

EXPLORING CHRISTIAN SPIRITUALITY

Part 1: Traditions of Sprituality

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Purpose

The Christian life is not only about beliefs but also about practices that aid us in growing more and more into the likeness of Jesus. We will explore the broader church in order to look at and learn from various traditions of Christian spirituality (evangelical, contemplative, charismatic, liturgical, etc.). We will also learn how to incorporate various practices into our lives. As time permits, we want to look at developing a rule of prayer, praying the daily office, prayer as spiritual warfare, using a prayer list, journaling, meditation, contemplative prayer, spirituality and social justice, the use of the body in spirituality (kneeling, raising hands, the sign of the cross, etc.), the role of the sacraments in spiritual formation, and many others.

The Varied Traditions of Christian Spirituality¹

- Most people are aware that there are different *theological* traditions in the church (Reformed, Lutheran, Wesleyan, Baptist, charismatic, Orthodox, Tridentine Catholic, etc.), and that these are reflected in the various *denominational* families (Presbyterian, Lutheran, Methodist, Assemblies of God, Roman Catholic, etc.).
- However, there are also certain traditions when it comes to *spirituality*—the practices of the Christian life.
- Keeping this in mind, there are two basic principles that guide this course:
 1. The Christian life involves both beliefs and practices. In the confessional Reformed tradition, there has been a tendency to emphasize beliefs at the expense of practices (and this is reversed in other traditions). This course focuses on the practices, though (I hope) in a theologically rich way.
 2. We need to learn from all of our brothers and sisters in Christ. The church is tragically divided into denominations, but Christ has poured out his Spirit on the whole church. Therefore, no ecclesiastical family of churches has a corner on the truth—in terms either of beliefs or practices. We can learn from everyone.
- While we could divide the pie differently, we are looking at five basic spiritual traditions (see chart):
 1. Evangelical
 2. Liturgical
 3. Charismatic

¹ I am indebted for this section of the course to a Ministry Community Meeting lecture given by Dr. Tim Keller at Redeemer Presbyterian Church in Manhattan in 2000.

4. Contemplative
5. Social Justice

Why This Is Important

- It helps us avoid spiritual *arrogance*.
 1. Either by assuming that your tradition is the only correct or helpful one, or...
 2. That some traditions are dying out, or....
 3. That—if you’ve “switched” that your old tradition is to blame for the problems of the church.

- It helps us both *appreciate* other traditions and yet *realize* that every Christian and every church is situated in a particular tradition.

- It helps us *understand* where Trinity Church is coming from.
 1. Trinity Church is basically from the evangelical tradition. We are a congregation of the PCA—a confessional, Reformed evangelical denomination—and we are a daughter church of Redeemer Presbyterian Church in Manhattan, which was started by the PCA along with a number of people from Campus Crusade.
 2. This is a good thing, not least because evangelical spirituality is uncommon in the NYC metro area. People find in Trinity Church an emphasis on intelligent biblical and theological teaching as well as confidence on how one can become a Christian. Yet we are influenced by the other traditions.
 3. We are deeply shaped by the liturgical tradition, practicing a liturgy shaped by the “evangelical catholic” tradition, particularly of the Reformed and Anglican churches. While I grew up in the evangelical tradition (with some influence from the charismatic), the liturgical tradition has been a major influence on my life.
 4. Also, there are influences from the charismatic tradition (contemporary music, emphasis on prayer, every-member ministry, spiritual gifts) and the social justice tradition (emphasis on mercy ministry, community development, social justice as inherent to the church’s mission). The contemplative tradition is less visible in our worship, but many people at Trinity Church have been deeply shaped by this tradition.

- Most importantly, it helps us—as individuals and as a church—*grow* closer to Jesus Christ.
 1. Our goal is to be increasingly conformed to the image of Jesus Christ. We do this through the means of grace—Word, prayer, sacrament. In all of these, we are living out the gospel—the *dynamic* of spiritual growth.
 2. But there are many, many spiritual disciplines and practices available to us within these three means of grace. We’re going to look at some of them.
 3. Remember, not every discipline will be a good fit for you, your temperament, your station in life. But we can expand our spiritual “toolbox.”