

A NEW PARADIGM FOR CHRISTIAN SPIRITUALITY

A paradigm shift has been occurring from an older view of Christian living to a newer paradigm, illustrated in the table below. (The newer paradigm for Christian living also incorporates a new vision for integrating spirituality with justice.)

Moving toward the new vision – individually and corporately – involves reading carefully each statement, reflecting on it, and then listing specific steps for implementation.

| A NEW PARADIGM FOR CHRISTIAN SPIRITUALITY | |
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| Older Paradigm for Christian Living¹ | Newer Paradigm for Christian Living² |
| Otherworldliness – earthly existence is mainly a “testing period” preliminary to “real” fulfillment in the afterlife. | God values mankind’s earthly existence – this fills history with intrinsic meaning. |
| Spirituality that is elitist and individualistic, concerned mainly with prayer and spiritual exercises. | Spirituality concerns the whole of the Christian religious life. |
| Individualism implicitly supplies a rationale for avoiding concern for social change. | Concern for <i>social justice</i> is at the heart of discipleship, seen in the various ways the newer spirituality is described: creation-centered, liberationist, prophetic, or spirituality of social justice. |
| The focus is mainly on the spirituality of one’s particular faith tradition. | Appreciation is for the spiritualities of Protestants, Catholics, non-Christians, and even non-theistic religious traditions. |
| Spirituality is between the ‘soul’ and God. | God is immanent in all relationships. |
| God’s relation to creation is one of domination and control. | God’s relation to creation is one of energizing and nurturing. |
| The emphasis is on a “patriarchal” God-consciousness. | The emphasis is on a relational, liberating God-consciousness. |

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| <p>Grace is some sort of “thing” needed for admittance into heaven.</p> | <p>Grace is personal and involves God’s presence and empowerment. It is another name for the “Spirit of God” (God’s power immanent in the universe).</p> |
| <p>God is experienced as remote, outside of the world, and acting over people.</p> | <p>God is immanent, involved in the world, and acting through people.</p> |
| <p>A tendency to affirm one half of a polar tension at the expense of the other (e.g. divine transcendence at the expense of God’s immanence; the spiritual by denigrating the physical and material; contemplation favored over action; individual emphasized over the social context).</p> | <p>Authentic contemporary spirituality affirms both poles of the tension at once (e.g. contact with the transcendent God in prayer and other cultic activity does not ‘leave the world behind’ but rather bestows an absolute depth and seriousness precisely to our life in this world; body-soul dualism is rejected and spirituality is seen as bodily existence in the world according to the Spirit of God).</p> |
| <p>An emphasis exists on privatization and individualism.</p> | <p>Contemplation in action which stresses the social constitution of the person and the social dimension of human freedom.</p> |
| <p>Spirituality is relegated to the cloister.</p> | <p>Social justice is recognized as everyone’s responsibility</p> |
| <p>An other-worldly spirituality of <i>Pilgrim’s Progress</i> is evident.</p> | <p>A this-worldly spirituality of historical affirmation is evident.</p> |
| <p>Economic and social relationships that are far from respectful of the humanity of persons in subordinate positions are left uncriticized.</p> | <p>Reflection about justice must go on in the context of recognizing that it can no longer be assumed that social and economic patterns are basically good, much less divinely established.</p> |

| Older Ideals for the Christian Life | Newer Ideals for the Christian Life |
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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Patriarchal” model for Christian character. • Other-worldliness, as well as patterns of domination and subordination. • Misogynism and body-rejecting dualism. Women expected to excel in charity and chastity. Men trained to think in terms of justice and rights. • Focus of religious devotion is the directing of one’s energy to controlling bodily impulses and other people. Virtue involved the control of passion by reason and subordination of earthly values to ‘supernatural’ ones. • Suffering – an apocalyptic mentality in which the ‘righteous’ see themselves enduring persecution from godless enemies in this world, but ultimately vindicated in the next. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Men and women are <i>equal</i> partners in the human community. • Notion of <i>respect</i> for created reality is fundamental (not <i>control</i>). • Sexuality seen as a matter of social justice, as well as of personal virtue (rather than concentrating on chastity <i>per se</i>). • Focus of religious devotion involves a stance of on-going commitment to the well-being (which is at once spiritual and material) of oneself and others – this entails concern for building social relations of <i>respect</i>, <i>equality</i>, and <i>mutuality</i>, thus emphasizing the virtues of solidarity and justice. • Suffering – forces of evil long structured into unjust power relationships exist that will seek to destroy those who dedicate themselves to the cause of social and economic justice. However, there is the continued involvement of God in human history which means that the campaign has in principle been won. |

¹ Anne Patrick, “Ethics and Spirituality: The Social Justice Connection”, *The Way Supplement* 63 (1988): 103-116.

² Ibid.