

Listener notes by J. Michael Godfrey
(*Tradition: The Key to a Close Knit Family* by Anthony Campolo)

TRADITION

Christianity is interpreted as anti-ritualistic. Movement broke loose in Jesus to shatter rituals of Judaism. It had become so ritualistic and traditional that the spontaneity of the spirit was gone. The people responding to tradition had lost the essence of the Jewish faith. This is easy to do in our own faith. Danger of getting so wrapped up in ritual that one forgets the essence and spirit that gave birth to the ritual in the first place.

When one **is filled with God**, prayers tend to break out of ritualistic forms. When the spirit of God invades us, we break out of ritual. Jesus referenced this in his sayings about wineskins - new wine, old wineskins. In his revelation to John, He said, "I make all things new." Protestant reformation born out of rebellion against ecclesiastical tradition. Prior to the reformation, people were performing religious ritual without understanding the meaning behind the ritual. Consequently, evangelical Christians have become anti-ritualistic.

This has had negative effects on families. Family life needs tradition and ritual. One of the most important indices of marital solidarity and family oneness is the level of tradition and ritual that exists in the family. The more tradition and ritual, the closer the family, the more intense the relationships. The weaker the tradition, the more the family will tend to disintegrate. In the context of a high level of ritual in the family, children are attached to parents. Married couples with high level of ritual, closely knit together.

Emil Dierkheim, Elementary forms of the Religious Life outlines the four basic functions of ritual.

1. Ritual increases social solidarity
2. Ritual increases commitment of individuals to groups
3. Ritual is the ultimate educator.
4. Ritual creates a euphoria, a sense of emotional well-being.

RITUAL INCREASES SOCIAL SOLIDARITY

Religious groups with high level of solidarity have staying power in history. Example: Catholicism has survived 1500 years of history through all kinds of controversy and attacks. Ritual has held it together. Why is there such loyalty among Catholics? Ritual brought them together. Most participants in the mass did not understand what was being said. Ritual itself drew them together. Now, since Vatican II and the giving of freedom to vary the mass, the church is beginning to disintegrate. With the breakdown of ritual came a breakdown in solidarity and unity.

Judaism does not carry out rituals within the context of houses of worship. Instead, rituals are carried out within the home. Rabbi said Christianity is basically an anti-family system. Paul says

married people are those who cannot control their passions. Jesus single. Jewish families held feasts in home.

RITUAL INCREASES COMMITMENT OF INDIVIDUALS TO GROUPS

Jewish ritual has kept Jews Jewish over thousands of years of history. Some Jews are atheist but still observe feasts. They do not believe in God but feel this has little to do with it. They perform their rituals because they are Jews. To cease observe the rituals is to forget Jewishness. Every Jew feels at one with every other Jew. Modern Judaism worship service is much like Unitarian service. Modern Jews often join Quakers or other liberal religions.

RITUAL IS THE ULTIMATE EDUCATOR

Jews use ritual to teach (PASSOVER, etc.). Jesus wrapped up his most important teaching in ritual (Lord's supper). Quakers, who do not celebrate the Lord's Supper, have lost the centrality of the Cross. Jesus knew that as long as we performed the ritual, we would not forget. Ritual helps us remember the things so easily forgotten.

RITUAL CREATES A SENSE OF EUPHORIA:

Tower of London, ritual performed every day, beefeaters feed the ravens on the grass. Belief is that as long as ravens are fed on the lawn at the tower of London, London will never fall to enemies. During WWII, the bombs began to scare off the ravens, Churchill secretly had the wings clipped. In the midst of the war, beefeaters fed the ravens at 4 p.m.

Tea time at 4 p.m. is a ritual. The Monarchy cannot be understood without the understanding of ritual. English in midst of economic woes spend millions to maintain monarchy.

Without ritual, people become destabilized. They move into a state of anomy, normlessness. As ritual declines, emotional imbalance, rate of nervous breakdown, and suicide increases. Dierkheim's classical work, Suicide, is built on the assumption that as ritual declines, suicide increases, drug addiction increases, and alcoholism increases. Every social problem imaginable can be positively correlated with decline in ritual. Higher level of ritual leads to higher level of social, psychological, and emotional stability.

As families lose ritualism, solidarity is lost. Our nation is falling apart because national rituals are ending (e.g. National anthem etiquette, rearranged birthdays to make for convenient long weekends rather than making them important observances). Satanic forces have understood ritual better than Christians (e.g. Ritual used by Hitler, one big nationalistic ritual).

RITUAL IN FAMILY STYLES

Family rituals built around celebrations, holidays, and even putting kids to bed. Sociological studies indicate that if you make putting kids to bed highly ritualistic, children will sleep better because ritual will establish a sense of euphoria that all is well and give them a feeling of well-

being. Often the day has been a wreck and ritual can help put them in a state of emotional equilibrium.

Ritual educates, humanizes, and civilizes. Otherwise we are barbarians.

Some families have ritual for every meal; some do not. Some kitchens are structured to be non-ritualistic.

Higher level of ritual = higher level of solidarity. Ritual will unify and maintain loyalty and give the feeling that all is well.

Ritual of family devotions should be a part of evangelical families. Dr. Phillip Rief, foremost theorist in field of sociology living today says, "The family that prays together, stays together, whether there is a God or not." That is, the ritual of performing this creates solidarity and a sense of oneness. Devotions are not only important for spiritual reasons but for sociological ones.

Ritual is one of the few things you can control. There is so little that you can control about raising children. You can control ritual. If you want kids to have your values, get a high level of ritual. Kids become more loyal to the things the family is all about. Ritual holds the family together and binds the couple together.

Couples are now writing own vows; some are strange vows. What holds a couple together when the romance is not intense? Ritual. Ritual holds you together when the emotion is not all together. No variation in the liturgy of the wedding because audience rehearses the vows with the couple being married. Every couple in the congregation is being remarried. Ritual revitalizes and renews the past. It's not what the ceremony does for the couple that is important as it is for those who hear.

"Fiddler on the Roof" - Opening song, the lead character, Tevya, a Jewish father sings "Tradition," noting that there are rituals for everything. Rituals enable us to keep our balance. Throughout the course of the musical, the traditions begin to break down and as a result, the family breaks down. The end of ritual is the end of the family or group.

In the musical, during the wedding ceremony (ritual) of his daughter, Tevya rehearses his own wedding ceremony. Traditional ceremonies allow everyone present to recall their own wedding and such experience can actually strengthen a marriage. The greatest gift to give older married folks is to have a ceremony and allow them to go through it with you.

Kids don't understand ritual. The kid calls home to tell parents he/she is not coming home for holidays. Mother, "but we always have thanksgiving together." She knows that the breaking of the ritual means the end of family. There is silence during the meal and someone says, "Without John, it's just not the same." Then, new families come into existence whose solidarity depends on the ritual built in them.

There is a high level of emotional instability among young people today. One of the reasons is the low level of ritual among families. There is a rising divorce rate in America today. One of the reasons is the low level of ritual in families. There is failure of the older generation to teach values to younger effectively. One of the reasons is the low level of ritual. The whole society seems to be going insane and one of the reasons is the low level of ritual.

In counseling, one of the first things to learn about clients is how much ritual there is in their family life. If there is a low level of ritual, you can start them at will and as a result improve family life.

If all you have is ritual, then you have an empty shell. But if all you have is an emotional experience, without ritual, you have nothing in which to house that emotional experience and to perpetuate it in time and space.

"Can a nation repeat the same ritual year after year in spite of all the social changes?" Some things never change. Good ritual does not preserve the inconsequential and superfluous but always preserves the essential. When rituals preserve things not worth preserving, people laugh at them. American Indians have proved this. You can recreate identity. They are going through a revitalization movement. They were almost assimilating into the dominant Anglo culture. Now their cultures are coming back. Navajo and others do not even talk of themselves as Americans anymore. They are now establishing identity in terms of their tribal commitments. The way they have done this is by bringing back the old rituals, dancing dances not used for 100 years.

"You are facing a divorce and you feel yourself slipping out of a marriage. What can be done?" Many things; but in terms of ritual, set up a regular eating schedule. Every meal should be ritualistically engaged. Re-establish rituals like going to church together and praying together even if you don't feel like it. The ritual will recreate the feeling you once felt. The last thing you want when a relationship is in a precarious state is spontaneity. If you perform all the rituals that are a part of a good marriage, the rituals tend to create what they symbolize. Sit down with partner and put off divorce for six months and set up rituals. This is guaranteed to work.

Hopi Indians danced the rain dance. Sociologists were curious about this. This dysfunctional social institution should die out if it obviously it doesn't bring rain. They discovered the dance had a latent value. The manifest function was to bring rain. The latent function was to give solidarity and commitment to the tribe. The more they danced the dance, the more Hopi they were.

The more ritualistic your family is, the more solid the family is. This is not only a true lesson for family life, it is also true for our Christian lives. Kids go off to college and the first thing they do is break the religious rituals. They stop going to church. "You don't have to go to church to believe in God," they say. The answer is yes you do. If you stop going to church and break the ritual, it's only a matter of time before the thing the ritual communicated is lost.

In personal Christian life, is it ritualistic? Is there a time every day when you pray and ask for God's blessing. "It's not important to do that. The important thing is that it's in your heart, that

you really feel it." they say. You will not continue to feel it unless the ritual is performed over and over again.

Ritualistically reaffirm faith in Christ daily by performing a ritual that renews your commitment, revitalizes your faith, gives order to your life and sends you on your way rejoicing.

In the midst of an unstable world, what enables us to keep our balance?