

outreach

The New Horizons Newsletter

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Matthew 28:19-20

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Undervalued Tradition

There's a sense of warmth as we bask in our traditions. Sometime in the past, often the distant past, a particular practice crept into widespread acceptance and became part of our comfort zone. It may be *personal*—something we introduced into our life—a regular family gathering, a visit to a special place, the journey to work. Or it may be a *nationwide* tradition when we celebrate a famous victory or the Queen's birthday or the flying of the national flag on specific occasions. Traditions are woven into the fabric of the national life and often fiercely defended.

What eventually becomes embedded in the nation's culture often met, in its beginning, with equally ferocious opposition. Hence the hostility often expressed at the introduction of an alien culture—whether it is a food tradition or dress or manner of worship (see Zephaniah 1:8). Shared tradition is vital for national cohesion.

Spiritual Danger

Tradition, however, can be a blight. It was so in the lifetime of Jesus as the religious authorities rigorously enforced what he calls 'the tradition of the elders'. He says: '*...they [the Pharisee sect] tie up heavy burdens and put them on people's shoulders, but they themselves are not willing with their finger to move them*' (Matthew 23:4). The apostle Paul, too, warned the Colossian Christians of the dangers of tradition: '*...Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition [Gk. *paradosis*] of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ*' (ch 2:8). The apostle confided with the Galatians that his zealotry for these 'traditions of the elders' had impelled him to persecute Chris-

tian believers (ch 1:13-14).

But tradition does have its place, not least in Christian practice. Notably so in the Roman Catholic church, where, as in first century Palestine, it has displaced the teaching of God's Word. It enslaved believers for a thousand years. The principle is that any practice or teaching that violates that Word is unacceptable.

Jude, the brother of Jesus, illustrates this principle: '*...Having made all haste to write to you about the common salvation, beloved, I had need to write to you to exhort you to contend earnestly for the faith once [once for all] delivered to the saints*' (v.4).

Innovation

The Christian church early on experienced the influx of practices that became cherished traditions—no matter that they were seriously heretical and inimical to the Word of God.

For the first few centuries the practice of Jesus and the church was observance of the weekly seventh-day Sabbath. Overwhelming pressures from the surrounding heathen culture led to the introduction of first-day worship—enforced by the Emperor Constantine in the early fourth century. It became the tradition and is almost universal.

That same culture swamped the early Christians' practice of observing the annual festivals appointed by the Creator (Leviticus 23). In came Easter, Christmas, Saints days and a ream of observances condemned in the Word. Not approved by God but now the embedded traditional observances of most Christians.

Warning Voice

Jesus, of course, warned the disciples to expect—and to vigorously resist—such innovations. '*...They worship me in vain,*' he said, '*teaching as doctrines the commandments of men. Abandoning the commandment of God, you hold fast to the tradition of*

Tradition

Gk *paradosis*
Signifies 'a handing
down' of previous guid-
ance or instructions

Life Before Birth

Most of us are thrilled when a new-born infant enters the world. Emerging from the darkness of the womb and in a sense already nine months old, near enough, he or she invokes joy in parents and friends. Perhaps to become the genius who solves a previously unsolved challenge for humanity.

But hold it! That life did not begin with the union of an egg and a sperm nine months before birth, nor with the parents nor with the grandparents. Go back fifty generations and that newborn's life was there. Indeed no matter for how many generations—right back to that seminal moment when ‘...the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul’ (Genesis 2:7). No amount of genetic manipulation can transform inanimate matter—wood or stone or water or slime—from dead to alive! The ever-living Creator, in whom alone is inherent life, can impart life to every creature that has breath.

Man—unlike the rest of creation—is a unique creation designed ‘...in the image of God’ (ch.1:26) with divine attributes and destined to become part of the divine Family, to be truly ‘...My sons and daughters says the Lord Almighty’ (II Corinthians 6:18). Human life is precious in God's eyes!

According to WHO, every year, worldwide, there are an estimated 40-50 million abortions. This corresponds to approximately 125,000 abortions per day.
USA 1.2million (Abortion Act 1973)
UK 290,000 (Abortion Act 1967)

He has a care for each of us from the moment of conception. Writes the Psalmist: ‘...You have possessed my inward parts; You wove me in the womb of my mother...My bones were not hidden from You when I was made in secret; when I was woven in the depths of the earth. Your eyes saw my embryo; and in Your book all my members were written the days they were formed, and not one was yet among them’ (Psalm 139:13-16). The patriarch Job states: ‘...You formed my body with bones and sinews and covered the bones with muscles and skin. You have given me life and constant love, and your care has kept me alive’ (Job 10:11-12).

Innocent Blood

Wise King Solomon has this to say: ‘...These six things does the LORD hate: yea, seven are an abomination unto him: A proud look, a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood’ (Proverbs 6:16-17). Society condones—applauds, even—the horrendous practice of the taking of innocent lives before they emerge into the light of day to contribute their God-given talents to the service of mankind.

It is a man-made curse on our so-called civilized society. Note this warning: ‘... it shall come to pass, if you will not hearken unto the voice of the LORD your

God, to observe to do all his commandments and his statutes which I command thee this day; that all these curses shall come upon you, and overtake you’ (Deuteronomy 28:15). He adds (v.18): ‘... Cursed shall be the fruit of thy body’. We have neglected those guiding principles handed to us at creation and now suffer the consequences.

The LORD has been witness between you and the wife of your youth, against whom you have dealt treacherously: yet is she your companion, and the wife of your covenant. And did not he make one? [Genesis 2:24] Yet had he the residue of the spirit. And wherefore one? That he might seek a godly seed. Therefore take heed to your spirit, and let none deal treacherously against the wife of his youth’ (Malachi 2:14)

Or, as in a modern translation:

‘Didn't God make you one body and spirit with her [your wife]? What was his purpose in this? It was that you should have children who are truly God's people. So make sure that none of you breaks his promise to his wife’.

Respect Denied

Among the activities that God abhors, says Solomon, is ‘...the shedding of innocent blood’. That's why He explained to Noah: ‘...Whoso sheds man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed: for in the image of God made he man’ (Genesis 9:6). Respect for human life is a fundamental Biblical principle. It's a principle modern ‘civilized’ societies have thrown overboard, first neglecting the elderly, setting killers free, then encouraging the killing of children in the womb. Next follows experimentation on the aborted foetus and euthanasia. A downhill slope.

Inevitably, this moral slide spreads as disrespect for life and established institutions seeps into general society—petty vandalism, litter, discourtesy, manners, and escalating to violence against the person. Not least affected is that foundation of civil society, the heterosexual family with its current lack of discipline and instability.

Underpinning our (previously) stable society has been widespread acceptance of Christian values and respect for all life—long abandoned by increasing numbers, and actively promoted by the ruling ‘elite’ in government and our national institutions. They have undermined the foundations—the family and Christianity. The main purpose for abortion is *contraception*—almost entirely due to the widespread—and widely accepted—gross violation of God's family law and fundamental to Christianity.

As these pillars continue to crumble the death knell tolls for our society and the collapse of our once working society becomes inevitable. Governments must carefully consider our laws in the light of these age-old principles of respect. Ω

Tradition...cont'd from p.1

A recurring theme throughout the Scripture record is that God says He is 'jealous': '*...I the LORD your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me*' (Exodus 20:5). Look at what He said to His special nation, Israel: '*...They provoked him to jealousy with strange gods, with abominations provoked they him to anger. They sacrificed unto devils, not to God; to gods whom they knew not, to new gods that came newly up*' (Deuteronomy 32:16-17). And he continues, saying He '*...abhorred*' them for their idolatry. Jealousy is a powerful emotion among mankind—leading not infrequently to violence and even the taking of a life. We—and God—protect our own!

Just Consequences

The worship of false gods manifests through how they were worshipped—the rites and ceremonies, the festivals they observed. The grotesque religious practices of the ancient Palestinians, for example, led to their expulsion from Canaan at God's command. Israel too, lost its right (temporarily) to occupy this same holy land—for its neglect of the weekly seventh-day, annual and land Sabbaths: '*...the LORD hath caused the solemn feasts and sabbaths to be forgotten in Zion*' (Lamentations 2:6). The demise of Israel was a direct consequence of their breaking the covenant they made at their inception as a nation (v.17): '*...this whole land shall be a desolation, and an astonishment; and these nations shall serve the king of Babylon seventy years*' (Jeremiah 25:11).

Fair warning for our own age as the world, in all faiths, clings to false and idolatrous traditions. **Ω**

Letter from England

Friends

My thanks to all of you for your response to our recent mailing re-vamp ('CONSENTS' are still coming in). I assume there are varied reasons for subscribing to OUTREACH, not all of them complimentary! But I like to think of it as building a community of Bible believers. To this end (community) I welcome your input in response to the various thoughts expressed in it.

There's a surfeit of 'religion' around us but sincere interest in what the Bible says—never mind our applying it to our lives—means there is scant opportunity for face-to-face contact. That's the 'holy grail' of all outreach with this good news—the chance to interact with one another: '*...iron sharpens iron*'.

I know that some of our readers are dedicated members of one or other of our 'sister churches' and I don't advocate that relationship be disturbed. That need not hinder healthy discussion as we all strive for that same goal, the spirit Kingdom of God.

All of us, no matter how mature as Christians, are on a learning curve as we '*grow in grace and the knowledge of Christ*'. It is the responsibility of each to share this precious knowledge of the Kingdom.

James

A TRUMPET SOUNDS

Amid the confusion that envelops prophecies of the end-time, one text stands out: '*...He will send His angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they will gather His elect from the four winds, from the ends of the heavens to their ends*' (Matthew 24:31). The 'elect' will at last encounter the Saviour face-to-face.

This momentous event, the apostle Paul tells us, occurs at the return of Jesus Christ, and he inserts a time marker: '*...We shall all be changed. In a moment, in a glance of an eye, at the last trumpet; for a trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall all be changed*' (1 Corinthians 15:52). It occurs at *the last trumpet*, he notes, implying a *sequence* of blasts.

The detail is spelled out clearly in the book of *Revelation*: John in vision '*...saw the seven angels who stood before God, and seven trumpets were given to them*' (ch 8:2). These were themselves the seventh in a series of 'seals' on a prophetic scroll, each of which when opened revealed the periodic unfolding of end-time events climaxing with the return of Christ (ch 19).

This seventh trumpet is itself called '*the third woe*' (ch 8:13) which heralds the 'seven last plagues' (described as 'vials') which will afflict unrepentant mankind (ch 15:7). Many refused to repent even after the trauma of the second woe (ch 9:20-21): '*...he shall be tormented [experience distress] with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels, and in the presence of the Lamb*' (ch 14:10).

Note that Jesus will by then have returned—at the sounding of that 'last (seventh) trumpet'. These events unfold '*...in the presence of the Lamb*'.

Memorial Festival

The people of God observe the annual autumn '*Feast of Trumpets*' with reference to these awesome events. It recalls the powerful demonstration of divine power when the LORD appeared to Israel on Sinai—an experience burned into the psyche of the people of Israel, but with portents for mankind's future. It marks the end of human destructiveness and ineptitude and the advent of divine leadership of human affairs.

At the point of time symbolized by that seventh *Trumpet* Jesus Christ will return to establish the rule of the everlasting spirit Kingdom of God. It behoves us to be alert to the events symbolized by these trumpet alarms as they build to the climax of human misrule. Participation in the *Feast of Trumpets* annually highlights for us the divine trumpet calls. **Ω**

Festivals 2018

Trumpets	September 10
Atonement	September 19
Tabernacles	September 24-30
Eighth Day	October 1

The People of God

Life, for everyone (Gk. *laos*) who has walked this planet, is a gift of the Creator. Some, however, are special—the ‘people of God’, set apart by Him for their readiness to follow His ways (as defined for us in the Scriptures). As defined by the apostle Peter in reference to the church at large: ‘...you are God's chosen and special people. You are a group of royal priests and a holy nation’ (I Peter 2;9).

As witnessed by the historical record, that excludes most of mankind, and at times ‘the people’ comprised but a handful. But around 1500BC a people emerged who entered into covenant with God to do just that.: ‘...all the people answered together and said, all that the LORD has spoken we will do’ (Exodus 19:8). It was their unanimous response to God’s offer: ‘...if you will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then you shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people: for all the earth is mine: And you shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation’ (vv.5-6). A previous lone voice had voiced the same determination to follow Him: ‘...[Abraham] obeyed my voice, and kept my charge, my commandments, my statutes, and my laws’ (Genesis 26:5). They were ‘...the apple of his eye’ (Deuteronomy 32:10).

Sadly, the covenant was soon widely breached and over the ensuing centuries Israel embraced idolatry, to the point where God said: ‘...you are not my people, and I will not be your God’ (Hosea 1:9), and ‘...I will no more have mercy upon the house of Israel; but I will utterly take them away’ (v.6).

The ‘People’ Renewed

With the ministry of Jesus Christ a new ‘people of God’ is born, a people in whom dwells the divine Spirit. They are the new priesthood who have themselves entered into that same Covenant. They are ‘...a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that you should shew forth the praises of him who has called you out of darkness into his marvellous light: Which in time past were not a people, but are now the people of God: which had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy’ (I Peter 2:9-10).

They are God’s precious ‘flock’ (v.2), and are being tutored through the experiences of life to reign as ‘kings and priests’ when God’s king-

dom comes to reign over mankind: ‘...[you] have made us unto our God kings and priests: and we shall reign on the earth’ (Revelation 5:10). They are ‘God’s heritage’ (Gk *kleros*—a term later corrupted and applied solely to the ‘clergy’, the church leadership).

Each member of this ‘royal priesthood’ is individually selected by God (John 6:44) and endowed with spiritual gifts with which to serve their congregation. Within their local assembly the new Christian is nourished by spiritually mature brethren, and overseen by chosen leaders (selected in accordance with strict guidelines—eg I Timothy 3 and publicly appointed).

These ‘elders’ (or ‘bishops’ Gk *episkopos*, overseer) and deacons are tasked to serve the brethren. They are held responsible (by Christ) to ‘...Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; Neither as being lords over God's heritage (Gk *kleros*), but being ensamples to the flock’ (I Peter 5:2-3).

This implies that ‘the people’ will gather in assemblies to experience this face-to-face guidance, fellowship and for worship, and we are urged to ‘...consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works: Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as you see the day approaching’ (Hebrews 10:24-25).

Servant Class

Jesus addressed the Twelve with this issue of power-seeking (lordship) and inappropriate oversight: ‘... He said to them, ‘...The kings of the nations lord it over them, and those exercising authority over them are called benefactors. But you be not so, but the greater among you, let him be as the lesser; and the one governing as the one serving. For who is greater, the one reclining, or the one serving? Is it not the one reclining? But I am in your midst as One serving’ (Luke 22:25-27).

In the service of Jesus and the church, brethren are gifted in various ways to edify our local assembly, while some serve as evangelists or pastors or teachers or counsellors *etc.* (These latter are roles, functions and not ‘offices’. There are but two offices—*overseers* and *deacons* - Philipians 1:1).

As part of ‘the people’ we are commissioned to be worthy representatives of Jesus Christ. Ω

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