

## ORTHOPRAXY LEADS TO REAL ORTHODOXY

### **8<sup>th</sup> Core Principle: We do not think ourselves into a new way of living; but we live ourselves into a new way of thinking. (praxis over theory)**

A few months ago I again found myself using the above phrase, a great one-liner that had been central to our pastoral vision at the New Jerusalem Community in Cincinnati. Then I wondered why I had not been using such a great teaching tool for some time. How did the phrase slip out of my consciousness, since I actually believe it now more than ever? I am still not sure why, especially since some volunteer groups had even put it on the back of their T-shirts! Then I realized that it clearly belongs in our Vision and Mission statement of the Center for Action and Contemplation, since it is, in fact, at the core of our model of education here.

It has grounded all our CAC sponsored programs, including the Internships and our immersion trips to the border in Juarez, Mexico, and the Men's Rites of Passage. It is underneath our recognition that the “contents”—which we emphasize here—tend to spill all over the place if there is not a proper “container” which inherently validates the contents. Every vision needs a vehicle or the vision itself soon becomes vague, distorted, and unshareable. Jesus said that every wine needs a proper wineskin—or *both* are finally lost (Mark 2:22). So the Board of Directors of the CAC officially and happily agreed that this would be our 8th official core principle, emphasizing the importance of praxis over theory, and would be added to our vision and philosophy statement. I will talk about it a bit here, so you will know why we think this is so important.

Education theory in the last fifty years has come more and more to the conclusion that the lecture method and mere reading are actually among the least effective forms of teaching. They are highly passive, individualistic, do not necessarily integrate head with heart or body, and leave the ego in its usual defended position and virtually untouched. As long as our ego self is in the driver's seat, nothing really new or challenging is allowed. Remember our ego is committed to *not* changing, and is highly defensive by its very nature.

The form of education which most changes people in lasting ways has to touch them at a broader level than the thinking or reading mind. Some call it integrative education, transformative education, or even lifestyle education. Somehow we need to engage in hands-on experience, emotional risk taking, moving outside of our comfort zones, with different people than our usual flattering friends. We need some expanded level of spiritual seeing or nothing really changes at a deep level. Within minutes or hours of entertaining a new idea, we quickly return to our old friends, our assured roles, our familiar neural grooves, our ego patterns of response, business as usual; and it is as if we never read that latest book or heard that last lecture or sermon! We are all creatures of habit and fall most easily into the familiar and the customary.

The genuinely new or different is always a threat. Unless there is something strong enough to rearrange our worldview, call our assumptions into question, and also engage our heart and body (“at the cellular level” as I like to call it), we will seldom move to new interior or exterior places. God has a hard time getting us to join Abraham and Sarah in “leaving your country and your family for a new land that I will show you” (Genesis 12:1-2).

The Dalai Lama said it well, “Every change of mind is first of all a change of heart.” Equally, “Every change of heart is soon a change of mind.” This is the urgently needed work of mature spirituality and the vision of our work here at the Center. All this probably seems strange coming from someone who writes and talks as much as I do, but actually it is exactly my experience as a

teacher that has led me to this conclusion. Many folks over the years, even very good-willed people, have read and listened to my presentations of the Gospel yet have actually done very little—in terms of lifestyle changes, economic or political rearrangements, or even church reform. After all, “Church is just believing ideas to be true or false, isn’t it?” “Religion is about attending services, isn’t it?” They just listen to my ideas and judge them to be true or false. They either “like” them or do not “like” them. But it never gets to any new “practices” or changes of patterns or habits. *Transformative education is not asking you to believe or disbelieve in any doctrines or dogmas. It is saying, “Try this!” Then you will know something to be true or false for yourself.*

So here at the CAC we will continue to say, “Try this, go here, change sides, move outside your comfort zone, make some new contacts, let go of your usual role and attractive self image, walk instead of drive, make a friend from another race or class, visit not as a tourist but in the neighborhoods, go to the jail or to the border, attend another church for a while, etc. etc. etc. Then we can live ourselves into new ways of thinking, which then seem so called for that we wonder how we could have ever thought in any other way! Before new experience, new thinking is difficult and dangerous. Afterwards, the new thinking is natural and even necessary.