



Five Traditions of the Apostles



Rev. Dr. Joseph Tong

I thank God greatly for this opportunity to join with each of you for the 43rd Commencement Exercises. Whenever I see God's love and grace upon our young people, especially seeing that they have been trained by the Lord and are ready to go out into the ministry, I have two kinds of feeling in my heart. First, I am very happy for each one of you, because in the kingdom of God a new force has been added, a new generation who will serve the Lord. On the other hand I am so afraid, because when you are prepared to go out to serve the Lord, on what basis will you go out and serve Him? I recall when I was graduating, I was so confident of myself, thinking I could do anything! But then I realized that I was but a small ant who could not do anything without God's grace. I asked an older minister what I should do, and he advised that when you don't know what to do, do what has been done traditionally.

When you go out into the ministry, you will surely meet problems, but do not forget one thing. You must respect the traditions of the Church. What is the tradition of the Church? In English, tradition is different from heritage. In Chinese when we say *thôan thong* we actually mean heritage. One type of tradition can lead to death; this is called Dead Tradition. The other type makes us live. Many times we feel that Church tradition is dead, but this is not necessarily so. Because the tradition that has been transmitted from generation to generation, this tradition that we have inherited from our forefathers, if we treasure and develop them by God's grace and love, we will be able to stand firm and pass on to the next genera-

tion. Today I will share from Paul's exhortation to the elders of the Ephesian church as he reached the end of his journey. He gave them five traditions that all of us who want to serve the Lord must hold onto dearly.

I. Tradition of Weeping

If you want to serve the Lord, you must be ready to shed tears. The love of God must be in your heart. When God saw that Adam sinned, the Bible says that there was a cool wind as if God's heart was heavy with sorrow and He was looking for His prodigal son. Ever since that time, God has sent His Son and His servants and when they preached, they preached with tears. If you do not have the love for lost souls, have not wept for them, you will not know how to do God's ministry. Jesus wept for Jerusalem. To be the servant of God you must have His heart for the people. Paul said to the elders that for three years, he wept for them day and night (v. 31). May you have this heart of compassion like Paul and Jesus. God's sufficient grace will wipe away your tears and turn them into His power; the Holy Spirit will be with you so that you can do His work. The first tradition then, is to weep, not for yourself, but for the Lord and for lost souls. Throughout Christian history, there has been no exception. If you want to see the church revived, souls repent, believers loving God, it is not by your own strength but by the tears you shed.

II. Tradition of Preaching

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“...the tradition [of the Church] that has been transmitted from generation to generation,... if we treasure and develop them by God's grace and love, we will be able to stand firm and pass on to the next generation.”

Happy Resurrection Day!

Jean Uayan

Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind... (Rom. 12:2)

This past Holy Week, I made it a point to greet my friends "Happy Resurrection Day." I'm trying to find a better alternative to the word "Easter." I could use Pascha, which is the Greek form of the Hebrew Pesah/Pasah. The Spanish say Pascua; the Italians, Pasqua; and the French, Pâques. All of these words refer to the Exodus event which is celebrated by the Jews in the festival called Passover. The trouble I have with the English word for "Easter" is that it comes from the word "Eostre" (from where we get the name of the female hormone, estrogen) or "Eostur" which are of Teutonic (ancient German) origin.

"Eostre" is the name of pagan goddess of fertility, and "Eostur" is the festival of spring. It is the time of equal day and equal night, a perfect balance, and this is significant to those who worship Mother Nature, whether as a religion or as an ecological focus, because spring brings a new cycle in life, a cycle that is so closely related to the fertility and prosperity that all men covet. Customs of celebrating with eggs (symbolic of cosmic egg of creation) and rabbits (fertility) were imported from Mediterranean lands, and the early inhabitants of the British Isles observed it. This celebration takes place during the full moon of the lunar month, called Vernal Equinox

Full Moon.

Although the Church didn't celebrate full moons and they fixed Christ's resurrection day on the first Sunday *after* the Full Moon, yet they retained the name Easter. The Catholic Church was so adamant about not incorporating lunar goddess symbolism that they decided to postpone the celebration to the next Sunday *if* ever the date fell on the Full Moon itself. Yet down through the ages, vestiges of the pagan practices still prevailed, especially with the eggs, rabbits, and chicks motifs. The Microsoft Encarta Encyclopedia states that

traditions associated with the festival survive in the Easter rabbit, a symbol of fertility, and in coloured Easter eggs, originally painted with bright colours to represent the sunlight of spring, and used in Easter-egg-rolling contests or given as gifts.

Aware of the connotations of these motifs, some churches have urged their members to focus on other motifs, such as the lamb, the empty tomb, light shining in darkness, and retelling or acting out the story of Christ's resurrection. These are more significant and better alternatives, in my view.

Likewise, Christians need to be aware that among pagans and other religions, there is a mythological motif of either a goddess or god descending into the

Underworld, and the duration is for three days! This is because before and after the Full Moon, there are two days when the moon is not in sight, or hidden from our views. This is the season of celebrating the victory of life over death, and in the pagan world, there are many solar and lunar heroes/heroines, or gods/goddesses who undergo this experience. Examples are King Arthur, Gwydion and Amaethon (Welsh tradition), and Eostra.

And yet Jesus Christ is not just one among many of these gods/goddesses because he died, "descended into the lower parts of the earth," (Eph 4:9, NASB) was raised from the dead and is now enthroned in heaven. Christ's victory over death is a once-for-all, no-need-to-be-repeated momentarily powerful event that permanently broke the stranglehold of death and brought everlasting life into this hopeless world. As the Bible declares: *God put His power to work in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places.* (Eph 1:20) This assurance and firm foundation that were accomplished by Jesus Christ are infinitely better and definitely much more desirable than what non-Christian religions can offer. This earth will one day pass away; Mother Earth is an illusory deity, and man is now free from the cycle of birth-death-rebirth that is the only "hope" traditional religions can offer. *I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which He has called you...and His incomparably great power for us who believe.* (Eph. 1:18 NIV). HALLELUJAH! HAPPY RESURRECTION DAY!

equipping I have received for the ministry. I pray that my training will make me a better servant of God, ready to be used by Him anytime, anywhere, and in anyway that He sees fit. Praise the Lord!

RICHARD GUION

If I were to describe my life in BSOP in a capsule, I would say that it was ALL BY THE GRACE OF GOD. How could I not put it this

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MORE GRADUATION TESTIMONIES

MAYRA JOY CHIO

Time flies really fast. It seemed like yesterday when I left Bacolod and entered BSOP, graduated last April 1, 2001 with the M. Div. major of Christian Education degree and now... the time has come for me to graduate again with a major in Pastoral Counseling.

Indeed I am very thankful to God for four

years of teaching and training me for His ministry. During this time, God has taught me and molded me in every aspect of life: my daily devotion with God; daily interaction with professors, schoolmates, classmates, and BSOP workers; my weekly practical field work and time doing my assignments. BSOP not only trained me academically, my life has been molded in many ways. I am grateful for the time spent at BSOP, for the training and



FACULTY ON THE MOVE

- Dr. Joseph Shao will be attending the 10th Anniversary of Evangelism Explosion in Russia on June 24, 2002. He will then proceed to San Francisco (July 1-6, 2002) and teach a course on the Books of Ezra/ Nehemiah at the Reformed Institute at Stanford Seminary.
- Rev. Wilson Go Kiao was the guest speaker at the First Family Conference of Christ Universal Church on March 28-31, 2002. He also supervised students who were doing their practicum at Jesus Christ Church of Calapan on May 10-13, 2002.
- Rev. Dennis Yam led a Masterplanning seminar at Dumaguete Christian Church on May 6-9, with the church and youth leaders attending. He also visited practicum students at Cagayan Gospel Church, Cebu Gospel Church and Dumaguete Christian Church.

NEW AND VISITING FACULTY

- OMF missionary Jay Hallowell (D. Miss. Candidate) has been assigned to teach Mission courses in BSOP starting June, 2002, for a term of four years.
- Aside from Dr. Glen Scorgie who will teach *Theology of Spirituality* (June 10-15), another visiting faculty is Dr. Paul Shen who will offer a module on *Preaching* to the Mandarin-speaking students. Dr. Paul Kong taught a summer module on *Christian Ethics* from May 27-31, 2002.

FULLY BOOKED

This year the campus was again fully booked. The month-long MACE courses, summer conferences (2), kids' camps (2), Youth Leaders retreat (1), and our own fulltimers' camp made full use of our facilities.

SHORT TERM MISSIONS

Two teams went north and south of Luzon to plant seeds of the gospel in different Chinese communities. The first group, led by Dr. Jane Chuaunsu, with team members Cai Lian Qing, Lin Chao Qun, You Yong, went to Sta. Cruz and Los Banos. The other team, led by Rev. Wilson Go Kiao, with Wang Dong Feng, Wang Ming Qing, Li Rui visited San Fernando (La Union), Laoag and Vigan.

NEW CURRICULUM

Praise God! With the permit given by the Commission on Higher Education, we will be launching the Master of Intercultural Studies this coming school year. Please pray for the new school year which will start on June 17, 2002.

SUMMER Theological Education by Extension

UECLegazpi	<i>Chinese Folk Religion</i> Dr. Tan Chiu Eng
Cagayan Gospel Church	<i>Jonah</i> Rev. Dennis Yam
Bacolod Trinity Christian Church	<i>Inductive Bible Study</i> Prof. Allen Lim

www.bsophil.org

Launched last March, BSOP is now in cyberspace. As we continue to build our website, check in from time to time to find more features and information. We hope that this will serve as a tool to build bridges between BSOP and the church, alumni, and friends.

(TESTIMONIES, Continued from page 2)
way? Consider the following facts:

Having no definite source of financial support at the start, I ventured to the seminary with a pregnant wife and an almost two-year-old daughter.

Trained previously in a far-flung Bible institute, I sat with classmates who hailed from some of the prestigious universities of the country.

Burdened with "tons" of reading assignments and research papers, I also played the role of a husband to my wife, a father to my children, and a pastor to a number of believers under my care.

Armed only with an elementary Chinese education from the province, I was ex-

pected to preach to Chinese congregations and even communicate daily with Mandarin-speaking schoolmates from China and Taiwan.

Lacking in exemplary Christian virtues and a natural flair for socializing, I had to deal with various people day in and day out.

Possessing a basic skill in administration, I served the student council as the president.

Now, dear reader, please tell me. Wasn't it ALL BY THE GRACE OF GOD?

For more testimonies, log on to:
www.bsophil.org/testimonies.htm

The second tradition is the preaching ministry of the apostles. When we preach, we must remember that we are preaching God's word. We must study the word of God faithfully. Do not think that after you graduate you can stop reading God's word. I can say proudly that I have read the Bible sixty times. Once I met someone who said he read the Bible 1,000 times! How about you? I require my students to read the Bible four times before they graduate, but I cannot do that here for I am not the president of this seminary. There are many other seminaries that don't even teach their students to read the Bible. How can the Church be revived? Whatever ministry we are doing, we must preach the word of God. May you be like Amos who could not help but proclaim the word of God, although he was not a prophet but only a herdsman and grower of sycamore figs. May you be like Jeremiah who said that the word of God was in His heart burning like fire. If I do not proclaim it, it will burn me up. It doesn't matter how much knowledge you have, if you do not preach God's word, you will not serve Him well. The people need God's word. May you be able to say: "I praise God! I do not have anything but I have the word of God!"

III. Tradition of Commitment

We must give ourselves fully to the Lord. When I was young, a song really touched my heart. It said: The way of the cross is a way of suffering. Whether gain or loss, it is not important; we must heed God's will in our hearts. God has called you, Jesus has saved you. You must live for Him. But whether you live or die is not important. What is important is you must finish the course of your life. Paul was a man of commitment, although bonds and afflictions awaited him. *I do not consider my life of any account as dear to*

myself, so that I may finish my course and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify solemnly of the gospel of the grace of God (v. 24). Down through the ages, such has been the attitude of God's faithful servants. May this tradition not stop with our generation. Recently I have been editing the biography of Yang Yi Dong, a pastor in Beijing. When he died his son testified that the whole family suffered terribly with him because he wanted to serve God. Yet despite these great sufferings, he said that his father left them with a clean slate and self-respect. May this be true of us all. We must not sell out God's grace. We must be faithful until death.

IV. Tradition of Pasturing

Paul exhorted the elders of Ephesus *to be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood*. (v. 28) Paul warned them that the wolves would come, even from among themselves, deceiving the believers to follow them. When you become a pastor, may you not have a selfish heart, whatever you do, you must take good care of the flock. Don't whip them, don't kill and eat them, but rather, teach them God's word, love them, guide them. It is very easy to do what you desire and build your own little kingdom. But remember that God said I am the ever-living God; I will not give my glory to those who want to rob Me of My glory. If you grab the glory of God He will not let you off the hook that easily.

V. Tradition of Simplicity

When we do God's work, we must not be complicated but be very simple in our lifestyle. As Paul testified, *I have coveted no one's silver or gold or clothes. You yourselves know that these hands ministered to my own needs and to the men who were*

with me. (vv. 33, 34) As a servant of God, we must remember that we are public servants. We must not try to gain anything from our ministry. When I was ordained as a young pastor, I started out with a lot of authority. Under me, there were 30 churches, 60 pastors and ministers; I was overseeing all of them. But remember always that if there are people below you, you are also below someone. I praise God that He taught me how to be submissive and humble. There was a treasurer in my Synod at the time. He deliberately did not give me my salary, in order to test whether I was "spiritual" or not. I was very young at that time, and I experienced five days when I had nothing to eat, not because I was fasting, but because this treasurer would not give out my salary, just waiting to see if I would make the first move. But I praise God, I was able to endure and not die of hunger or anger! All because of God's grace. Don't think of what you NEED to live, but think of what you DON'T NEED to live. From that time on, I began to learn what I do not really need. I discovered I only needed God's grace. We must all learn this. Your lifestyle must be as simple as possible. Do not say if I do not have a house, a car, servants, then I will not go to this church. It doesn't matter what you GET, but it does matter what you GIVE. What can you share with people? May you follow this tradition of simplicity, be submissive, humble and live a simple lifestyle.

These traditions of the church are the traditions of the apostles. May we continue to accept and transmit these traditions. Then God's ministry will continue. May God's grace be with you even as throughout your whole life you faithfully seek to serve Him.

(This Commencement Address, based on Acts 20:17-35, was given on March 24, 2002 at the BSOP Auditorium. The summary is written by Prof. Jean Uayan)

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