

OUR GOD IS ONE :

The **Monotheistic** Imperative

(Ex 20:1-4; Ro 1:18-23)

I. THE ONLY (REAL) ONE: “No other gods” (Ex. 20:1-4)

- A. Countering **Polytheism** (gods in our world) & **Pantheism** (god is the world)—intellectual constructs
 - 1. Creation/Origin gods (generally aspects of the natural/physical world)
 - a. Sun & Stars—Egyptian Amon-Re; Greek Apollo; current physics re “energy”; popularity of astrology symptomatic
 - b. Earth—Greek *Gaia*; Latin *Mater* (e.g. matter-mother); current bio-centric, “Mother Earth” devotees (NB Alston Chase’s *In A Dark Wood*)
 - c. Animistic entities—e.g. “Manitous” & Hindu spirits; healing crystals & New Age notions; Wicca cults (now qualify as military chaplains)
 - d. Goddess Sophia (cf. Oden’s *Requiem*)—immanent power
 - e. Naturalistic processes—Empedocles; Darwin’s “natural selection;” Neo-Darwinianism (e.g. Richard Dawkins: *The Blind Watchmaker*)
 - 2. Dionysian deities
 - a. Baal cults, orgies—aligning devotees with irrational powers (e.g. *The DaVinci Code*)
 - b. E. Michael Jones: *Degenerate Moderns; Dionysius Rising; Libido Dominandi*; Pitrim Sorokin’s analyses: *The Crisis of Our Age* & current “sensate culture”
- B. Countering **Idolatry**—gods of our own making (Ro 1:18-23)
 - 1. Citations:
 - a. Martin Luther: “We easily fall into idolatry, for we are inclined thereunto by nature, and coming to us by inheritance, it seems pleasant.”
 - b. Nietzsche: “There are more idols in the world than there are realities.”
 - c. C.S. Lewis: “Nearly all that we call human history . . . [is] the long terrible story of man trying to find something other than God which will make him happy” (*Mere Christianity*).
 - 2. Analyses:
 - a. Timothy Keller: *Counterfeit Gods* (e.g. love, money, success, power); “A counterfeit god is anything so central and essential to your life that, should you lose it, your life would feel hardly worth living” (#133).
 - b. Nancy Pearcey: *Finding Truth: 5 Principles for Unmasking Atheism, Secularism, and Other God Substitutes*
 - 3. Current manifestations
 - a. Ideologies imposed, often ruthlessly
 - 1. Leftist—Jacobins in France; Bolsheviks in Russia; Antonio Grammski’s “march through institutions”—thus Bill Ayers, Tom Hayden; N.B. *The God That Failed*
 - 2. Racialist—Eugenicists (e.g. Margaret Sanger); Hitler
 - b. Instincts—“pleasure principle” whereby all behaviors allowed
- C. Countering Atheism
 - 1. Ps 14 re “fool”
 - 2. Bo Jinn’s *Illogical Atheism: A Comprehensive Response to the Contemporary Freethinker from a Lapsed Agnostic*

II. SIMPL(E)Y ONE: **Internal Integrity** (To be real is to be one”)

- A. Pure Spirit:
 - 1. Non-material, Supernatural, Noumenal
 - 2. Untainted (thus God=Good, without evil), though spirits (i.e. angels & demons) may be either purely good or evil!
- B. Pure Act
 - 1. Unmoved Mover (only ONE can move all else)
 - 2. Sustaining Being (only ONE can preserve all else)
- C. Indivisible
 - 1. Inner wholeness, integrity, unified being
 - 2. N.B. Mysterious mutual indwelling of Triune Persons

Oden's *REQUIEM*

In his final days as a professor at Drew Theological Seminary (a United Methodist institution), Thomas Oden published *Requiem: A Lament in Three Movements* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, c. 1995) to register his “affectionate anguish” with both seminary education and the state of mainline Protestant denominations in the United States. Having discovered and sought to make available the great resources of the classic Christian tradition, he styled himself a “young fogey” so committed to the truth of the past that he is considered “old-fashioned” by the legions of “modernists” now controlling mainline institutions. “As a former sixties radical,” he confessed, “I am now out of the closet as an orthodox evangelical (yes, you read me right—orthodox evangelical) teaching in the PC Wordperfect (politically correct) theological school, in a resourceful faculty that has tried to live out the inclusiveness ethic as earnestly as any I know” (p. 15). The deeply sorrowful in many ways, this *Requiem* “is essentially a lament for a friend, not a diatribe against an enemy” (p. 19). And yet he must utter words of caution: “Christian worshipers can no longer afford to neglect what is happening to the young people they guilelessly send off to seminary, entrusting that they will be taught all that is requisite for Christian ministry” (p. 22).

Explaining “the feast I left” Oden focuses on an incident in his seminary’s chapel devoted to worshipping the goddess “Sophia.” Presiding at the service was one of the coauthors of *Wisdom’s Feast* who had described Sophia as “a strong, proud, creative goddess within the biblical tradition,” a “divine saving figure” immanent “in all things, waiting to be discovered.” Sitting in the chapel of a United Methodist seminar and forced to listen to a feminist homily and hymn devoted to Sophia, he “felt just a little (for the first time in my life) like the apologists of the second century must have felt when confronted with the challenge of attesting the Lordship of Christ amid a pagan pantheon of Greco-Roman deities” (p. 29). Pondering his predicament as the chapel service moved toward the sacrament of the Lord’s Table, he prayed for a wisdom quite different from Sophia, and when the female homilist “offered the invitation to come to the Lord’s Table, not in the Lord’s name, but in the name of the goddess who was speaking through Jesus,” he “quietly, inconspicuously, left the service” (p. 32). Though this kind of service is, Oden insists, quite limited to radical hyperfeminist circles, it does in fact represent powerful currents within contemporary Christianity. But since he had read *Wisdom’s Feast*, he knew what the homilist was doing and he could not endorse it since she had clearly written that ““in this [Eucharistic] service, *Sophia actively replaces Jesus*”” (p. 146).

The fact that a goddess, Sophia, could be worshipped in a Methodist seminary points to the tarnished history of theological education in America. To Oden, the culprit in the story is *Secularization*, an “interloper” who has stolen the doctrinal, liturgical and devotional riches of the church. Mainline seminaries have aided and abetted this secularizing process, wedding themselves to a “modernity” (what Oden calls “mod rot”) that is already passing away. They have provided a safe place for trendy, tenured radicals who worked closely with ecclesiastical bureaucracies to promote “change” in the church. Self-consciously “liberated” and socially engaged, they generally considered themselves “*doctrinally imaginative, liturgically experimental, disciplinarily nonjudgmental, politically correct, multiculturally tolerant, morally broad-minded, ethically situationist, and, above all, sexually lenient, permissive, uninhibited*” (p. 34). Consequently: “It seems worth noting that the liberated seminary at its zenith has finally achieved a condition that has never before prevailed in Christian history: Heresy dimply does not exist” (p. 46). Political Incorrectness must be punished—witness the fate of Larry Summers, forced to resign as President of Harvard for untoward remarks regarding women in science. Heresy must be tolerated, even celebrated for its “cutting-edge” elements—witness the failure of the Episcopal Church to discipline bishops promulgating the most radical denials of orthodoxy.

Yet for all the bad news Oden presented two decades ago, he had hope for seminary education, for there was an “emerging resistance movement” committed to rediscovering and promoting classic orthodoxy. Despite his personal struggles with powerful “ultrafeminists” who must be heroically resisted despite their opprobrium (calling folks like Oden medieval, misogynist, puritanical), there are many women in ministry committed to preserving the ancient truths of the faith. Despite the Marxist ideology underlying much of “liberation theology,” there are advocates of social justice still securely committed to orthodoxy. Young Evangelicals may very well maintain (if they rightly struggle) their deep convictions while taking advantage of the enormous scholarly resources (libraries, endowments, etc.) of mainline denominations. They illustrate the emergence and worth of what Oden terms “Postmodern Paleo-orthodox Spirituality” that is rooted in an Ancient Christianity that will, in fact, ever endure. “The gates of hell shall not prevail!”

WHO'S NUMBER ONE?

1. Explain our craving to be number one? Athletic teams, season after season, work hard to win the final tournament, to proudly proclaim themselves #1. Why was Jordan Speith so happy to win the recent U.S. Open and John Deer Classic golf tournaments? the US women's soccer team the FIFA tournament? And why did so many Americans join them in celebrating the victory over Japan? Why not rejoice in being the "runner up," or the most "genial" of competitors," or the most nicely attired combo? Why do NFL and NBA teams not insist on the importance of "equality" and field the most perfectly diverse, racially balanced, sexually-blended teams?
2. Of all the mountains on earth, is one of them the "highest"? Of all the mountains in Colorado, is one of them the "highest"? Of all living human beings alive on earth, has one of them been the "tallest"? Of all the human beings who have ever lived on earth, is one of them the "tallest"? Of all living human beings on earth is one of the "strongest"? the "fastest"? the "smartest"? Was Mohammed Ali wrong to label himself "the greatest"?
3. Of all scientific theories (compare Ptolemy with Copernicus) regarding the solar system, is one of them the "truest"? Of all cosmological theories regarding the universe, is one of them the "truest"? Why do many physicists (persuaded there are four basic forces—gravity; electromagnetism; strong nuclear force; weak nuclear force—in the universe) still seek an ever simpler "unifying theory of everything"? Does all our experience drive us to place everything in an hierarchical context, pointing to some pinnacle of excellence or perfection?
4. Why do we generally admire and long to be the **best**? Doing so we acknowledge that some things are "**better**" than other things. Is Chartes Cathedral a "better" church building than Lake George's CFC? Is Pavarotti's voice "better" than Gerard Reed's? Is Mozart a better musical composer than Bob Dylan? Is Michelangelo a "better" sculptor than Dieter Rademacher (or his precocious son, David)?
5. Are plants more lively (alive) than minerals (gasses and rocks? Are plants, inasmuch as they absorb and transform minerals into their own being, more admirable and worthwhile than minerals? Are animals livelier (more alive) than plants? Are animals livelier inasmuch as they absorb and transform plants into their own being, inasmuch as they have sensations (seeing, feeling) than plants? Are human beings livelier (more alive) than animals? Inasmuch as humans absorb and transform plants and animals into themselves, and inasmuch as they ingest knowledge regarding themselves and the cosmos, are they superior to the rest of creation? If so, does human superiority reside in possessing a higher and more perfect kind of being?
6. Consider the importance of the suffix "**est**," derived from the German *ist* (meaning is), and taken more fundamentally from the Latin *est* (meaning is). When we call something the "finest" or "greatest" do we mean it is most fully realizing its potential, attaining its perfection? Is it self-evident that in every given category some thing or someone is the **est** of all? Might we conclude that the more *isness* something has the better it is? If so, might we conclude that the "greatest possible being" is the One Who IS? And as such, does He possess important attributes, such as immensity, infinity, etc?

The True and Only Heaven

A history professor at the University of Rochester, the late Christopher Lasch, once himself a Marxist-oriented, progressive, socialist intellectual, testifies to both his personal convictions and his historical judgments in *The True and Only Heaven: Progress and Its Critics*. His own confidence in the reigning liberalism of the intelligentsia slipped in the 1970s, when his family studies “led me to question the left’s program of sexual liberation, careers for women, and professional child care” (p. 25). Surveying the scene, all forms of “authority, including parental authority, seemed in serious decline” (p. 31), a process which inevitably undermines “the capacity for independent judgment, initiative, and self-discipline, on which democracy had always been understood to depend” (p. 31). Lasch now sees things, not as a young radical, but as a responsible adult--and, more importantly, as a parent.

“To see the modern world from the point of view of a parent is to see it in the worst possible light. This perspective unmistakably reveals the unwholesomeness . . . of our way of life: our obsession with sex, violence, and the pornography of ‘making it’; our addictive dependence on drugs, ‘entertainment,’ and the evening news; our impatience with any thing that limits our sovereign freedom of choice, especially with the constraints of marital and familial ties; our preference for ‘nonbinding commitments’; our third-rate educational system; our third-rate morality; our refusal to draw a distinction between right and wrong, lest we ‘impose’ our morality on others and thus invite others to ‘impose’ their morality on us; our reluctance to judge or be judged; our indifference to the needs of future generations, as evidenced by our willingness to saddle them with a huge national debt, an overgrown arsenal of destruction, and a deteriorating environment; our inhospitable attitude to the newcomers born into our midst; our unstated assumption, which underlies so much of the propaganda for unlimited abortion, that only those children born for success ought to be allowed to be born at all” (pp. 33-34).

The book’s title comes from a prescient passage in Nathaniel Hawthorne’s “The Celestial Railroad,” which says: “Many passengers stop to take their pleasure or make their profit in [vanity] fair, instead of going onward to the celestial city. Indeed, such are the charms of the place that people often affirm it to be the true and only heaven; stoutly contending that there is no other, that those who seek further are mere dreamers, and that, if the fabled brightness of the celestial city lay but a bare mile beyond the gates of vanity, they would not be fools enough to go thither.” In this book Lasch pursues “a deceptively simple question. How does it happen that serious people continue to believe in progress, in the face of massive evidence that might have been expected to refute the idea of progress once and for all?” (p. 13). Following a century notable for its genocidal wars and ecocidal woes, why do so many political thinkers and politicians so blithely aver, in chorus with did Eleanor Roosevelt, that the “world’s getting better, and better, and better”?

The reason for their optimism, Lasch thinks, is a deeply emotional, if not overtly religious, attachment to the doctrine of historical progress. Tracing the permutations of that doctrine over the course of two centuries is his quest. To do so, he first seeks to accurately define the idea of progress. With their cyclical philosophy of history, the Greeks had no notion of “progress.” To Christians like St Augustine, history is linear, but it’s hardly on an upward trajectory! Only in the “modern” era did the notion of historical progress clearly emerge, particularly in the economic thought of Adam Smith with its insistence that we have infinite desires for infinite goods and progress means acquiring ever-more of the world’s goods.

Leading intellectuals of the Enlightenment envisioned better living through commerce and industry. In David Hume’s opinion, merchants are the “most useful race of men in the whole society.” Tom Paine declared: “If commerce were permitted to act to the universal extent it is capable, it would extirpate the system of war, and produce a revolution in the uncivil state of governments.” Romantics reacted nostalgically against it, Marxists envisioned a distant utopia emerging out of its shambles, agrarian “populists” railed against it, but the modern world still embraces deeply-inscribed Enlightenment aspirations. Whatever adds to our collection of houses or stocks or household appliances is necessarily good.

The most insightful critics of progress, Lasch found, stood rooted in “the tradition of Christian prophecy, as reformulated by Calvin and his followers and, in the nineteenth century, by moral philosophers and social critics--notably Thomas Carlyle and Ralph Waldo Emerson—in whom Calvinism remained a powerful background presence” (p. 227). They saw the human and environmental costs which never appeared in accountants’ ledgers. Since WWII, “the politics of the civilized minority” (an elite liberal corps which has generally secured its ends by circumventing the will of common people), has dominated America, using the courts, rather than the legislatures, to gain permissive abortion policies, for example. Against such Lasch protests!