

Session 10

The Adventure in Discipline for a Christian Resurgence Circle

The word “discipline” raises eyebrows, because our culture (formed by the Enlightenment and by romanticism) is schooled in antiauthoritarianism and individualistic overemphasis. The majority of Christian-identified people insist on doing their own thing. The exceptions are loyal churchgoers who make religious attendance into a prideful moralism. It will remain difficult to find the middle ground between moralism and libertarianism. To acquire the discipline needed for being an effective Christian Resurgence Circle will never be easy.

Discipline as a Primal Attitude

Being human is not like being a rock or a tree. It is not like being a plant, reptile, mammal, or even a biped with opposable thumbs. Being human means being aware of our own death and our deep freedom. Being human is a gift that is also a task and as such, requires discipline. Being human requires initiative. Being human requires keeping at it. Being human requires obedience to the essence of being a human being. Being human requires both attentionality and intentionality. Being human requires response rooted in openness to encounter. Being human requires paying attention to Reality and taking initiative within the unfolding of our actual possibilities. Being human does not just happen. A human is required to be human intentionally. Such discipline does not mean subservience to rules or laws or authoritative persons. Such discipline is a self-initiated loyalty to being the being we essentially are. Such discipline is more of a surrender than a conquest. Although more of a “letting-be” than an achievement, such discipline requires consciousness and passion and detailed considerations.

Discipline as a Cultic Practice

This primal devotion to being our true being can be enabled by a group practice, a “cultic” discipline – perhaps a set of written agreements. Such a specific practice of discipline is essential for an effective Christian Resurgence Circle. Discipline is necessary for worship, study, witnessing love, or contribution to social and ecological justice to take place.

Such a discipline begins with very simple commitments: Come to the weekly meeting unless a true emergency intervenes. Come on time. Come prepared for the group study. Come prepared to perform your role of leadership when assigned. These agreements may seem unimportant, but they reveal the presence of (or the lack of) that deeper discipline discussed above as a primal attitude.

That deeper discipline is more fully manifest in these expectations: Listen to others when it is appropriate for you to listen. Speak when it is appropriate for you to speak. Speak honestly and openly. Admit being defensive when you are. Give up being defensive when you can. Forgive everyone no matter how disgusting they seem. Challenge everyone no matter how brilliant they may seem. Pay attention. Take initiative. Blame no one for your behavior. Take responsibility for your own feelings, thoughts, words, and actions. Be flexible. Be firm. Be who you are in the deepest sense of “you.” Realize that the true “you” is a mystery unknown even to you. Value the whole group over your own interests or the interests of anyone else, however sentimental you may be about that person. Our obedience to this endless list will result

in many failures and much need for forgiveness. Such discipline and such forgiveness are two aspects of the same process.

Forgiveness does not mean that we indulge others or indulge ourselves but that each of us is welcomed home to realistic living, no matter how often or deplorably we stray. Confession of this straying and the announcement of absolution are both part of the discipline we need.

Absolution means calling attention to the everlasting truth that Final Reality welcomes all returning prodigals. Like a devoted mother or father, Reality runs to meet the returning prodigal with clean clothes in hand. Absolution is a sort of feast in which the group shares joy with the returning prodigal.

This amazing and deep discipline takes place not only within the life of the Circle but in the lives of the Circle members. Witnessing love in our real world relations requires discipline -- that is, a creative discipline, not some rigid obligation to assault people with your last best thinking. The discipline of witnessing love means paying attention to where other people are, what language they speak, what they can hear at this time, and what their next steps in realistic living might be. Disciplined witnessing love requires boldness and risk, but also appropriateness, and in the end, leaving decisions regarding transformation up to those who are (or are not) being transformed.

Discipline is also prominent in making our contributions to social and ecological justice. Whatever tiny piece of the global transition we choose to lift, it will require persistence, accurate thinking, careful handling of enemies as well as friends, continual review of our efforts, and continual willingness to change our actions. All this is part of the discipline that forms the core of our Christian Resurgence Circle practice.

Discipline as a Solitary Practice

Another part of our CRC discipline is to encourage one another to construct a daily solitary exercise that nurtures our Spirit. If we have not deeply examined this discipline here, it is not because we think it less important. In fact, we plan to create another ten-week course on this topic, going into some detail about reading, journaling, meditating, contemplating, praying, and other practices that assist our Spirit journey. For now, suffice it to say that no group practice can optimize its nurture of the Spirit journey unless members are also committed to solitary methods of opening to Spirit.

Discipline as Glue

Discipline of the sort indicated here is the glue that holds a Christian Resurgence Circle together. It takes a strong, binding force to hold together a group of Spirit-maturing and creative people who are also experts at fleeing and fighting with Reality. It takes a strong, binding force to hold together powerful nurture and effective mission. Some persons will be passionate about the nurture of worship and study but reluctant to engage in the mission of witnessing love and social transition. For others their passion will be for the mission, tending toward omission of the nurture required to do that mission well. Discipline holds nurture and mission together. Discipline glues a body of individuals into a community of effective living. Discipline is the glue without which a Christian Resurgence Circle flies apart.

Discipline is also the glue that holds each of us to the practices necessary for ever-greater appropriation of our essential being, our ever-greater trust and surrender to Final Reality, our ever-greater embodiment of the Christ life we cherish.