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The Friday Symposium

Dallas Baptist University  
September 7, 2001

Building Christian Academies<sup>†</sup>—  
The Rediscovery and Recovery of Classic Traditions  
in Christian Higher Education

Guard, through the Holy Spirit . . . the treasure  
which has been entrusted to you (2 Tim. 1:14).

“Only as we stand on the shoulders of giants do we see.”  
—Isaac Newton

“Because of our traditions, everyone knows who he is  
and what God expects him to do.”  
—Tevye, *The Fiddler on the Roof*

“Tradition is the living faith of the dead,  
traditionalism is the dead faith of the living.”  
—Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Vindication of Tradition*

### **The Bible and Tradition**

How could they forget? How on earth was it possible for the people of ancient Israel to forget the essentials of the Law of Moses and the annual celebration of the Passover for eight and a half centuries all the way from the time of the Judges to King Josiah (c. 1382-628 B.C., or approximately 750 years)? And yet this is precisely what happened! We read of this incredible act of forgetfulness in the following account found in 2 Kings 23: 21-23.

Then the king [Josiah] commanded all the people saying, "Celebrate the Passover to the Lord your God as it is written in this book of the covenant." Surely such a Passover had not been celebrated from the days of the judges who judged Israel, nor in all the days of the kings of Israel and of the kings of Judah. But in the eighteenth year of King Josiah, this Passover was observed to the Lord in Jerusalem (cf. 2 Chron. 35: 16-19).

Whatever may explain this incredible theological amnesia—no doubt traceable to a variety of cultural, social, martial, moral, and religious distortions and

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<sup>†</sup> The first phrase in the title for this paper is taken from the new book by Arthur F. Holmes, *Building the Christian Academy* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2001).

distractions—Israel managed somehow, somehow to let that which was most important in her past and central to her identity slip through their corporate and individual memories. *Israel forgot her historic spiritual traditions*, and eventually reaped the consequences of this astonishing dereliction.

Such a significant lapse in memory was, of course, strongly antithetical to the repeated pentateuchal exhortations to remember God and His work on Israel's behalf. "Remember the days of old," said Moses in the poignant words of his farewell address, and "consider the years of all generations. Ask your father, and he will inform you, your elders and they will tell you" (Deut. 32: 7). This task of communicating Israel's legacy to subsequent generations—what Edith Schaeffer has aptly called the "perpetual relay of truth"<sup>1</sup>—was crucial to the maintenance of Israel's spiritual well-being and to the fulfillment of her theological vocation as the covenant people of God.

Only give heed to yourself and keep your soul diligently, lest you forget the things which your eyes have seen, and lest they depart from your heart all the days of your life; but make them known to your sons and your grandsons . . . so they may learn to fear Me all the days they live on the earth, and that they may teach their children (Deut. 4:9-10).

Despite a surplus of reminders about remembering like this one,<sup>2</sup> Israel gradually did forget as the years passed slowly by. As we have seen, from the time of the judges, through the united and divided monarchies, to the captivity of Israel in the north, the Jewish people lost touch with their magnificent spiritual heritage. At last, however, this long-standing pattern of mindlessness was reversed by the

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<sup>1</sup> Edith Schaeffer, *What is a Family?* (Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1975), chp. 6. This process of holding firmly to the apostolic tradition and passing it on to others is a central New Testament motif as well (see 1 Thess. 3: 6; 2 Cor. 11: 2; 2 Thess. 2: 15; 2 Tim. 1: 4).

<sup>2</sup> For example, see Exod. 13: 3; 32: 13; Deut. 5: 15; 8: 2; 15: 15; Judg. 8: 34; 1 Chron. 16: 12, 15; Psa. 77: 11; 143: 5; Isa. 46: 9; Jer. 23: 36; Hab. 3: 2; etc.

unexpected discovery of the book of the law (Deuteronomy?) in the temple precincts during the reign of King Josiah. Through this young monarch's leadership (he was only twenty-six years old at the time), the law was read to the people, the covenant was renewed, the priests and artifacts of false worship were destroyed, and the Passover was again celebrated. Under these Josianic reforms, Israel was reconnected with her forgotten past, and her great theological and spiritual traditions were retrieved and renewed (see 2 Kings 23).<sup>3</sup>

But what is the point of this story? What does all of this have to do with us today? Well, in an analogous way, it seems to me that through the passage of time, we contemporary evangelical—"free church"—believers have also lost touch with the overall classical Christian tradition to our great detriment in the Church. And along with it—and this is my major concern in this presentation—we have also lost touch with the rich, dynamic classical Christian tradition *in education* to the great detriment of our schools, colleges, and universities. For centuries, the Church was at the heart of the educational enterprise in the West. Her leading theologians and philosophers reflected profoundly on the foundations and meaning of the educational enterprise in the light of the faith. They committed the best of their reflections to writing, forming an unofficial canon of texts that has served as an amazingly rich literary resource for subsequent generations. And they were active in putting their theoretical considerations into practice, establishing various kinds of schools and creating a pattern of scholarship worthy of emulation. Over time, the Church developed a distinctive Christian intellectual tradition of remarkable breadth,

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<sup>3</sup> Unfortunately for the tribe of Judah, such acts of repentance and renewal were too little, too late. Because of their characteristic provocations, judgment at the hands of the Babylonians was an inevitability. However, because of his tender heart, personal repentance, and spiritual leadership, Josiah himself would be spared the consequences of the forthcoming disaster (see 2 Kings 23: 24-27).

depth, and influence. For centuries, it constituted the heart and soul of Western intellectual life.

Unfortunately, however, the elements of this grand Christian intellectual tradition have been imprudently forgotten for reasons we will consider in just a moment. And without at least a working knowledge of the Church's wise and thoughtful intellectual heritage, contemporary Christian educational endeavors suffer a great (if unrecognized) loss. And, as a result, we may be using methods and pursuing goals that are more in keeping with the *Zeitgeist* or spirit of the times than with historic, biblical faith. To think that the Church's academic task today can be undertaken successfully apart from the accumulated wisdom of the past is not only foolish, but perhaps a little arrogant as well. For it is only as we stand upon the shoulders of giants that we see. As Robert Wilken has said in his book *Remembering the Christian Past*, ". . . there can be no genuine Christian intellectual life that is not rooted in history. . . . The Christian intellectual is inescapably bound to those persons and ideas and events that have created the Christian memory. . . ."4 There is, therefore, a need to *rediscover* what the elements of this Christian intellectual tradition are, and to attempt to *recover* them as critical components in building the Christian academy today. That is what this paper—and, indeed, the entire Friday Symposium lecture series this fall—is all about.

### **'Tradition' and Why We Have Lost It**

If our goal, then, is the retrieval and renewal of the best that has been said and done in the Christian intellectual tradition, then we should make sure that we understand something about the meaning and nature of this concept in the first place. The word 'tradition' comes from the Latin root *tradere* which means "to hand

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<sup>4</sup> Robert L. Wilken, *Remembering the Christian Past* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995), 173, 180.

over, to give over, and even to betray” (as a traitor would). Its etymological components are *trans*, meaning “across” or “over,” and *dare*, which means “to give.” In the dictionary, it refers simply to “a long-established custom or belief, often one that has been handed down from generation to generation” and to “a body of long-established customs and beliefs viewed as a set of precedents.”<sup>5</sup> In more meaty terms, ‘tradition’ must be recognized as culturally basic and central to human existence.

Tradition is the foundation of culture, a spiritual bond between the present and the past, between the individual and the greater fellowship in space and time of which he is an integrated member. What man knows, his experiences and insights, what he has felt and thought and expressed in words, has . . . been handed down by the tradition of mouth and example. This means also in rather fixed forms, but nevertheless always gradually and unconsciously adapted to the changing circumstances and interests of the changing ages.<sup>6</sup>

From a Christian point of view, the concept has both ancient and modern meanings, and has been embroiled in turbulent disputes. “In the early Church Fathers, tradition (*paradosiβ*, *traditio*) means the revelation made by God and delivered by Him to His faithful people through the mouth of His prophets and apostles.” As something handed over, tradition was first called “apostolic” since it was delivered by the apostles to the churches they established. Later on, it was referred to as “ecclesiastic” because this essential teaching was passed along by Church leaders to their parishioners. In more recent times, “tradition means the continuous stream of explanation and elucidation of the primitive faith, illustrating the way in which Christianity has been presented and understood in past ages. That is to say, it is the accumulated wisdom of the past.” In the modern period, only those traditions that have met the tests of (1) fidelity to Scripture, and (2) acceptability to

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<sup>5</sup> *Encarta: World English Dictionary*, 1999.

<sup>6</sup> *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, s. v. “Tradition, Oral,” 4: 683.

human reason have been regarded as *bona fide*. And, of course, this notion has not been without controversy in the history of the Church. In the context of the Reformation, for example, the Protestant belief in the sole sufficiency of Scripture (*sola Scriptura*) was in robust conflict with the apparent Tridentine assertion (i.e., the Council of Trent, 1546) that both the Bible and unwritten traditions were of equal epistemic authority for the Catholic faithful (though this interpretation has been challenged and the viewpoint modified since Vatican II).<sup>7</sup>

Obviously, then, the notion of ‘tradition’ has played a key role in the history of the Church and in the lives and experience of countless believers. But of what does it consist? What, generally speaking, is the content of this thing known as the Christian tradition? First of all, there is the tradition of the Christ-event and the apostolic interpretation of this event preserved in the text of the New Testament itself—“the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints” (Jude 3). And then there are also the ecclesiastical beliefs and practices that have grown up around Jesus and the Word over time, sometimes consciously, sometimes unconsciously, providing continuity and also adapting to change. It has taken the specific forms of a christological hermeneutic, patterns of evangelism and discipleship, the meaning and practice of the sacraments, the development of various Church polities, the conciliar debates and creedal formulations, the writings of the Church fathers, theologians, and philosophers, the formation of liturgies, the Christian hymnic, poetic, and artistic offerings, the practices of prayer and the spiritual disciplines, monastic orders, events in Church history, and so on. As D. H. Williams asserts in his book *Retrieving the Tradition and Renewing Evangelicalism*, “In both *act* and *substance*, the Tradition represents a living history which, throughout the earliest

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<sup>7</sup> *Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, 3rd ed., s. v. “Tradition.”

centuries [and beyond], was constituted by the church and also constituted what was the true church.”<sup>8</sup> The making, keeping, refining, and transmitting of tradition, as a divinely wrought, intrinsically human activity, has been central to the history and formation of the Church, and to the lives of individual believers in pursuit of theological understanding and spiritual direction.

But in recent centuries, this overall Christian tradition, including its substantive educational vision, has experienced a significant breakdown. We evangelicals today know as little about these historic matters of consequence as the denizens of Josiah’s Judah knew about the mosaic law and the Passover. How could *they* forget? How could *we* forget? What dancer/choreographer Jerome Robbins once said about the Broadway musical *Fiddler on the Roof* seems to apply to the Christian spiritual and intellectual vision in the West since the Renaissance and the Enlightenment, namely, that it is “a show about tradition and its dissolution.”<sup>9</sup> And this dissolution includes the classic Western tradition as well. Indeed, an entire way of life has been undergoing a radical disintegration for the last three to five centuries. Why has this happened? Why this assault on tradition—Christian, Western, and otherwise?

This question is complex, but perhaps some general impressions will provide an adequate response. In short, many thinkers in the Renaissance and Enlightenment began to argue that keeping company with classical traditions presented a major obstacle to new knowledge and genuine enlightenment. Traditions were old, authoritative, and restrictive. Over against this worn-out ethos,

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<sup>8</sup> D. H. Williams, *Retrieving the Tradition and Renewing Evangelicalism: A Primer for Suspicious Protestants* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999), 36.

<sup>9</sup> Richard Altman with Mervyn Kaufman, *The Making of a Musical: “Fiddler on the Roof”* (New York: Crown Publishers, 1971, p. 31; quoted in Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Vindication of Tradition* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984), 3.

there arose a strong desire for fresh thinking and modern insights, for intellectual autonomy and academic freedom, and for a new found liberty to pursue truth wherever it may lead (even if it meant the abrogation of time-honored, cherished ideals). Hence, 'tradition' itself became a dirty word, and as a result every effort was made by progressive minds to cut the ties that bound them to the past. In developing this mindset of "anti-traditionalism," or what Hans Georg Gadamer has referred to as the "prejudice against prejudices,"<sup>10</sup> an alternative culture of liberty, autonomy, spontaneity, and contemporaneity was generated. For the most part, its target was the Christian tradition, and its final objective was free, untrammelled thought and life.

The German philosopher Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) was no small contributor to this new mentality. In an article in which he asked the question, "What is Enlightenment?" (1784), he distinguished between what he called "public" and "private" reason. On the one hand, private reason, as the name indicates, was person-relative in character, employed in service to domestic spheres, and generated nothing more than individual values. On the other hand, public reason was critical in character, appropriate for life in the public square, and the sole source of genuine facts and true enlightenment. In an autonomous fashion, public reason investigated, analyzed, and evaluated everything, especially religious institutions and traditions.<sup>11</sup> As Kant put it in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, "Our age, is in especial degree, the age of criticism, and to criticism everything must submit."<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Hans Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 2nd rev. ed., trans. revised by Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (New York: Continuum, 1993), 272.

<sup>11</sup> Immanuel Kant, "What is Enlightenment?" in *Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals*, trans. Lewis White Beck (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1959), 86-87.



In this revolutionary context, therefore, Kant issued his fundamental challenge to liberate oneself from a self-imposed cognitive infancy in which the exercise of reason depended upon the guidance of tradition. Only children have to do what they are told because their elders know what is best. In the West, whole societies have behaved like children in submitting to the traditions of their elders, especially those of the state and the church. But if history is a process of growing up, then it was time for people living in servile obedience to the regnant authorities to begin to think for themselves and take charge! In Kant's words,

Enlightenment is man's release from his self-incurred tutelage. Tutelage is man's inability to make use of his understanding without direction from another. Self-incurred is the tutelage when its cause lies not in lack of reason but in lack of resolution and courage to use it without direction from another [i.e., tradition]. *Sapere aude!* "Have the courage to use your own reason!"—that is the motto of enlightenment.<sup>13</sup>

In an age of independent, grown-up thinkers, who would want to be numbered among intellectual sucklings characterized by abject dependence upon custom and convention? This Kantian thesis, and his not-so-subtle appeal to the human ego, contributed significantly to the death and interment of tradition and to the rise and shine of reason as the final source of authority in the overall process of human life. Gadamer explains in these words.

In general, the Enlightenment tends to accept no authority and to decide everything before the judgment seat of reason. Thus the written tradition of Scripture, like any other historical document, can claim no absolute validity; the possible truth of the tradition depends on the credibility that reason accords it. *It is not tradition but reason that constitutes the ultimate source of all authority.*<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Immanuel Kant's Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Norman Kemp Smith (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1956), 9.

<sup>13</sup> Kant, "What is Enlightenment?", 85.

<sup>14</sup> Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 272 (emphasis added).

No doubt other factors contributed to this negation of the role of tradition in the Western world. *Objectivism* demanded the exclusion of subjective influences like traditions in the knowing process in order to attain to epistemological certitude and a homogeneous rationality for the ordering public life. *Historicism* argued that traditions, like all things human, are rooted in the relativities of particular places and times and consequently lack any transcendent qualities or permanent values. *Progressivism* fostered a mindset that forgets about the past, and fixes attention on the future in hope of a better tomorrow based upon the promise and precedent of modern science and technology. It is not without reason, therefore, that Czeslaw Milosz has said that people today have developed a “new obsession . . . , a refusal to remember.”<sup>15</sup>

Thus out of the whirlwind of these ideas—Kantianism, objectivism, historicism, and progressivism—modern, autonomous, “liberal” individuals were born. That is, the Enlightenment has given rise to radically free, atomistic, traditionless, self-interested, self-reliant persons invested with certain natural rights. Such people employ all of their personal resources and cognitive powers, including their educational achievements, to meet their personal needs and fulfill their unique desires. People live their lives as a private, individual affair, with little or no accountability to anyone or anything, and with nary a care for the community or the common good. Eric Springsted has suggested in a most provocative way that most colleges and universities in the United States (including so-called liberal arts and church-related, Christian institutions)—with their traditionless, “value-neutral” teaching, programs of autonomous, critical thinking, and an emphasis on obtaining

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<sup>15</sup> Czeslaw Milosz, *Nobel Lecture* (New York: Penguin English Library, 1j982), 14; quoted in Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Vindication of Tradition* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984), 24.

marketable skills and knowledge—exist primarily to service the demands of these kinds of modern, “liberal” individuals.<sup>16</sup> Furthermore, in a market-driven economy, these “students,” so-called, are more or less consumers purchasing an academic product from educational providers that will enable them to fulfill their personal dreams and goals. Being shaped at the university by the historic beliefs and practices of a worthy tradition, especially a Christian one, is the furthest thing from their minds!

Be that as it may, what has become crystal clear in the last few decades is the glaring contradiction that exists between the Enlightenment doctrines of human autonomy and anti-traditionalism, and the nature of human beings and life as it is actually lived. It just seems impossible for any man or woman to live well in a detached, impersonal way, separate from some kind of historic, social and communal context replete with a life-guiding set of customs and beliefs. Indeed, it is the memory of and adherence to a tradition that fosters a clear sense of identity, order, and responsibility, making the world a meaningful place and life worthwhile. As Tevye says in the opening scene of *Fiddler on the Roof*,

Because of our traditions, we've kept our balance for many, many years. Here in Anatevka we have traditions for everything—how to eat, how to sleep, how to wear clothes. For instance, we always keep our heads covered and always wear a little prayer shawl. This shows our constant devotion to God. You may ask, how did this tradition start? I'll tell you—I don't know! But it's a tradition. *Because of our traditions, everyone knows who he is and what God expects him to do.*<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Eric O. Springsted, “*Liberal Individuals and Liberal Education*,” *Religious Education* 86 (Summer 1991), 467ff. As the author points out, however, this autonomous mentality is a far cry from the time-honored vision of liberal education that is designed to shape the minds and character of individuals for sake of service in the world, and from the Christian perspective of believers united to one another and to God by a redemptive covenant that calls for the active expression of the love of God and neighbor even as oneself.

If traditions do, indeed, play this kind of noble role in the life of various human communities, then it is no wonder that the modern attempt to abrogate this concept would eventually fail. The anti-traditionalism of modernity has been subjected to extreme criticisms recently, and concerted efforts have been made by various thinkers to rehabilitate this important notion. And as we shall see, this endeavor has implications for the restoration of the classical Christian tradition, and along with it, a renewed memory of its educational and intellectual components as well.

### **The Rediscovery and Recovery of Tradition**

In his attempt to make sense of the cacophony of moral discourse in the late twentieth century, philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre (b. 1929) traces the problem to the fact that only fragments remain of a once unified moral vision. This former perspective consisted of an essentialist understanding of human nature and a well-defined understanding of the ethical good. He likens the disturbing situation in contemporary moral thought to an imaginary world in which a once flourishing scientific enterprise was destroyed because it was blamed for a series of environmental disasters. After a while, a reaction sets in, and an attempt to rebuild the scientific program from its surviving components is undertaken. But because so much has been lost over time, the reconstituted program, though it goes under the name of science, is not really science at all. So it is with contemporary ethics: the once unified moral vision was obliterated by the Enlightenment and its liberal view of persons as atomistic individuals using their autonomous reason to seek the fulfillment of their contingent desires. In this context, the attempt was made by utilitarians and neo-Kantians to build a coherent moral philosophy from surviving fragments rooted in utility or reason respectively. Though this endeavor goes under

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<sup>17</sup> *Fiddler on the Roof*, book Joseph Stein, music Jerry Bock, Lyrics Sheldon Harnic. Based on Sholom Alechem's stories (New York: Crown Publishers, Inc., 1964), 1 (emphasis added).

the name of moral philosophy, it is not truly moral philosophy at all. Enlightenment liberalism fails to provide a basis for a coherent system of ethics. Thus, the only alternatives in MacIntyre's estimation are to accept the Nietzschean reduction of morality to the will-to-power, or return to an Aristotelian ethic rooted in a substantial conception of human nature that can be fulfilled by the cultivation of moral and intellectual virtues. MacIntyre has almost single-handedly resurrected this latter alternative.<sup>18</sup>

However, in further developing his thesis, MacIntyre realized that the content and defense of any particular moral philosophy is inevitably linked to a view of practical reason that is always a function of a particular community or human tradition. In other words, we live and think in accordance with dictates of our social grouping. The anti-traditionalism of Enlightenment liberalism (which, ironically, became the new modern tradition as MacIntyre repeatedly points out), has been trumped by the recognition of the inescapable role played by tradition to which all human concepts, words, and deeds are inextricably linked. As MacIntyre puts it in a clear summary statement,

There is no standing ground, no place for enquiry, no way to engage in the practices of advancing, evaluating, accepting, and rejecting reasoned argument apart from that which is provided by some particular *tradition* or other.<sup>19</sup>

Thus, it became evident to MacIntyre that "conceptions of justice and of practical rationality . . . confront us as closely related aspects of some larger, more or less well-articulated, overall view of human life and of its place in nature."<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> See Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*, 2d. ed., (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984).

<sup>19</sup> Alasdair MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988), 350.

Justice and rationality, in other words, are thoroughly tradition-dependent. His defense of this position was extended even further in yet another book—his 1988 Gifford Lectures—in which he argued for the superiority of a tradition-based method of moral inquiry (which includes historical, literary, anthropological, and sociological questions) over the rival versions of the strong rationalism of the encyclopaedists (exemplified in the Gifford Lectures themselves, and in the ninth edition of the *Encyclopedia Britannica*), and the radical perspectivism and relativism of the genealogists (exemplified in F. Nietzsche's *Genealogy of Morals*, and M. Foucault's *Order of Things*).<sup>21</sup> MacIntyre, therefore, has demonstrated in his triad of books the inescapable role of human traditions as the context in which people live, move, and have their being.

This rehabilitation of tradition has had important implications, not only in the area of moral philosophy, but also for the Church. As a non-negotiable guide for human thought and life, tradition's comeback has been readily accepted in those branches of Christianity such as Catholicism and Orthodoxy where it has held a place of prominence historically. And it has led thinkers in the evangelical world to consider its possibilities after centuries of neglect. Recently, a virtual cottage industry dedicated to the rediscovery and recovery of the classical Christian tradition has grown up among conservative believers. My own interest and involvement in this matter has consisted in introducing college students at UT-Arlington and here at DBU to historic, liturgical forms of worship and spirituality. Also, back in 1994, I proposed to DBU administrators a forty-five hour master of arts program in classical Christianity (MACC!) consisting of a reading and discussion of primary texts in the

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<sup>20</sup> MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?*, 389.

<sup>21</sup> Alasdair MacIntyre, *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry: Encyclopedia, Genealogy and Tradition* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1990).

Christian tradition within the framework of a reformational worldview. In addition to my own interest in this recovery operation, a number of individual monographs devoted to the theme of the Christian tradition have been published recently, including Robert L. Wilken, *Remembering the Christian Past* (Eerdmans, 1995), and D. H. Williams, *Retrieving the Tradition & Renewing Evangelicalism: A Primer for Suspicious Protestants* (Eerdmans, 1999). InterVarsity Press, under the general editorship of Thomas Oden (who is dedicating his final years as a theologian to the renewal of the classical Christian tradition), is in the process of publishing the *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture* based on the writings of the Church Fathers. An introductory volume to this series by Christopher A. Hall titled *Reading Scripture with the Church Fathers* (IVP, 1998) encourages readers to hear the music of the patristic voices to which many remain “tone-deaf.” William B. Eerdmans, in a similar vein, has embarked upon a project called *The Church’s Bible* that presents selected extracts of patristic commentary on major passages of Scripture. A “Reclaiming the Great Tradition” conference, sponsored by *Touchstone* magazine, was held in the spring of 1994 in which prominent Catholic, Orthodox and Evangelical believers discovered that they held in common and affirmed together the great tradition—what C. S. Lewis called “mere Christianity.”<sup>22</sup> Another similar conference is scheduled for this fall.<sup>23</sup> And finally, the pilgrimages of former

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<sup>22</sup> James H. Cutsinger, ed. *Reclaiming the Great Tradition: Evangelicals, Catholics & Orthodox in Dialogue* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1997). Lewis described his notion of mere Christianity in these words: “no insipid interdenominational transparency, but something positive, self-consistent and inexhaustible. I know it, indeed to my cost. In the days when I still hated Christianity, I learned to recognize, like some all too familiar smell, that almost unvarying something which met me. . . .” (from C. S. Lewis, “Introduction,” in *St. Athanasius: On the Incarnation* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Orthodox Seminary Press, 1944; reprint 1993), 6.

<sup>23</sup> For information, call 1-800-375-7373.

evangelicals such as Peter Gillquist,<sup>24</sup> Thomas Howard,<sup>25</sup> and Franky Schaeffer<sup>26</sup> in the direction of Rome, Canterbury,<sup>27</sup> and Constantinople, indicate that there is a hunger on the part of many biblical Protestants for a theology and spiritual experience that has deep roots in the Christian past.

And on it goes. Not only do I suggest that we pay attention to this worthwhile attempt to recover the classical Christian tradition in general, but I also suggest, for the purposes of our life and work together here at DBU, that as a part of this tradition rediscovery and recovery movement, we Christian administrators, professors, staff, and students must seek to reclaim the most worthy aspects of the *Christian intellectual tradition* as well. In this final section, I will specify its content and how we might best approach it.

### **The Classical Christian Intellectual Tradition: Content and Approach**

In keeping with the spirit of the times to dig deep into the Christian past and discover its neglected treasures, Arthur F. Holmes, professor of philosophy emeritus at Wheaton College, has written a recent book from which my address today takes its title: *Building the Christian Academy*.<sup>28</sup> Taking his cue from the title to George

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<sup>24</sup> Peter Gillquist, *Becoming Orthodox*, rev. ed. (Ben Lomand, CA: Conciliar Press, 1992).

<sup>25</sup> Thomas Howard, *Evangelical is not Enough* (Nashville, Thomas Nelson, 1984).

<sup>26</sup> Frank Schaeffer, *Dancing Alone: The Quest for Orthodox Faith in the Age of False Religion* (Brookline, MA: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 1994).

<sup>27</sup> Robert Webber, *Evangelicals on the Canterbury Trail: Why Evangelicals are Attracted to the Liturgical Church* (Waco: Word, 1985). See also his *Ancient-Future Faith: Evangelicalism for a Postmodern World* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1999).



Marsden's *The Soul of the American University* (Oxford, 1994), Holmes wanted to ascertain the historic characteristics of the soul of the *Christian university* over the past two millennia. In short, he wanted to investigate the best of the Christian tradition in higher education, and employ that wisdom on behalf of our institutions today. So his research led him to seven formative schools and thinkers whereby this tradition developed. So he examines the Alexandrian schools, the contribution of St. Augustine, the monastery and cathedral schools, the scholastic university, reformational institutions, the role of Francis Bacon, and finally, the work of John Henry Newman. Out of this broad overview, he identifies four themes that comprise the soul of the Christian academy. Here they are:

1. Out of the monastic and cathedral schools, *the care of the soul* (that is, the moral and spiritual formation of students, and the quest for wisdom).
2. Out of the Alexandrian schools, *the unity of truth* (that is, the [re]integration of Christian belief with the assumptions, content, and practice of the fundamental academic disciplines).
3. Out of Protestant reformation, *the usefulness of the liberal arts as preparation for service to both church and society* (that is, knowledge and skills that enable a person to identify worldviews, engage the culture, enjoy aesthetic experience, and become a more complete person).
4. Out of Augustine and others, *contemplative or doxological learning* (that is, a reflective approach to education as a call to worship for the glory of God).

What do these historic traditions in Christian higher education say about building the Christian academy today? Several things in Holmes's estimation.

They warn us about premature specialization and the increasingly utilitarian view of education. They tell us to emphasize the liberal arts, [and] their formative role. . . . They tell us that student formation must be more intentional. . . . [They remind us] that Christian scholarship is not the "outrageous idea" that some of our secular counterparts suppose. . . . [And they tell us that] we need to recover the habit of contemplative learning that

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<sup>28</sup> Arthur F. Holmes, *Building the Christian Academy* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2001).

glorifies God in all the arts and sciences, and to acknowledge that in him are “all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.”<sup>29</sup>

And this is just the tip of the proverbial ice berg of the Christian intellectual tradition. If we drew upon the following reading list and its content, who knows how it might transform our contemporary understanding and practice of the Christian higher education: Plato, *Republic*; Aristotle, *Ethics*, *Politics*; Clement, *Pedaigogus*; Augustine, *De Doctrina Christiana*; *De Magistro*; Boethius, *Consolation of Philosophy*; Hugh of St. Victor, *Didascalicon: A Medieval Guide to the Arts*; Bonaventure, *The Journey of the Mind to God*; Thomas Aquinas, *On the Teacher*, *The Division and Methods of the Sciences*; *Truth*; Martin Luther, “A Sermon on Keeping Children in School,” “To the City Councilmen in Germany That They Establish and Maintain Christian Schools”; Philip Melancton, *Address on Education*; John Calvin, *By-Laws of the Geneva Academy*; John Milton, “Tractate on Education”; Francis Bacon, *Advancement of Learning*; *New Atlantis*; *Novum Organum*; John H. Newman, *The Idea of a University*, *University Subjects*; John Locke, *Educational Writings*; C. S. Lewis, *Abolition of Man*; Jean Leclercq, *The Love of Learning and the Desire for God*; Pope John Paul II, *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*; *Fides et Ratio*; and so on, and so on, and so on, and so on . . . ! May God help us to take advantage of these “acres of diamonds” in our own backyard!

And how shall we approach these truths and treasures in this venerable Christian educational and intellectual tradition? My answer: by immersion in it and as apprentices to it! “All knowing,” says Robert Wilken, “begins with what we have received; before we become masters we must first learn to be disciples, to allow others to form our words and guide our thoughts.”<sup>30</sup> And so it is with the Christian

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<sup>29</sup> Holmes, *Building the Christian Academy*, 116-118.

<sup>30</sup> Wilken, *Remembering the Christian Past*, viii-ix.

intellectual tradition and the great educational arts of reading, writing, studying, teaching, and learning. “An art which cannot be specified in detail,” according to Michael Polanyi, “cannot be transmitted by prescription, since no prescription for it exists. It can be passed on only by example from master to apprentice.”<sup>31</sup> This is a mysterious process, but it certainly involves imitating a trusted authority who is able by example to pass along a great tradition of learning to a humble apprentice. Polanyi continues:

To learn by example is to submit to authority. You follow your master because you trust his manner of doing things even when you cannot analyse and account in detail for its effectiveness. By watching the master and emulating his efforts in the presence of his example, the apprentice unconsciously picks up the rules of the art, including those which are not explicitly known to the master himself. These hidden rules can be assimilated only by a person who surrenders himself to that extent uncritically to the imitation of another. A society which wants to preserve a fund of personal knowledge must submit to tradition.<sup>32</sup>

So, for example, if you want become a jazz musician or a folk singer, then immerse yourself in the singing and trumpeting tradition of a classic jazz virtuoso like Louis Armstrong, or in the soulful folk melodies of a Kate Campbell. Robert Wilken explains the purpose of this process on the basis of his weekend ritual.

On Saturday mornings, I often listen to a jazz show on National Public Radio that features interviews with famous and not-so-famous jazz pianists, saxophonists, drummers, trumpeters, etc., and I am regularly struck at how they speak with such respect of teachers and masters, and how to a person they learned to play the piano by first playing in someone else’s style or learned to blow the trumpet by imitating Louis Armstrong or someone else. Similarly, one is impressed with how often a performer like folk singer Jean Redpath speaks about tradition as the necessary condition for making and singing folk music. How often we are admonished not to let the old traditions be forgotten. Why? . . . because musicians, like painters and writers and

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<sup>31</sup> Michael Polanyi, *Personal Knowledge: Towards a Post-Critical Philosophy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), 53.

<sup>32</sup> Polanyi, *Personal Knowledge*, 53.

sculptors, know in their fingertips or vocal cords or ears that imitation [of a tradition] is the way to excellence and originality.<sup>33</sup>

I am seeking to immerse myself, though not uncritically, in the historic, Christian educational and intellectual tradition (as well as the larger classic, Christian spiritual tradition), and, by the grace of God, be a faithful, submissive apprentice to its very best aspects. I seek to observe it, imitate it, learn from it, revere it appropriately, and pass the treasures of this tradition along to others. And I am happy to report that I have fourteen faculty colleagues here at DBU (and no doubt, many others) who are my companions and co-laborers in this endeavor. This summer, we in the 2001 Summer Institute in Christian Scholarship along with DBU provost Dr. Gail Linam, spent ten weeks together reading about 10 books (approximately 1500 pages in all), meeting for three and a half hours a week studying, thinking, and talking about these books and their content. From the very beginning, we made it our goal to focus on seven specific themes in the Christian intellectual tradition with a view to presenting our findings to the larger DBU community in the Friday Symposium this fall. We are paired up across disciplinary boundaries, are doing our homework, and are looking forward to presenting papers about these elements of the tradition in the weeks ahead. Today my paper has been an mere introduction to these upcoming Symposia presentations. So here is what lies ahead:

September 14: Debbi Richard and David Strickland—The Foundation for Christian Higher Education: The Biblical Worldview

September 21: Mike Rosato and Rose Johnson—Christian Liberal Arts Education

October 5: Deborah McCollister and Philip Mitchell—Christ and Culture: The Puritan Model for the University

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<sup>33</sup> Wilken, *Remembering the Christian Past*, 170-171.

October 19: Donna Shelton and Marsha Pool—Christian Moral Education

October 26: Beverly Giltner and Bobbie Martindale—The Christian Academic Vocation

November 2: Carey Moore and Andrew Schaffer—Learning Communities and the Moral and Spiritual Disciplines

November 9: Joe Matos and Marilyn Edwards—Christian Epistemology, Teaching, and Learning

November 16: Alisha Magee—Shaping the Hearts of the Young Through Stories

November 30: Christi Williams—The Roots of Progressive Education in Postmodern Society: A Critical Look at Rousseau's *Emile*

### **Conclusion**

Each faculty member (and student) on this roster has made the wonderful rediscovery, and are working toward the needed recovery, of the classic traditions in Christian higher education for the sake of building the Christian academy, DBU in particular. In this regard, perhaps the most important question that DBU can ask itself institutionally, and that we should ask ourselves personally, is not so much what should we believe, think, or do, but whom should we trust and who are we trusting? That is, to whom have we apprenticed ourselves in faith for formulating and carrying out our understanding of the academic vocation?<sup>34</sup> For it is not too much to say that those master-authorities in whom we trust as apprentices will determine who we are and what we shall become. It will determine what kind of institution we will be, and what kind of influence we will have on students, and through them, on the church and the world. For our primary goal ought to be to introduce students to, immerse them in, shape them by, and equip them to live out

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<sup>34</sup> Wilken, *Remembering the Christian Past*, 173.

and transmit the heart and soul of the classic Christian spiritual and intellectual tradition while they are at DBU. This is no small matter for us to think and do something about!

The Church as the living community of the faithful is called to be the bearer of the ancient traditions received from those who have gone before. And the Church was not only to keep the traditions safe, but was to pass them on to others. As St. Paul said to his disciple Timothy, “Guard, through the Holy Spirit . . . the treasure which has been entrusted to you” (2 Tim. 1:14), and “the things which you have heard from me . . . these entrust to faithful men, who will be able to teach others also” (2 Tim. 2: 2). Unfortunately, however, someone, somewhere along the way let their guard down, dropped the baton, and the truth was broken. Consequently, we have lost the memory of that treasure of the tradition that had been conferred upon the Church. *How could we forget?* We have been blind to its history, deaf to its story, and mute in our speech about it. It is no longer the true object of our trust! Our apprenticeship is aligned with others. Given the condition of the academy today,<sup>35</sup> we can no longer remain in this desensitized and compromised condition. By the grace of God, a major rediscovery and recovery effort of the great Christian tradition, including its scholarly vision, is underway, and we have the opportunity to be a part of it. Our Friday Symposiums this fall are devoted to it. In this regard, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe’s words of advice are most *apropos* with which to conclude:

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<sup>35</sup> George M. Marsden, *The Outrageous Idea of Christian Scholarship* (New York: Oxford, 1997), 3, asserts: “Contemporary university culture is hollow at its core.” Alasdair MacIntyre describes the contemporary university as a place of “constrained disagreement,” and says that the central responsibility of higher education is “to initiate students into conflict.” See his *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry*, 231.

What you have as heritage,  
Take now as task.  
For thus you will make it your own.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> *Faust*, 682-683; quoted in Pelikan, *The Vindication of Tradition*, 82.