolic teachings and practices that establish CHRIST as central, supreme and all-sufficient in all things in and for the Church. In particular, this remnant will need to embrace those ancient traditions that establish CHRIST, *in essence*, as her “Formative Core”.

The apostolic teachings and practices of the centrality and preeminence of Christ in all things must be regularly taught and faithfully embraced in all practical ways. HE must be her “Attractional Center”, the central purpose, passion, and Person that the ekklesia coalesces around. HE must be that which primarily draws and holds the church together and is the main reason for her existence. HE must be the One that the church gathers around as the centerpiece of its life and assemblies. HE must be the primary focus and

fullness of all teaching and worship. All secondary and sectarian “attractional centers”, in whatever form they are found, must take their rightful place as secondary, subservient, and complimentary to Christ. HE must be the ekklesia’s unrivaled *Center!*

The apostolic teachings and practices of Christ being the unifying Identity of the Church must be regularly taught and practically expressed. HE and not some secondary identity must unify the Church as a distinct entity and distinguish it from every other association on earth. HE and not some sectarian identity must be the distinctive identity of the ekklesia’s self-concept and confession as to who they are. All secondary, sectarian names, labels, titles, denoms, descriptives, confessions, and the like must be supplanted with the supreme, unifying *Identity* of the Church, CHRIST.

The apostolic teachings and practices of Christ being the sole Foundation of the Ekklesia, Who alone, by His Person and work, establishes, unifies and defines the churches must be regularly taught and practically applied. All fundamental aspects of who?, what?, when?, where?, why?, and how? of the church’s nature, form, and function must find their all-sufficient Answer and Source in CHRIST. All secondary, sectarian “foundational bases” that men contrive and employ to establish, unify, and define a particular expression of the Ekklesia must be discarded and replaced with CHRIST alone, without supplements or substitutes. CHRIST must be established as the sole *Foundation* for each local expression of the Church, according to God’s eternal purpose.

The apostolic teachings and practices regarding CHRIST as the unrivaled, functional Head of the Church and churches must be regularly taught, pursued, and practically expressed. HE, in His Headship, is the “governance principle” by which the each church is led, how decisions are made, where authority lies, and how people or things that are detrimental to the group are handled. All secondary, substitutional “governance principles” that men employ to govern a particular expression of the Church must be surrendered to the cross and submitted to the sovereign authority and functional leadership of Christ. HE must be the unrivaled *Head* of each assembly of His Body, the Church.

Through the recovery and re-establishment of these “Biblical traditions”, CHRIST will be restored to His rightful place in the remnant expressions of the Ekklesia. The “root”, i.e., the “formative core”, of each ekklesia will thus be established according to God’s eternal purpose. This will “make the tree good” so that its fruit will, likewise, be “good”. This will establish her heavenly “DNA” so that the “tree” will grow “organically” according to God’s Pattern. The “conformative matrix” that develops will naturally be conformed to CHRIST and begin to manifest all of the fruit of the fullness of CHRIST. This will, in turn, “lock in” the “Formative Core”, thus preserving the “Root” of the “tree”. The entire “tree”, as it grows and develops, will manifest the full expression of the “fruit of restoration”: *unity, fullness, purity, and balance* in every respect. The remnant Ekklesia, thus established, will stand as a “Tree of Life” for the nations, and a testimony to God’s unending purpose in His Son at the end of the age.

A Final Word

This, then, is an overview of the place and power of Tradition as it relates to the end-time restoration of the Church. Much more can be said concerning this process, but may this suffice to give an essential “paradigm of restoration” by which we may safely and surely pursue the Lord in this final day.

In closing, I would like to say that, although this process has been described primarily from a collective, corporate perspective, it begins, first and foremost, on a personal, individual level. Before Christ can possibly be established in a corporate expression of the Ekklesia as its “Formative Core”, He must first be established within the individual hearts of His people who comprise it as their personal “formative core”.

So I ask you...

Is CHRIST your unrivaled Center, or do other secondary things take preeminence in your heart?

Is CHRIST your supreme Identity, or do you look to other factors and associations to define who you are?

Is CHRIST your sole Foundation, or do you trust in lesser, worldly principles or man-made things to *establish, unify, and define* who you are?

Is CHRIST your unrivaled Head, or do you look to yourself or others to supremely direct your life?

The establishment of CHRIST in these fundamental ways in our individual hearts and lives is what God desires so that our inward “formative core” may be according to His ultimate desire and design. He is working to make our “tree good”, from the “roots” up, that we may bear the full “fruit of restoration”, a life marked by *personal integrity, spiritual fullness, moral purity, and holistic balance*. Then, and only then, will we be fit vessels for His end-time purpose of restoration in the Ekklesia!

May God raise up such a company in this last day!

May it begin with you and me!

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