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# 11

## The 'Charge' We Have to 'Keep'

*Enhancing Gospel-Integrity in Christian Higher Education*

VICTOR SHEPHERD

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"A charge to keep I have,  
A God to glorify,  
To serve the present age,  
My calling to fulfill"  
—CHARLES WESLEY<sup>1</sup>

### INTRODUCTION

SEVERAL YEARS AGO, TYNDALE University (my current employer) rejoiced that the word 'university' now appeared in its masthead. While the seminary had been a seminary since 1974, the former Bible college was finally elevated to the status of university college. There was exultation throughout the institution.

In the midst of the understandable exuberance, the provost, who had presided over the same sort of transition in academic institutions in Western Canada, took me aside. Without chilling anyone's celebration he

1. Wesley, *Works of John Wesley*, 7:465.

remarked, “The challenge to Tyndale now isn’t to increase academic rigour and respectability. In fact, academic rigour and respectability will become its preoccupation. The challenge to Tyndale will be to retain its Christian conviction and identity and mission. I have watched Christian colleges all over North America,” he continued, “improve their academic offerings while allowing their Christian character to attenuate.”<sup>2</sup>

Decades earlier David D. Lutz, a graduate philosophy student at Notre Dame University, argued that historic Methodist Universities in the USA, including Emory, Duke, Boston, Northwestern, Syracuse, Vanderbilt, and the University of Southern California, may have ongoing ties to the United Methodist Church but have long since forfeited any Christian substance.<sup>3</sup>

I pondered the situation closer to home. From 2002 until 2016 I was an adjunct professor at Trinity College (Anglican), University of Toronto. The faculty of divinity at Trinity is small: four full-time professors. Two of them, however, are self-declared atheists. The provost at Tyndale was correct. Christian educational institutions take pains to ensure their academic integrity. Frequently, however, they appear less concerned about ensuring their Christian identity.

Since such attenuation tempts and threatens Christian institutions of higher education relentlessly, and since there is no shortage of (formerly) Christian institutions who have succumbed, capitulated, and given up their birthright, we should be alert to this development and recognize it.

What are some signs that theological erosion is at the door?

## THE SHIFT FROM TRUTH CULTURE TO THERAPY CULTURE

Thomas Oden, a Methodist theologian whose name is still redolent (he died 8 December 2016), has said there are two competing cultures in society and church today: a truth culture and a therapy culture.<sup>4</sup>

A truth culture, Oden maintains, asks two questions: “What *is*” and “What is *right*?” A therapy culture asks but one question: “How does it *feel*?”

It can be maintained that Christian higher education (or at least seminary education) in North America prior to World War II largely presupposed a truth culture; but after World War II, a therapy culture. In the wake of World War II, North Americans felt jarred and jolted if not wounded

2. Provost Earl Davey, in a private conversation with Prof. Victor Shepherd.

3. Lutz, “Can Notre Dame Be Saved?”

4. Oden, *Care of the Soul in the Classic Tradition*, 28–30.

(even though they had suffered far less than the European and Slavic people in whose front yards the war had been fought, and whose wartime civilian deaths outnumbered combatants' deaths for the first time in military history). In light of the North American people's conviction that they were suffering extraordinarily, they introduced pastoral theology and pastoral psychology to the seminary curriculum. At first it was merely one more subject in the curriculum, an addition to, but not a rival of, the traditional disciplines of Scripture, theology, history, liturgy, and homiletics. Little by little, however, it came to dominate the curriculum. It came to dominate not by crowding out formally the place of other disciplines, but rather by intruding itself into the substance of these disciplines, with the result that theology, for instance, gradually became less the articulation of the catholic substance of the faith "once for all delivered to the saints" (Jude 3) in the thought-forms and language of contemporaneity, less a mandate to "guard the truth that has been entrusted to you [Timothy] by the Holy Spirit who dwells within us" (2 Tim 1:14). Incrementally theology became the religious legitimization of a psychological preoccupation whose agenda derived largely from the social sciences and the prioritizing of intra-psychic contentment and self-fulfillment.

In my own seminary, Tyndale (in Toronto), the single largest major by far is counselling. And whereas in my seminary days (1967–1970) everyone in the seminary was pursuing ordination to the ministry of Word, Sacrament, and Pastoral Care, today (at Tyndale, at least), only 11% of students plan to enter the pulpit/pastoral ministry. Most graduates of the counselling programme will seek counselling positions outside the institutional church. In order to be employed in secular venues they will have to minimize their identity as Christians and maximize their identification with the psycho-social *Zeitgeist*. As a professor of theology and philosophy, I have observed the shift in seminary students' concerns from truth culture to therapy culture.

Let's examine briefly the distinction between truth and therapy cultures respectively. The truth culture asks first, "What is?"—that is, "What is real? What is real rather than merely apparent? What is real rather than merely actual? What is *ultimately* real?" In relation to this question, the truth culture also asks, "What is right? What ought we to do? How is what we ought to do constrained by what is? In short, how does the real constrain the righteous?" If our ability to discern reality is diminished, is our ability to exemplify righteousness comparably threatened?

When Jesus says, "I am the way, the truth and the life" (John 14:6), the Greek word John uses for truth is *aletheia*. Today we regularly use 'truth' as a predicate of statements. The statement "The sun is 93 million miles from the earth" is adjudged truth. In the Greek of antiquity, however, *aletheia*, truth, was 'reality disclosing itself'. Not only did ancient Greek philosophy understand 'truth' to be 'reality disclosing itself'; so does a modern philosopher (Martin Heidegger, we might note), even if what he means by 'reality disclosing itself' is certainly something other than 'Jesus Christ in the power of the Spirit'.<sup>5</sup>

The therapy culture, on the other hand, asks one question only: "How does it feel?" The concern here is the adjusting of feeling. Overlooked here is whether the feeling is appropriate, inappropriate, or out-and-out neurotic. The therapy culture aims at reducing intrapsychic discomfort (which aim, we should note, is not to be slighted or trivialized). The question of whether the person who feels guilty, for instance, *ought* to feel guilty; this question isn't paramount, if it is raised at all.

In my work as pastor (I was a pastor with denominational appointment from 1970 to 2006) I frequently had congregants in my study telling me, for instance, that one had to be wary of extra-marital affairs just because such liaisons might 'get you hurt.' Not merely the predominant issue here but the only issue was whether and how one might be hurt. Not even to be considered was the 'truth' issue of what is real and right; namely, the holy God's engagement with a people he is fixed upon rendering holy. Holiness happens to be Scripture's preoccupation, or in the words of John Wesley, its "general tenor," one ingredient of this being our recognition of God's righteous claim upon our obedience and God's blessing promised to it.<sup>6</sup>

What are the signs that such a shift is underway?

### *Signs of the Shift*

#### FIRST SIGN: SHIFTS IN MEANINGS

One sign of such a shift in the church and its related institutions is the retention of Christian vocabulary while importing non-Christian meanings.

5. Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 219–23.

6. Wesley uses this expression throughout his *Works*. See *Works of John Wesley*, 26:158–60.

Consider the word 'guilt.' At one time 'guilt' described one's situation before God. As sinners, we are guilty inasmuch as we have violated God-in-person (not inasmuch as we have violated a moral code, it must be noted). Having violated God-in-person we have broken God's heart, provoked God's anger, and aroused God's disgust.<sup>7</sup> Our guilty condition, guilty state, imperils us before God. Be sure to notice that as sinners we *are* guilty before God regardless of how we *feel*. We may feel blissfully happy (because living in the spiritual equivalent of a fool's paradise), unaware of our perilous predicament before God, as happy as party-goers on a boat-outing who are unaware that the boat is about to capsize.

In this regard C. S. Lewis has pointed out that the language of the Anglican *Book of Common Prayer* is realistic at all points. When worshippers confess, week by week, that they are 'miserable offenders,' their misery pertains not to how they happen to feel but to their predicament before God.<sup>8</sup>

Another instance of retaining Christian words while importing non-Christian meanings pertains to forgiveness. The word 'forgive' has been retained although the meaning now is 'excuse.' "I forgive you" now has the force of "I understand the extenuating circumstances that explain, in part or in whole, why you did what you did. I see now what factors precipitated what you did, and therefore I recognize that you can't finally be held accountable for it. Therefore, I can excuse it." Lost here is the crucial distinction between forgiving and excusing; namely, we excuse what is excusable, whereas we forgive precisely what is inexcusable. The day you tell me you have forgiven me is the day you have judged me wholly inexcusable. In the same vein, to say with the Apostles' Creed, "I believe in the forgiveness of sins," is to say that God, the Holy One, has pronounced us utterly without excuse; and God, the just judge, has condemned us. His forgiveness, in other words, is a reprieve that spares us ultimate loss.

Related to the shift we are illustrating is the vocabulary of sin. Whereas sin is a violation of God born of our disobedience, ingratitude, rebellion, defiance, and disdain; in short, the 'unbelief' of the heart (not merely or chiefly of the head), 'sin' has come to mean immorality. Overlooked here is the scriptural insistence that moral people sin as much in their morality as

7. Martin Luther frequently reminds readers that sin provokes God's disgust. No less frequently Luther uses his characteristically earthy language to speak of it. See Oberman, "Teufelsdreck: Eschatology and Scatology in the 'Old' Luther," 51-68. Concerning fallen humans, Calvin (*Sermons on the Epistle to the Ephesians*, 129) says as much: "There is nothing but rottenness and infection in us. God loathes us . . ."

8. Lewis, *Miserable Offenders*.

immoral people sin in their immorality. The apostle Paul, we should note, never says that Jesus died for the immoral; he insists that Jesus died for the ungodly (Rom 5:6). Moral people and immoral are alike ungodly, alike equidistant from the Kingdom of God. Did Jesus ever suggest anything else? Did our Lord ever receive better treatment at the hands of the moral than at the hands of the immoral? Among whom were his friends found? And who found him insufferable? Were not the most moral people those who hated him most thoroughly? Was he not faulted for the welcome he accorded moral failures and rejects? Let me say it again: according to Scripture's understanding of sin, moral and immoral persons alike are equidistant from the Kingdom.

While the Apostles' Creed gathers up the whole of the Christian life in the expression, "I believe in the forgiveness of sins"—meaning, "I believe that in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, and in that Spirit the Son bears and bestows, the entire cosmos is renewed and me with it"—today we are told in many areas of the church, with increasing frequency, that the church should jettison a liturgical confession of sin because such confession is 'too negative'; people go to church, we are told, 'to hear something positive'; any mention of sin is deemed at best counterproductive turnoff, and at worst a pathological diminution of ego-strength.

I am dismayed as I come upon more and more congregations whose service of public worship no longer includes a corporate prayer of confession and declaration of absolution. Plainly all such services assume that worshippers are not sinners. They may be anxious, unfulfilled, fretful, frustrated, nervous; they may be ardent, ambitious, zealous, or eager. But they are not sinners.

Scripture contradicts such self-deception and folly. Together with Luther, all the Protestant Reformers insist that Christians remain under two determinations: the righteousness of Christ, and the 'old' man/woman of sin. Admittedly, these determinations are not weighted equally: the determination of Christ's righteousness is definitive and characterizes the Christian; the determination of sin, however, remains operative, and for this reason the 'old' man/woman, slain at the cross but refusing to die quietly, says Luther, paradoxically must be slain anew every day. For this reason Luther has as the first of his Ninety-Five Theses, "When Our Lord and Master Jesus Christ said, 'Repent,' he willed the *entire* life of believers to be one of repentance."<sup>9</sup> Luther never moved away from his insistence that Christians

9. Luther, *Luther's Works*, 31:25. Emphasis added.

remain *simul totus iustus et simul totus peccator*: we are simultaneously both wholly justified in Christ and wholly sinful in ourselves.<sup>10</sup> Calvin concurs: concerning Christians he insists, “For what have we but infection and filthiness? . . . We are loathsome in his sight, yet in spite of this, it is his [i.e., God’s] will to have us joined to him [i.e., Jesus Christ].”<sup>11</sup>

“The contemporary declension and concomitant shallowness are grievous, for if people aren’t sinners, then Jesus Christ may be a good example but he certainly isn’t Saviour. If we aren’t sinners, then the cross may be an instance of martyrdom (neither more nor less significant than the martyrdom of John the Baptist or Dietrich Bonhoeffer), but the cross certainly isn’t atonement wherein the Holy God and unholy creatures are made ‘at-one,’ reconciled. If we aren’t sinners, then Good Friday may be ‘good’ in the sense that it’s psychologically good for us to “pour contempt on all our pride” (please note that Isaac Watts’ hymn *When I Survey the Wondrous Cross* says nothing, utterly nothing, about the cross and what God achieved there), but Good Friday isn’t ‘Good’ in the sense of ‘God’s Friday’ (as our mediaeval Christian foreparents called it). Good Friday, we ought to acknowledge, is good since God the just judge judged sin in the cross of his Son, and simultaneously God the just judge *absorbed in himself* his own judgment on sin, thereby allowing sinners a future they could never merit. Apart from ‘God’s Friday,’ the predicament of sinners is hopeless.

Retaining biblical words while simultaneously importing non-biblical meanings is a clear sign that the shift from truth culture to therapy culture is underway in the church.

## SECOND SIGN: SHIFT IN IDEOLOGIES

Related to the above and no less ominous is the replacement of biblical categories with non-biblical ideologies. Consider the word ‘mutuality.’ It appears innocuous. In fact, it points to a tectonic shift in our understanding of human sexuality.

Scripture insists that humanity is co-humanity. The text of Gen 1 reads, “Let us make man (*adam*, humankind) in our image . . . Male and female (*ish* and *ishah*) he created them” (Gen 1:26–27). According to the text, the definition of the human always entails gender correlation. It is male and female *together* who are made in the image of God.<sup>12</sup>

10. For a discussion of this point, see Shepherd, *Interpreting Martin Luther*, 145–68.

11. Calvin, *Sermons on the Epistle to the Ephesians*, 123.

12. While Karl Barth has highlighted gender-complementarity with respect to the

Am not I, Victor, an individual agent, possessed of my own identity, and the subject of my own existence; am I not made in the image of God? Indeed, I am—as long as it is remembered that I am what I am only in the context of what I am not: woman. This truth is operative whether I am married or not, sexually active or not.

It should be noted here that our Lord tacitly endorses this truth repeatedly. Luke tells us, for instance, that Jesus, an unmarried male, included in his expanded band of disciples both married and unmarried women (Luke 8:1–3). His encounter with the Samaritan woman at the well was nothing less than scandalous, in view of the strictures of his era (John 4:1–26). He received the affection of a woman who unpinned her hair in public (no less), and then proceeded to wipe his bare feet with her hair—an act, most any psychiatrist will admit, that is unambiguously erotic (Luke 7:36–50). Not to be overlooked is the fact that Luke, in his written Gospel, mentions thirteen encounters with women that are mentioned nowhere else.

According to Scripture, male-female complementarity is just that: a complementarity that is unsubstitutable. This complementarity entails correlation: male and female are correlates, not correspondents. If man and woman merely corresponded to each other in some sense, then the disappearance of one would permit the survival of the other. Since, however, they are correlates, the disappearance of one entails the disappearance of both.

Three decades ago The United Church of Canada, the first major Protestant denomination to normalize homosexual behaviour and the ordination of persons involved in same-gender genital intimacy, began using 'mutuality' intentionally as a protest against and alternative to 'complementarity.' Male/male mutuality; female/female mutuality; this notion replaced male/female complementarity. The replacement, with its attendant code-word, was a major item in the elevation and implementation of the homosexual agenda.

At a recent meeting of the Board of Trustees of a Christian university, a speaker invoked the 'God of mutuality.' Immediately I recognized a code word; immediately I knew what was presupposed is divine legitimization for something that Scripture everywhere rejects.

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image of God in *Church Dogmatics* III/2: 45, it should be noted that Calvin anticipated Barth on this point in the former's *Commentary on Genesis* (addressing 1:26). Calvin reinforces this point in *Commentary on Genesis*, 132–33 (addressing Gen 2:21) and in *Sermons on 1 Timothy*, 295–310 (Sermon #20).

It must be noted that according to Scripture, the distinction between male and female is the one distinction built into the creation rather than arising from the Fall. Other distinctions—between rich and poor, for instance; between learned and ignorant, between healthy and ill—are all concomitants of the Fall. They can be overcome and should be since they contradict God's intention concerning the human good. The distinction (and human alienation arising therefrom) between rich and poor is reduced through graduated income tax and social assistance. That between learned and ignorant we aspire to reduce through government-funded public education; that between healthy and ill through medical insurance and health care plans and tax-supported access to medical services. In other words, we recognize all such distinctions to violate what God wills for our blessing.

The distinction between male and female, however, is unique. It isn't a concomitant of the Fall but is rather an ingredient of the creation. Any attempt to deny it and overcome it is sin. For this reason, for instance, the Torah is horrified at cross-dressing: "A woman shall not wear anything that pertains to a man, nor shall a man put on a woman's garment; for it is an abomination to the Lord your God" (Deut 22:5). It isn't a matter of cultural stereotyping. It isn't a matter of whether a man wears a skirt (as kilted men do in Scotland), or whether a woman wears trousers (as Western women do more often than not). Cross-dressing is forbidden in Scripture, rather, in that Scripture forbids the attempt at eliminating the *one* distinction God has ordained for the human creation. The denial of this distinction God deems to be sheer defiance born of ingratitude and disobedience.

While the shift from the category of complementarity to the category of mutuality betokens a major departure from the catholic substance of the faith, it is, needless to say, not the only shift. Discerning Christians (discernment is the major activity of the Holy Spirit within the Christian community, according to Acts) should be alert to such shifts and render explicit what they entail.

### THIRD SIGN: SHIFT IN VIEWS OF GOD

In light of needed discernment, consider substitutions concerning the Trinity. In Scripture, God names himself Father, Son and Spirit. In some circles today it is fashionable to rename God creator, liberator, and sustainer—or any other threefold description that the neologist deems to represent the deity. Again, such a substitution may appear harmless, even helpful; I submit, however, it is not.

Why is there a substitution at all? What drives it? I think there are two motivators at work.

One is the feminist objection to the putative maleness of Father and Son.<sup>13</sup> Another objection pertains to the salvific uniqueness of Christ, and to the historical specificity of Jesus of Nazareth.

With respect to the first objection, it should be recalled that the church catholic has *never* said that God is gender-specific. Any such sexualizing of God would have horrified the covenant people, Israel, and would have provoked the protest of the prophets that Yahweh had become no more than a Canaanite fertility force. If, on the other hand, some uninformed Christians have read (misread) the language of Father and Son as ascribing maleness to God, I can only reiterate that such misreading the church catholic has never endorsed. Gender-specificity, we must always be aware, pertains only to the creation; never to God. Then if 'Father' and 'Son' don't betoken maleness, can't the male-sounding vocabulary be dropped and something else replace it? (I shall return to this point shortly.)

In our discussion of the Trinity and the suitability of language for it, the substitution 'creator, liberator, sustainer' might appear to be an improvement. In truth, danger lurks.

(1) First, 'creator, liberator, sustainer' doesn't reflect the personhood of 'Father and Son.' Instead it reflects a function, what is done rather than who someone is, rather than the identity of a person. Substitute-trinities speak of *what is done* in time, not of *who someone is* eternally. Right here, it should be noted, the personhood of God is receding (and with it the personhood of humans, since we are persons, according to Scripture, only as we are 'personned' by the Person of God).

(2) In the second place, the use of such expressions as 'liberator' is a substitution deployed largely by those who do not uphold Jesus Christ as sole saviour but who rather want to attribute salvific efficacy to other individuals and movements. Liberation theology, for instance, claims not merely to liberate economically or socially; it claims to liberate the human most profoundly; it claims to liberate from the root human bondage. In a word, it claims to fashion the new creature. The vehicle of all such liberation and re-creation is Marxist philosophy.

Coincident with this shift is the shift from 'Jesus Christ' to 'Christ figure.' The question then posed today is "Who is the Christ figure for us?"

13. It should be noted that the eternal Son is not male; Jesus of Nazareth, the Son incarnate, is.

“Who has messianic force for us?” Or in the words of a former moderator of The United Church of Canada, “Who rings the bell for us?” Whoever “rings the bell for us” is the Christ figure, the liberator.

More pointedly, many feminists, unable to call God ‘Father’ for any number of reasons, object to the maleness of Jesus of Nazareth. While God the eternal Son indisputably isn’t male, the Son-incarnate indisputably is (“circumcised on the eighth day,” in case anyone is in doubt). Theologian Catherine LaCugna asks, “Can a male saviour save women?” As her theology unfolds through several steps she finally pronounces God not to be self-existent; God’s existence is no more than God’s existence *for us*. Answering her own question, “Can a male saviour save women?” she concludes that human loving communion with each other *replaces* the redemptive achievement of Jesus Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit.<sup>14</sup> Our salvation doesn’t hinge upon what has been done for us and in us by a saviour given to us; our salvation hinges on what we do for each other. We may be ‘Christ figures’ for each other, but Jesus of Nazareth cannot be sole, sufficient saviour.

Catherine LaCugna maintains that Christian theology shouldn’t commence with revelation whose content is redemption (the logic of Scripture in both older and newer testaments, recognized and recovered by the Protestant Reformers, we should note); instead, she insists, Christian theology should start with the “experience of being saved.”<sup>15</sup>

What LaCugna means by ‘saved,’ however, isn’t what Scripture means; namely, relief from sin’s condemnation (under God) and release from sin’s grip.<sup>16</sup> In addition, to begin theology with an experience of being saved (especially where ‘saved’ has been secularized) can only mean that theology is no more than an articulation of experience, experience of life, experience of one’s intra-psychic history, indistinguishable from an experience of God—which experience is self-referential in any case, since ‘God’ no longer transcends world occurrence and human history. As soon as substitutions are made with respect to the Triune God, the unsubstitutability of Jesus Christ is forfeited.

14. See LaCugna, *God for Us*, 223–28.

15. LaCugna, *God for Us*, 223–28.

16. LaCugna is unable to distinguish God from creatures, with the result that the God she depicts is unable to act upon creatures so as to save them. LaCugna, *God for Us*, 304.

(3) In the third place, all such substitutions deny the immanent Trinity, or at least collapse the immanent Trinity into the economic Trinity.

The economic Trinity is God in his action upon us and within us. The one and only God who is eternally transcendent simultaneously comes among us in Jesus of Nazareth. Unlike John the Baptist who was "sent from God" to be a "witness to the light" (John 1:6-7), Jesus isn't sent from God: he *is* God. Neither is he a witness to the light; he *is* the light. We must always remember that the first people to recognize and insist that a hayseed from a one-horse backwoods village is God-with-us, Emmanuel; the first people to acknowledge and celebrate such were Jews for whom the identification of God with anything creaturely was blasphemous and therefore anathema.

Yet there's more to the economic Trinity. The God who comes to dwell among us, who comes into our midst, is also the God who comes within us. Were God only to come into our midst, we'd be left inert, no more than a spiritual corpse unable to profit from a visitor. As God comes within us, according to the apostles, dry bones live; the new creature comes forth; fruits of the Spirit appear and gifts of the Spirit operate.

The next question must be asked: Is what God does among and within us *merely what God does*, or *is it one with who God is*? If it is merely what God does, then plainly God could as readily do something else and might at any time. If, on the other hand, what God does is who God is, then God himself can be known and trusted.

Think of what God does as the face he displays before us; think of who God is as God's heart. The inescapable question then is: Are God's face and God's heart the same? Or might God's face be a false face?—not necessarily a malicious face, but a false face in any case? A Hallowe'en mask, after all, need not be frightening; nonetheless, it remains a mask hiding the identity of the person behind it. For if God's face turned toward us is not or even might not be who God is in himself, then in submitting ourselves to Jesus Christ and the Spirit-power in which he acts we still don't have to do with God himself, only with an activity of God unrelated to God himself—as surely as human beings frequently wear a 'false face,' as it were, their action contradicting who they regard themselves to be.

If God himself is to be known and trusted, the face of God and the heart of God must be one. *What God does* is *who God is*; and *who God is* is neither more nor less than *what God does*. In other words, the economic Trinity must be grounded in the immanent Trinity.

The doctrine of the Trinity witnesses to God's *identity*: what we see in Jesus of Nazareth is what we get: God himself and nothing other than God himself. In addition, the doctrine of the Trinity witnesses to God's *unity*: what is done *for us* in Jesus Christ and *in us* through the Holy Spirit is an act of the one God. These two acts are not the activities of two different deities or two lesser deities or two non-deities.

The oft-voiced question 'Who is God?' is a question Scripture never answers directly. Scripture answers this question indirectly by posing two other questions: 'What does God do on our behalf?' and 'What does God effect within us?' The answers to these two questions add up to the question 'Who is God?' Christology plus pneumatology equals theology. God is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. This God is one. The doctrine of the Trinity attests the unity of God, the singularity of God, and the identity of God. Any substitution here imperils the unity of God, the uniqueness of God, and the identity of God.

Let me say it for the last time. If God is what God does, then in Jesus Christ (the face of God) we have to do with God himself, not merely with an activity unrelated to God's nature. On the other hand, if what God does is who God is and all God is, then there doesn't lurk behind the face we see in Jesus Christ an aspect of God that might victimize us. It is essential that the immanent Trinity and the economic Trinity presuppose and imply each other.

## CATHOLICITY

To this point it may have appeared that I regard the church, and church-related institutions, to be chiefly on the defensive in our era, preoccupied with fending off frontal threats and subtle erosions. This is not the case. I continue to insist on the catholicity of the church and the catholicity of church-related institutions.

Catholicity consists of identity plus universality. Identity is given by gospel-uniqueness that distinguishes the church from the world. Identity is given by the effectual presence of Jesus Christ, who in his singularity cannot be replaced or substituted or modified.

Universality is that which impels the church to embrace the world. Only that which is different from the world can exist for the world.

When we confess with the creed, "I believe in God the Father almighty, maker of heaven and earth, the entire cosmos seen and unseen," we are

upholding universality. When we confess, "I believe in Jesus Christ his only Son our Lord, crucified under Pontius Pilate," we are upholding identity.

The missionary enterprise of the early church gave rise to catholicity, particularly the church's outreach to the Gentiles. Since Jesus had said he was "sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (Matt 15:24), were the apostles disobedient when they announced the gospel beyond the precincts of the sheepfold of Israel? Did the apostles prosecute a mission that Jesus, at least, never foresaw, and at most, would never have countenanced?

On the contrary, the seeds of the Gentile mission are found in the ministry of Jesus. Here we need only think of the reception he accorded Gentiles who came to him; the centurion for instance who wanted his servant healed, who trusted unreservedly our Lord's Kingdom-manifestation, and whose faith elicited our Lord's marvel just because it was greater than anything Jesus had found in Israel (Luke 8:5-13). On a larger scale, we need only recall his parable of the mustard seed (Luke 13:18-19). From the tiniest seed, says Jesus, there comes forth a shrub, a tree in whose branches perch all the birds of the air. 'Birds of the air' is a rabbinic circumlocution meaning 'all the Gentile nations of the world.' Jesus is telling unimaginative, skeptical disciples that from their small numbers (twelve at first, one of whom proved unhelpful), from such a pathetically small number, from their supposedly simplistic message, from their apparently insignificant mission there will come—what? There will come that kingdom-attestation which gathers in people of every nation and language and outlook, as Gentiles of every description will one day owe everything that is their glory to this handful of nondescript Jews who are already wondering if they shouldn't go back to their fishing (John 21:3).

And of course, the trajectory that the risen Jesus mandates for the apostles during the post-Easter Forty Days; the Lord's engagement with them during the forty days determines the trajectory that he wills the church to have forever, which trajectory indisputably includes the Gentile world.

We know that Peter opposed such universality; all Gentile Christians, he maintained, were to become Jews first as part of a two-step conversion (Gal 1-2). Peter, correct with respect to identity, was clueless as to universality. So very grievous was Peter's error that Luke devoted two entire chapters in Acts (the incident of Peter and Cornelius) to render unambiguous God's will concerning universality (Acts 10-11).

The unique message of the church guarantees its identity. The varied converts to the church guarantee its universality. By extension, a Christian university must preserve its identity by never surrendering the gospel, never compromising “the faith once for all delivered to the saints” (Jude 3), never hiding its light under a basket but always aspiring to remain a city set on a hill. At the same time, varied students enrolling in the college, and varied academic disciplines studied at the university (don’t “all things hold together in Christ”? Col 1:17), preserve its universality. In a Christian university identity is defined by exalting Jesus as Lord; in a Christian university universality is defended by articulating Christ’s lordship over every aspect of the creation.

In the church of the Patristic era the bishops or presbyters were responsible for ensuring catholicity. (In the New Testament *episkopos* and *presbuteros* mean the same.) In the Reformation era, scholarly pastors were responsible for ensuring it. (It must always be remembered that all the outstanding Protestant thinkers were preachers and pastors first, exegetes second, theologians third, and guardians of the public good fourth.) For the Christian liberal arts and science university, it is the Board of Trustees who are charged with ensuring the institution’s catholicity. The trustees must see to it that the college doesn’t forfeit its gospel-identity (whether through inadvertence or perfidy) and at the same time doesn’t endeavour to preserve its identity self-protectively by forgetting its universality (therein rendering itself sectarian). If the Christian college surrenders its identity, the college ceases to be Christian; if it loses sight of universality, it denies that “the earth is the Lord’s” (Ps 24:1).

I have extolled the church’s mission to the world, one aspect of which is the Christian university’s engagement with the totality of the creation. In order to engage the world, we must adapt ourselves and our language to modernity. If we don’t adapt, then however much we may have to say, no one will be able to hear us—and for this predicament we have only ourselves to blame.

I am a student of seventeenth-century Puritan thought. (By the way, are you aware that of the 50 books John Wesley included in his *Christian Library*, which collection Wesley expected Methodists to read, 32 are authored by Puritans?) As much as I cherish Puritan thought (they are the master-diagnosticians of the human heart), next Sunday morning I can’t read a Puritan sermon to a congregation. ‘I adjure you, by the bowels of

mercy, that forsooth you forswear . . .'; no one would profit. We must *adapt* to the world if we are going to be heard.

On the other hand, if we *adopt* the world's mindset and its anti-gospel *Tendenz*, then we may be heard but now we have nothing to say. We shall find ourselves doing no more than repeating the world back to itself. If we adopt the world's outlook, the world's agenda, and the world's schemes, we shall have performed the grand counter-miracle: we shall have turned wine into water.

I admire the effort Friedrich Schleiermacher, the progenitor of liberal theology, made to adapt the Christian message to its "cultured despisers."<sup>17</sup> Schleiermacher maintained that many people of his era rejected the gospel not out of extraordinary hardness of heart but out of their bewilderment at a gospel-presentation that wasn't remotely connected to their daily existence. Surely Schleiermacher can only be commended here. Alas, however, in attempting to adapt he uncritically adopted; the gospel was denatured.

If we think that it all sounds as if the line between adapting and adopting is an exquisitely fine line, I must agree. The line in question happens to be finer than a hair and harder than diamond. Yet this is no reason to be discouraged. I maintain that preachers, teachers, congregations, and Christian universities, all of whom aspire to tiptoe down the line, in truth are rarely exactly on the line but rather are divagating back and forth, first on one side then on the other, always endeavouring to come out on the line at the end of the day as we exercise our God-given vocation.

Once again, discerning the crucial line between adapting and adopting is just that: discernment.

### A CONSEQUENCE OF THE SHIFT

Several times to this point it has been emphasized that our naming God as God reveals and names himself (Father, Son, Spirit) doesn't mean God discloses himself as gender-specific; nor does it mean that we are projecting human gender-specificity onto God. At the same time, it has been stressed that substitutes of the sort advanced by Catherine LaCugna (for her, God must be feminized to be credible) entail forfeiting the gospel.<sup>18</sup>

17. Schleiermacher, *On Religion*.

18. LaCugna, *God for Us*, 18.

Let me say it again: to speak of God as Father, Son, and Spirit is *not* to render God masculine. On the other hand, to reject God's self-naming here and endorse an explicitly feminization of God is to render God female.

What happens, what *has* happened, in history when such a move has been made? In the history of religions, John Oswalt points out, wherever the deity is feminized, several accompaniments appear.<sup>19</sup>

(1) The radical transcendence of God is lost. In this regard, it ought always to be remembered that the being of God and the being of the creation are utterly discontinuous. The being of God is infinite and eternal; the being of the creation is finite (even if immeasurably large) and contingent. A creation that was brought forth *ex nihilo*, from nothing, can as readily be returned *ad nihilum*, to nothing. (We might as well note in passing that for every time Scripture speaks of God as creator, it speaks fifty times of God as destroyer—an insistence, a caution, a sobering check on all human presumptuousness that the church appears completely to overlook.) At all times, it must be kept in mind that while the universe is made *by* God it isn't made *from* God. It is made by God, and made from—nothing. If the universe and God are regarded as on a continuum of any sort, the radical transcendence of God is forfeited, and with it the notion that God ever remains *Lord* of his creation however intimately he may choose to relate to it. When God is regarded as continuous with the universe, God has become finitized, and God's being rendered contingent. At this point God and world are regarded as belonging to the same order, or God and world are regarded as needing each other, neither one yet of a conclusive nature, the matter still undecided as to what either one will turn out to be.

(2) When God's lordship over the universe is compromised, the forces of nature are elevated and worshipped. Specifically, life-forces or fertility are upheld for veneration. This in turn means that sexual activity is viewed as religiously significant; sexual activity is inherently salvific. Related to this notion is the phenomenon of sacral prostitution, a religious/psychological insistence reflecting the logic of 'sympathetic magic'; namely, sexual congress with a prostitute representing the deity renders the worshipper one with that deity.

Sacral prostitution occurred everywhere in the eastern religions surrounding Israel. More than surrounded Israel; it lapped at Israel, and lapped so very persistently as to gain entry repeatedly. No less frequently

19. Oswalt, *Called to Be Holy*, 11–17.

Israel's prophets had to denounce it in the name of Yahweh who is holy (Deut 23:17–18).

Lest the point I am making be dismissed as irrelevant, I should like to bring forward here a line from the second-last hymn book The United Church of Canada and the Anglican Church of Canada developed jointly in 1971.<sup>20</sup> The line spoke of "The sacrament of sex." Now sex is a gift of God, to be received with thanksgiving and, like any gift from God, not to be warped to purposes other than he intends and blesses. Sex, however, is not a sacrament. If sex were a sacrament, then sexual congress of any sort would intensify one's intimacy with Jesus Christ. What is this except sacral prostitution all over?

The people of God in the era of the Older Testament weren't the only ones threatened. The church in Corinth lived in closest geographic proximity to the fertility cult and temple of Aphrodite. Religious prostitutes from the temple plied their trade among the inhabitants of Corinth. (Corinth, a seaport, never lacked sailors looking for something to do.) Sexual promiscuity was so very notorious that the city's 'red light' business gave rise to a neologism, 'corinthianize.' In the ancient Near East, to 'corinthianize' was to engage in any and all abject expressions of sexual malfeasance.

To his horror, sorrow, and anger, the apostle Paul found Gentile Christians in Corinth evincing more than a little of a Corinthian mindset. In the midst of this ungodliness, he never told the Corinthians that they weren't Christians; he never refused to address them as 'saints.' He did, however, tell them they were a disgrace (1 Cor 5:1).

We live in a highly sexualized culture. The secularization of sexuality in our culture has rendered sexual congress of any sort the occasion of intensifying one's intimacy with the deities of secularization. Since the church, and church-related institutions, are faced with unrelenting pressure, not to say financial sanctions, concerning the secularization of sexuality, vigilance (not grimness, not paranoia, not non-biblical asceticism); good-natured vigilance and cheerful discernment are essential if capitulation is to be avoided and the gospel given up. Church-related schools are charged with prizing the gospel and the implicates of the gospel, especially where young people are concerned for whom the school acts *in loco parentibus*.

(3) If the above two points are considered together—the loss of God's transcendence and with it the loss of God's lordship—what's left, religiously,

20. The Anglican Church of Canada and The United Church of Canada, *The Hymn Book of The Anglican Church of Canada and The United Church of Canada*.

is the notion that there is nothing that isn't God. If all that is *is* God (pantheism); or if all that is *is of* God (panentheism), then there's nothing that isn't God or of God. And if there's nothing that isn't God or of God, then by definition there is no evil and no sin. No sin: how convenient for our New Age suburbanite 'yuppie' friends who find that New Ageism fits like a glove. Everything they do is itself of god, regardless of who or what that deity might be.

## TRADITION

As we reflect upon the challenges we must meet we shouldn't overlook the help we can find in the catholic Christian tradition.

Different metaphors are ready-to-hand in a consideration of tradition, one of which pertains to sailing. Sailboats are constructed with a leaden keel deep below the water line. At the end of the keel there is a torpedo-shaped lead weight. Keel and torpedo-shaped attachment are known as ballast. Ballast acts as a counterpoise whenever the ship heels over in high winds. The counterweight in the ballast rights the boat whenever a squall howls down upon it; it keeps the boat from capsizing. Even if a squall knocks the boat flat, the ballast returns the boat to an upright position.

In addition, the boat's keel keeps the boat on course when the direction of the boat and the direction of the wind are not the same. If the wind is blowing immediately behind the boat in its intended course, no keel is necessary. However, as soon as the wind is blowing from another direction, across the boat or from in front of the boat, the keel allows the boat to sail across the wind or even against the wind. In other words, the keel allows the boat to use wind from any direction as the boat endeavours to stay on course.

Think of tradition, or Christian memory, as the ballast and keel of that boat known as 'church.' Tradition as ballast renders the boat able to survive sudden, unforeseen squalls. Even a flash knockdown finds the boat righting itself, thanks to the counterweight below the waterline. Tradition as keel allows us to stay on course regardless of the direction of the winds that come upon us.

Admittedly, when keel and ballast have been immersed in the water for a protracted period, marine growths attach themselves. These growths are unsightly, yet are rarely seen since they are below the waterline. On the other hand, as these growths proliferate they impede the boat. For this

reason, the boat has to go into dry-dock occasionally to have such impediments removed.

In other words, not everything in the church's tradition is good. More than a little is deplorable, anti-gospel beyond doubt. No Christian, therefore, should embrace tradition uncritically. At the same time, only a fool would sever ballast and keel from a boat because of unsightly marine growths attaching themselves to it. If we are so foolish as to disown tradition, we can only be blown off course by current wind and capsized by unforeseen squall.

The rule of thumb in sailing is this: the greater the sail area above the waterline, the greater the ballast needed below the waterline. Methodists, for instance, speak much of the wind of the Spirit. Good. Unless sail is hoisted the wind of the Spirit can't be caught, and the boat goes nowhere. At the same time, the keener we are to catch the wind of the Holy Spirit, the more eager we should be to attend to keel and ballast, tradition.

Reference has been made several times already to multi-directional winds. The wind isn't always blowing in the direction the boater prefers. By extension, there is only one wind the Christian prefers: the wind of the Spirit. Spirits abound, but only one Spirit is holy. Therefore, it is essential that keel and ballast be attended to, for only then will the boat move ahead, on course, regardless of what wind, from whatever direction, the hoisted sail catches.

Let's change the metaphor. Let's think of tradition as memory, Christian memory, the church's memory. To lose one's memory is to suffer from amnesia, a terrible affliction. It isn't terrible because amnesiac persons can't remember where they left their umbrella. (They can always buy another one.) Amnesia is tragic, rather, in that amnesiacs can't remember who they are; not aware of who they are, they lack identity; lacking identity, they can't be trusted.

It isn't the case that amnesiac persons can't be trusted because they are uncommonly wicked or uncommonly stupid. They can't be trusted simply because they don't know who they are, and therefore don't know how they should act in conformity with who they are. Amnesia always means someone is untrustworthy.

Tradition, Christian memory, means we know who we are; we have an identity; and we can be trusted.

A preacher, a congregation, a denomination, an educational institution that allows its tradition to attenuate has rendered itself untrustworthy.

No doubt someone wishes to object that tradition can be a tyrant. Yes, it can. But in our era, with its superficial disavowal of history, the greater danger is that we shall forfeit tradition as our teacher.

G. K. Chesterton wisely reminds us that tradition is “democracy of the dead”; tradition means the dead are allowed to vote.<sup>21</sup> Why shouldn't the dead should be allowed to vote? Traditionalism, on the other hand, could mean that only the dead are allowed to veto. Or to put it differently, tradition is the living faith of the dead, while traditionalism is the dead faith of the living.<sup>22</sup>

Owning our tradition, owning it critically yet appreciatively, means we aren't pretending we are the first Christians, and we aren't so naive as to think that generations of Christians haven't faced the challenges confronting us. It means we know who we are; we have an identity; we can be trusted.

Institutions of Christian higher education will have a future as long as they have a past. They will thrive in fair winds and survive in foul as long as they are unashamed of their Christian heritage, which heritage is a crucial ingredient in the tradition of the church of Jesus Christ and in any educational institution that aspires to exemplify Christ's lordship over the entire creation.

Always aware of the responsibility parents bear concerning the spiritual and intellectual formation of their children; and aware as well of the responsibility academic institutions bear to facilitate the same, Charles Wesley summarizes the aspiration of families, congregations, and Christian universities:

Unite the pair so long disjoined,  
 Knowledge and vital piety;  
 Learning and holiness combined,  
 And truth and love, let all men see  
 In those whom up to thee we give,  
 Thine, wholly thine, to die and live.<sup>23</sup>

21. Chesterton, *Orthodoxy*, 29-44.

22. Pelikan, *The Vindication of Tradition*, 65.

23. Wesley, *Works of John Wesley*, 7:644.

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