

“The Opening of the Evangelical Mind”

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Of all America's religious traditions, the author writes, evangelical Protestantism, at least in its twentieth-century conservative forms, has long ranked "dead last in intellectual stature." Now evangelical thinkers are trying to revitalize their tradition. Can they turn an intellectual backwater into an intellectual beacon?

On June 29, 1989, in Providence, Rhode Island, Deborah Weisman graduated from Nathan Bishop Middle School. "God of the free, hope of the brave," Rabbi Leslie Gutterman offered in the graduation's ceremonial prayer, "for the legacy of America where diversity is celebrated and the rights of minorities are protected, we thank you. May these young men and women grow up to enrich it." Deborah's father, who had objected to the inclusion of the prayer, sued the school's principal, Robert E. Lee. By the now familiar margin of 5-4, in 1992 the U. S. Supreme Court ruled in favor of the Weismans.

Writing for the majority, Justice Anthony Kennedy applied the First Amendment's prohibition of an established religion. The prayer was nonsectarian, Kennedy acknowledged, and anything but an effort by Christians to impose their faith on religious minorities. Nonetheless, he said, government was involved in all its aspects. Not only was the prayer delivered at an official school function but its very inclusiveness was the result of guidelines supplied to all clergy by school authorities. "The undeniable fact," Kennedy continued, "is that the school district's supervision and control of a ... school graduation ceremony places public pressure, as well as peer pressure, on attending students to stand as a group.... This pressure, though subtle and indirect, can be as real as any overt compulsion." America is a society committed to the principle of individual freedom, and by forcing Deborah Weisman to participate in a ritual that violated her conscience, the prayer interfered with her rights.



All this was too much for Justice Antonin Scalia. Morality has always played a role in the public life of America, he argued in dissent, and because religion is the traditional source of that morality, the Court's decision represented one more step away from the faith of the Founders. In Scalia's view, the majority had succumbed to a kind of coercion inflation, equating something as harmless as a nondenominational prayer with "coercion of religious orthodoxy ... by force of law and threat of penalty." In words seemingly designed to be provoking, Scalia wrote that the Court's opinion treated religion as a "purely personal avocation that can be indulged entirely in secret, like pornography, in the privacy of one's room."

Lee v. Weisman is a wonderful case to use in undergraduate political-science classes, because it presents two passionately argued, and utterly contrasting, views of America. I recently visited such a class, at a four-year liberal-arts college in the Midwest, in which the question of the day was whether the case had been correctly decided. Defying every stereotype of apathetic students and indifferent professors, the discussion was vigorous, intelligent, and informed. As one might expect from a generation taught to believe that tolerance is the highest moral value, the overwhelming response of the students was to endorse Kennedy's opinion. "I may be a Christian," one said, "but Christians may not be in the majority forever." Another said that he had grown up Christian in a Jewish community, so he understood what it meant to be in the minority. Scalia's dissent, said a third, was "inflammatory." When a fourth student tried to criticize the majority decision, the others laughingly disagreed. These students understood, as if instinctively, the fundamental principle of liberalism hammered home by philosophers such as Immanuel Kant and John Rawls: A just policy is one to which we would agree if we could not know whether it would benefit us personally or not.

Although Lee v. Weisman involved a Jewish student and a rabbi, none of the students in this political-science class were Jewish. Wheaton College, in Illinois, where the class was held, is an evangelical-Protestant institution. "We believe that God has revealed Himself and His truth in the created order, in the Scriptures, and supremely in Jesus Christ; and that the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments are verbally inspired by God and inerrant in the original writing, so that they are fully trustworthy and of supreme and final authority in all they say," reads the doctrinal statement of Wheaton, prominently printed in the college catalogue. Wheaton takes its doctrinal



statement seriously, I was informed by the college's president, Duane Litfin. All prospective faculty members must take the pledge, and as Stanton L. Jones, Wheaton's provost, told me, they are considered to have reaffirmed it when they sign their annual salary letter. Indeed, to obtain tenure at Wheaton, faculty members not only must teach and do research but also must write, and have approved, a thirty- to fifty-page paper demonstrating that they can approach their academic discipline from a Christian perspective.

Because its doctrinal statement is so heavily committed to an evangelical-Protestant understanding of God, Wheaton excludes Jews and most Catholics. There are a few Catholic students at the college (fourteen out of 2,732 last fall), some of whom converted in college and others who see no contradiction between their faith and the statement. But there are no Catholics on the faculty, and except for four "Jewish Christians," as the college calls Jews for Jesus, no Jews at all. What would the college do, I asked Litfin, if a faculty member decided to convert to Catholicism? He would be asked if he would not be more comfortable working elsewhere.

Of all America's religious traditions, evangelical Protestantism, at least in its twentieth-century conservative forms, ranks dead last in intellectual stature. High-church Protestants established most of those universities we now call Ivy League. Methodism, with strong evangelical roots in England, came to America, eventually lost its revivalist spirit, and produced Northwestern, Boston University, and Emory. Three Catholic universities--Georgetown, Notre Dame, and Boston College--are now ranked in the top fifty of America's research universities. If there are only one or two great universities that are distinctively Jewish, that is because Jews have been so successful throughout American academic and intellectual life. No comparable legacy has come from those fundamentalist sects that have flourished in the American heartland. Fundamentalism emerged in the United States toward the end of the nineteenth century, as a reaction against the increasing cosmopolitanism of most American Protestant denominations. Convinced that the United States was living through a period that threatened the disintegration of Christian civilization, fundamentalists believed that a return to strict principles was America's only salvation. Published as *The Fundamentals*, a twelve-volume paperback series issued from 1910 to 1915, those principles insisted on the literal truth of the Bible, outlined the ways in which Jesus would return to earth, and



attacked competing religions, including Mormonism and Catholicism. While the rest of American religion accepted modernity, and with it freedom of thought, fundamentalists moved backward. So hostile were they to the life of the mind that they managed during the Scopes "monkey" trial, in July of 1925, to transform the bigoted H. L. Mencken, who was immortalized in *Inherit the Wind*, into a paragon of liberal tolerance. When Sinclair Lewis, the most celebrated American novelist never to have written a great work of literature, created the improbable Elmer Gantry, the behavior of one conservative preacher after another seemed to make him, of all things, lifelike.

Searching for roots in American culture, fundamentalists looked back to the revivalism that flourished throughout the nineteenth century, a religious outlook usually characterized as evangelical. The terms "fundamentalist" and "evangelical" are sometimes conflated, because the movements have common origins. But beginning in the 1930s some conservative Protestants began to distance themselves from the extreme anti-modernism of more-vocal fundamentalists, and adopted the term "neo-evangelical" to describe themselves. Since then it has been possible to describe evangelicals as Christians who are conservative in their theology and usually, although not necessarily, conservative in their politics.

Wheaton College was in the middle of these debates over the form that conservative Protestantism would take. When its second president, Charles Blanchard, died, in 1925, the college adopted as its creed a set of principles that Blanchard had helped to draft for the World's Christian Fundamentals Association. From then to now Wheaton has been an institution committed to a strict interpretation of Christian principles. Yet at the same time Wheaton is an interdenominational school and sufficiently open to the world to be characterized as evangelical. Its most famous graduate, Billy Graham, played a crucial role in moving American fundamentalism away from its self-imposed rejection of the larger world in which it existed.

Wheaton thus bears little resemblance to Elmer Gantry's Terwillinger College, with its "standard of scholarship equal to the best high-schools," but it does retain legacies from its fundamentalist years. No college is likely to attract a world-class faculty if it peremptorily eliminates members of most of the world's religions. Students at Wheaton sign their own pledge, vowing to desist from smoking, drinking, and dancing. Required attendance at chapel (patrolling monitors



note any vacant seats) is not the way to appeal to student consumers who expect their colleges to respond to their every whim.

And yet the class I attended was fascinating, both because the students understood and accepted the arguments behind the First Amendment and because they were so intellectually curious. In its own way, campus life at Wheaton College resembles that of the 1960s, when students and a few professors, convinced that they had embarked on a mission of eternal importance, debated ideas as if life really depended on the answers they came up with. Students at Wheaton, moreover, are as outstanding as any students in America. Wheaton's rejection rate last year was higher than the University of Chicago's. Its class of 2003 includes sixty-one National Merit Scholars. The average SAT score of last year's entering class was 1,310, putting Wheaton in the same range as Oberlin College and the University of Virginia. One political-science major I met had just been accepted for the doctoral program at Yale, another for the one at the University of California at San Diego. Wheaton does even better in the hard sciences than in the social sciences, ranking among the nation's leading colleges in the percentage of its graduates who go on to earn doctorates. Surprisingly, for a college deriving from a religious tradition that was hostile to Darwinism, Wheaton managed to recruit the chairman of its biology department--the first place where conservative alumni are likely to look for insistence on the Bible's inerrancy--from the University of Pennsylvania School of Medicine.

And Lyman Kellstedt, the professor who led the discussion of *Lee v. Weisman*, was no slouch. Kellstedt taught at Georgetown, the State University of New York at Buffalo, and the University of Illinois at Chicago before coming to Wheaton. At Wheaton he took a deep salary cut, saw his teaching load expand from four courses a year to six, and gave up his tenure, because Wheaton grants no immediate tenure to faculty members, not even those who have already earned it at other institutions. Why did he do it? "Because I had a calling from God," he told me. Kellstedt is about to retire, but his family's relationship with political science goes on: his son teaches that subject at the decidedly non-evangelical Brown University.

Wheaton College is part of a determined effort by evangelical-Christian institutions to create a life of the mind. At Calvin College, in Michigan; Fuller Theological Seminary and Pepperdine



University, in California; Baylor University, in Texas; Valparaiso University, in Indiana; and even the Catholic Notre Dame, also in Indiana, evangelical scholars are writing the books, publishing the journals, teaching the students, and sustaining the networks necessary to establish a presence in American academic life. Should they fail, the reaction of most secular academics--those who bother to notice--will be "I told you so." But should they succeed, their efforts will matter. Christian Smith, a sociologist at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, relying on a 1996 survey, concluded that 29 percent of Americans could be described as conservative Protestants, with roughly equal numbers of evangelicals and fundamentalists, making them the largest religious group in America. Even if a relatively small number of them want to participate in the wider world to which a good education has always provided entree, the rest of America cannot continue to write off conservative Christians as hopelessly out of touch with modern American values.

An "Intellectual Disaster"

First published in 1963, when liberals were beginning to recognize the growing power of what was then called the radical fight, Richard Hofstadter's *Anti-Intellectualism in American Life* recounted the hostility of fundamentalists such as Dwight Moody and Billy Sunday to anything resembling a complicated idea. "When the word of God says one thing and scholarship says another," Hofstadter quoted Billy Sunday as saying, "scholarship can go to hell." Liberals have long assumed that fundamentalist Christians cannot sustain disinterested inquiry. Yet fundamentalism is a cross that evangelicals, not liberals, have to bear. For if it is tree, as the historian Mark Noll has written, that "fundamentalist intellectual habits ... have been more resilient than fundamentalism itself," the impact of fundamentalism will be felt most among those academics whose religious heritage includes such proclivities as biblical literalism, apocalyptic prophecy, and numerology.

Noll, who is the Carolyn and Fred McManis Professor of Christian Thought at Wheaton, spent the 1999 spring semester at the Harvard Divinity School. In 1994 Noll published *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind*. Although he wrote that Hofstadter's analysis was too simple, Noll went even further than Hofstadter in categorizing what he called "the intellectual disaster of fundamentalism." Fundamentalists, Noll wrote, had "a weakness for treating the verses of the Bible as pieces in a jigsaw puzzle that needed only to be sorted and then fit together to possess a finished



picture of divine truth." They neglected "forces in history that shape perceptions and help define the issues that loom as most important to any particular age." And they had an unwarranted "self-confidence, bordering on hubris, manifested by an extreme antitraditionalism that casually discounted the possibility of wisdom from earlier generations." The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind, Noll would later say, "came very close to being my letter of resignation from the evangelical movement."

Noll's book was meant as a charge to evangelical intellectuals to avoid creation science and similar embarrassments. His was not the first such effort. In the years immediately after World War II the radio evangelist Charles Fuller, whose Old Fashioned Revival Hour boasted the largest radio audience in America, had a like-minded inclination. Fuller wanted to create a "Cal Tech of the evangelical world," and he used his entrepreneurial energy to buy prime land in Pasadena, not far from Caltech. Founded in 1947, Fuller Theological Seminary, as the historian George Marsden has shown in *Reforming Fundamentalism* (1987), began to attract a faculty unlikely to be satisfied with providing the kind of education offered at, for instance, the Moody Bible Institute.

Any effort to create an academically respectable seminary for evangelical Christians was bound to arouse the suspicions of fundamentalist leaders such as Bob Jones, who founded his eponymous college in 1927, and the Reverend Carl McIntire, one of the most militantly sectarian of all the early fundamentalists. Charles Fuller also ran the risk of losing financial support and facing a boycott of his radio program should anyone on the faculty at the seminary take an unpopular position. In its second year of existence Fuller's president, Harold Ockenga, tried to hire a European theologian of impeccable conservative credentials, Bela Vassady, but Vassady's lack of familiarity with theological correctness (he once said favorable things about the neo-orthodox, and also foreign, theologian Karl Barth, and applauded ecumenism) aroused furious opposition. The matter was resolved after Fuller adopted a credal statement that was to be adhered to "without mental reservation"--a formulation that Vassady, who believed that only God could truly lack mental reservations, was unwilling to sign. The Vassady case defined the conflict the seminary would face: would it really become a Caltech, determined to hire the best people it could find, or would it conform to the certainties of the religious base from which it grew?



For the first quarter century of its existence that question was easily answered: Fuller could never be stronger than the religious movement that defined its identity. Only two institutions in conservative-Christian America had any academic credibility during those years, and neither was of much help to Fuller. Wheaton was one. Many members of Fuller's original faculty had been Wheaton undergraduates in the 1930s, and Billy Graham, who was widely misted in fundamentalist circles in the late 1940s and later became a Fuller board member, was sympathetic to the move toward evangelicalism. But J. Oliver Buswell Jr., the Wheaton president who had built up the institution's reputation, had been fired in 1940 for being, as two historians of the college put it, "too argumentative in temperament and too intellectual in his approach to Christianity." After that, despite the efforts of the philosopher Arthur Holmes, a faculty member who wrote extensively about the necessity for Christian learning, the college went into a period of intellectual somnambulism from which it has only recently awakened.

The other source of intellectual strength in conservative-Protestant circles was the Christian Reformed Church, founded in America in 1857 by immigrants from the Netherlands. Abraham Kuyper, the Church's leading theologian (and from 1901 to 1905 the Prime Minister of Holland), believed that one of God's greatest creations was the human mind; much in the spirit of Saint Augustine, he urged his followers to engage in philosophical reflection. His legacy in America includes Calvin College, which from the 1920s to the 1950s left its mark on an extraordinary number of well-known philosophers, including O. K. Bouwsma, William Frankena, and William Harry Jellema. But Calvin, too, was of little help to the Fuller modernizers in their early years. If anything, Dutch Reformed intellectuals like Cornelius Van Til and Clarence Bouma were on the side of ultra-orthodoxy--even warning against the appointment of Bela Vassady.

It was not until the 1964-1965 academic year--when Fuller removed the "without mental reservation" from its statement of faith--that the institution finally began to leave fundamentalism behind. By the end of the 1960s Fuller had abolished compulsory chapel attendance, officially condemned racism, begun to admit women, and been accepted as a legitimate institution by the Los Angeles Presbytery. Yet it had hardly achieved its founder's goal and become the Caltech of religious scholarship. Enrollment expanded dramatically throughout the 1970s, in part because of a religious



revival in the United States. But intellectually speaking, Fuller Theological Seminary remained a marginal institution in American academic life.

By the early 1980s one could find a few distinguished scholars teaching at conservative-Christian institutions, such as the theologian and historian Jaroslav Pelikan at Valparaiso, and the philosophers Alvin Plantinga, Richard Mouw, and Nicholas Wolterstorff and the historian George Marsden at Calvin. In the grand tradition of American academic life, however, most of these scholars would make their institutions famous by leaving them for more-prestigious places--Pelikan and Wolterstorff for Yale, and Plantinga and Marsden for Notre Dame. (Mouw became the president of Fuller in 1993.) Left behind were a disproportionate number of mediocre faculty members burdened with heavy teaching loads and students not generally known for their intellectual depth. Evangelical Christians hoping to achieve intellectual respectability needed help. That help came from two philanthropic foundations.

The Lilly Endowment, established by the family that founded Eli Lilly and Company, grew dramatically during the 1980s and 1990s, eventually surpassing the Ford Foundation to become the largest philanthropic foundation in America. (Currently, Lilly ranks among the top six.) Religion was one of the endowment's major areas of interest. Although Lilly had an affinity with mainstream Protestant denominations, and although by tradition it focused on the state of Indiana, its grants--even to Notre Dame and other Catholic institutions--eventually helped to create a network of evangelical scholars. Because its programs have not been devoted specifically to evangelicals, it is impossible to know how much the endowment has spent on them, but the amount must surely be in the millions of dollars. (The endowment has funded some of my own research, and also a seminar on religion and higher education of which I was a member.)

A more directed effort in the movement to make evangelical scholarship respectable came from the Pew Charitable Trusts. J. Howard Pew, of the Sun Oil Company, was a supporter of Fuller Theological Seminary. The Pew trusts were established in 1948, a year after Fuller's founding, and eventually became a major supporter of evangelical-Christian institutions. Eventually Pew, like many other foundations, moved to the left, but it has never lost its focus on religion. In 1988 Pew commissioned a paper on the status of evangelical scholarship and developed a ten-year plan for



overcoming its marginalization. Joel Carpenter, a historian of American fundamentalism, went to Pew from Wheaton College in 1989 to lead the effort. Mark Noll would later identify the scandal of the evangelical mind as the fact that there was not much of one. Carpenter's efforts were dedicated to changing that situation. By century's end Pew had allocated some \$14 million to the revitalization of evangelical intellectual life.

Networks of Modernizers

A combination of generous financial support and awakened intellectual activity has transformed the landscape of evangelical scholarship. Here are some of its notable features:

* Because of the work of historians such as Noll, Marsden, Carpenter, and Nathan Hatch, the provost of Notre Dame, no serious student of American history can any longer dismiss evangelical Christianity as little more than a backward reaction against modernity. In particular, the Institute for the Study of American Evangelicals, at Wheaton College, currently directed by Edith Blumhofer, has sponsored scholarship exploring the contributions of evangelicals to American democracy, music, race relations, and popular culture.

* At a time when humanities departments at American universities are obsessed with theory, conservative Christian scholars have kept alive a humanistic tradition of writing about poetry and fiction for the informed lay reader. That tradition is best represented by Books & Culture, a magazine modeled on The New York Review of Books. With close ties to Wheaton College, Books & Culture, edited by a polymath named John Wilson, publishes articles by evangelical scholars on topics ranging from Jean Jacques Rousseau to popular film. In addition to evangelicals, figures as diverse as the economist Glenn C. Loury; the historian Eugene Genovese; Richard Bernstein, of New School University; and the novelist Larry Woiwode have written for the magazine, which has featured interviews with Stanley Crouch Adam Michnik, and Francis Fukuyama.

* It may well be true that many Americans, their attention span shortened by television and the Internet, no longer read books, but evangelical scholars continue to publish them in overwhelming numbers. The publishing company Eerdmans, another offshoot of the Dutch migration to America, is a main source of serious religious literature in the United States. It performs a service for all scholars of religion by undertaking such projects as the five-volume Encyclopedia of



Christianity, the Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible, and The New International Commentary on the New Testament.

* Reflecting some of the confidence that stems from finding a scholarly voice, a number of evangelical scholars, and those sympathetic to them, have begun to participate actively in public debate. Eerdmans recently published *Who Are We?*, by Jean Bethke Elshtain, a political philosopher at the Divinity School of the University of Chicago, and *Judgment Day at the White House*, a collection of essays commenting on the Clinton scandal and the President's efforts to ask for forgiveness from Christian ministers. The latter book demonstrated the increasing diversity of evangelical voices; although most were critical of the President, an essay by Nicholas Wolterstorff argued that "one cannot determine a person's moral standards just from observing what he or she does." The President's sins, if such they were, concerned only him and his God.

* Considering that their votes tipped the balance in favor of Jimmy Carter and Ronald Reagan, evangelical Christians were long the most important group of Americans about whom we knew little. That deficit has been made up with the help of Lyman Kellstedt, the political scientist whose class I visited at Wheaton. Together with three colleagues at other universities, Kellstedt insisted that the University of Michigan's National Election Studies, the main source of voting data in America, take religion more seriously as an analytic category, with results that have benefited all students of American political life.

* During the past half century, as Anglo-American academic philosophy has become excessively technical and abstract, Christians have participated in a major effort to return philosophy to its historical preoccupation with metaphysical questions. Alvin Plantinga and Nicholas Wolterstorff, both of whom have delivered the Gifford Lectures (the same lectures that gave rise to William James's classic *The Varieties of Religious Experience*), use all the tools of modern philosophy to argue that belief in God is, in Plantinga's term, "warranted" even under contemporary assumptions of rationality. Both men have served as president of the Society of Christian Philosophers, founded in 1978 to promote discussion of the relationship between Christianity and philosophy. With more than a thousand members, the SCP is one of the largest groups of professional philosophers in America.



* Michael McConnell, a member of the Evangelical Free Church of Salt Lake City, Utah, has emerged as one of America's leading constitutional scholars. Best known for his insistence that a strict interpretation of the First Amendment's separation of Church and State clause deprives religious Americans of equality before the law, McConnell was instrumental in *Rosenberger v. University of Virginia*, a 1995 case that overturned the university's refusal to allow student fees to be used to publish a conservative-Christian newspaper. *Christian Perspectives on Legal Thought*, a book McConnell edited with two colleagues, was recently accepted for publication by Yale University Press. He remains the Presidential Professor of Law at the University of Utah even as Harvard--whose law school has already hired another evangelical Christian, William Stuntz--is aggressively trying to recruit him.

* As William James famously recognized, psychology and religion inevitably interact. Stanton Jones, Wheaton's provost, published a paper in the March, 1994, issue of *American Psychologist* that reviews the evidence establishing a "mildly positive relationship" between mental health and religious faith and explores the ways in which belief interacts with psychology's clinical and scientific sides. Along similar lines, some mental-health professionals are persuaded that a capacity to forgive can have therapeutic benefits, and few scholars have devoted more attention to the paradoxes and conditions of forgiveness than two members of the Fuller faculty: the theologian Lewis Smedes and the pastoral counselor David Augsburger.

Evangelical scholars see all this activity as an indication that they have finally made it in American academic life. One of Joel Carpenter's objectives in going to work for Pew, he told me recently, was "to help the religious community to which Pew is closest--Christianity generally and evangelical Protestantism specifically--make a difference." Looking back on its initiatives, the staff of the Pew religion program, in a paper published last October, concluded that Carpenter (who is now the provost at Calvin College) and his successors had made "a major contribution" toward rectifying the lack of serious intellectual work that Mark Noll had identified in the fundamentalist and evangelical traditions. Heartened by these developments, Noll reconsidered his thoughts of leaving the evangelical movement. "Prospects for Christian scholarship," he wrote in 1997, "now seem to me better than even five or six years ago."



Are these conclusions justified? It seems to me that, with some qualification, they are. Conservative Christians have enlivened and enriched the humanities, political and social theory, and even empirical social science. At the same time, their success is uneven. There are not, and in all likelihood there never will be, similar developments in the natural sciences, and whereas there may be such a thing as Christian economists, there is no serious effort to create a Christian economics. Still, since the early 1960s, when Hofstadter wrote his book, conservative Christians with roots in American fundamentalism have indeed created a life of the mind broader and more imaginative than anything previously found in their tradition. The big question is whether they can maintain it.

A Visit to Fuller Theological Seminary

Although it is something of a well-kept secret, fundamentalism has had strengths as well as weaknesses, none greater than its populist appeal to ordinary people. In his award-winning book *The Democratization of American Christianity* (1989), Nathan Hatch explains the growth of revivalist sects in the early nineteenth century as part of the same forces that produced Jacksonian democracy. Suspicious of gentility, hierarchical authority, and ties of tradition, evangelicals in their religious energy unleashed democratic impulses that took the form of popular pamphlets, mass rallies, and the spontaneous expression of emotions. In Hatch's view, the vitality of American evangelicalism is as important to the success of American democracy as the ideas of Thomas Jefferson and Thomas Paine.

Hatch himself warns against taking his argument too far. He points out that Alexander Campbell, an early revivalist leader, "championed the interests of simple Christians and insignificant congregations against concentrated ecclesiastical privilege, yet he became one of the wealthiest men in western Virginia and ruled with an iron hand." One can see legacies of that authoritarianism at many evangelical colleges, and particularly at Baylor. Despite his determination to make Baylor the Notre Dame of the Baptist world, Robert Sloan, the university's president, has found himself continually criticized for such actions as creating a center on religion and science without consulting the faculty and firing two psychologists (who later married) after rumors of what he felt was an improper relationship began to surface. (The Chronicle of Higher Education has quoted Sloan as saying that the pair's failure to "exercise good judgment was certainly a factor" in his decision.)



Still, the democratic character of early evangelicalism has its contemporary counterparts. In contrast to Sloan, the evangelical scholars with whom I have spoken are democratic to a fault. They tend to see good in nearly everyone. Ruthless meritocracy is as foreign to their sensibility as it is to that of their counterparts in liberal secular academies. Hierarchies make them uncomfortable. Hating to see anyone hurt, they do not like rejecting younger people for tenure. Wanting to ensure that everyone succeeds, they spawn a multiplicity of journals and publishing houses so that anyone can publish anything. They are as insistent on multicultural diversity as any good leftist. Evangelicals have created institutions as sensitive and caring as any in America. The downside of all this is that evangelicals sometimes find themselves with no adequate way of distinguishing between ideas that are pathbreaking and those that are gibberish.

The sensitivity of the evangelical mind is perhaps best illustrated by developments at Fuller Theological Seminary. Like Wheaton, Fuller has been transformed by the arrival of serious scholars who are widely respected in the academic world. Its president, Richard Mouw, has none of those authoritarian proclivities that have alienated accomplished faculty members at Baylor. Nancey Murphy, a highly regarded philosopher, and Marianne Meye Thompson, a biblical scholar, are among Fuller's stars. By any criterion, including comparison with the divinity schools at Harvard and Duke, Fuller has become an institution of higher learning in the best sense of the term. Reflecting such recruiting, Fuller is no longer just a theological seminary. In the 1960s it created a school of psychology that was accredited by the American Psychological Association a few years later and began to offer doctoral degrees in clinical psychology, thereby embarking on a course that would bring it closer to Freud and Jung than to Jonathan Edwards. All students in the Fuller School of Psychology are required to take theology courses, because the mission of the program is "to train qualified Christian persons to function as competent practitioners in the field of mental health." At the same time, Fuller's psychology program covers subjects one would expect to find in any clinical program, such as human sexuality and child abuse.

God only knows what Charles Fuller would have made of his institution's turn toward psychology; introspection has never been one of fundamentalism's noteworthy features. But populist democracy has; and psychology, at least in the therapeutic form practiced at Fuller, is the most



populist of the disciplines. Hard-science topics such as psychometrics and psychopharmacology are taught at Fuller, but the program does not emphasize them. Fuller's psychology is meant not to divide and classify but to unite and heal. Enter the School of Psychology, turn right, and look immediately to your left: you will see a bookcase devoted to the writings of M. Scott Peck, one of America's best-known New Age psychologists. That exhibit, I later learned, is only a small part of Peck's relationship with Fuller. Peck has donated his personal papers to the seminary's library, and during my visit I attended one class in a semester-long course devoted to his writing.

Leading the class was James D. Guy, the product of as pure an evangelical background as one could find. Guy is a Wheaton graduate with a doctorate from Fuller who spent most of his career at Biola University (formerly the Bible Institute of Los Angeles). The dean of Fuller's School of Psychology when I visited, Guy, like just about everyone else I met at Fuller, was gracious and welcoming. He and the class were discussing Peck's most famous book, *The Road Less Traveled* (1978). This is not a book that would seem at first glance to appeal to the evangelical mind. Peck, a psychiatrist, grew up in a high-church Episcopalian environment; his book, reflecting his sympathy for a wide variety of Eastern religions, argues for a capacious understanding of religion that need not even include belief in God. No wonder the PsychoHeresy Awareness Ministries, of Santa Barbara, California, which exists to warn Christians against psychologizing the faith, finds that Peck's theology "clashes with Christianity at every crucial point."

But Peck's writings did not clash with Christianity in Jim Guy's class. Guy resonated with Peck's criticism of science, his belief in miracles, and his flirtation with mysticism. Twenty-five years ago, Guy explained to his class, we were convinced that science could allow us to know everything. Now, attracted to postmodernism, we think we cannot know anything. Peck stands right in the middle, the proper place to be. Guy proudly informed his students that they would have a chance to talk to Peck themselves--for although Peck's retirement and declining health prevent him from giving lectures, Guy had arranged for him to place a conference call to the class the week after my visit. "This is one powerful guy," he said. "Throw him anything." In anticipation of the event, the rest of the class time was devoted to a discussion of what questions the students ought to pose.



To a certain kind of skeptical liberal, M. Scott Peck is the very embodiment of mindless twelve-step recovery. "Even Peck's most avid readers," Wendy Kaminer wrote in *I'm Dysfunctional, You're Dysfunctional* (1992), "would probably have trouble explaining his ideas." If Guy's class is any indication, Kaminer is right; the discussion rarely moved beyond an exchange of clichés. But the class environment was as warm and caring as Peck's reassuring text. Every student's comment, no matter how trivial, was taken as a serious reflection on the human condition. (My impression, based on what I admit is an unrepresentative sample of classes, is that the ethos of Fuller makes it inconceivable that any professor would ever say that a student's comment was simply wrong.) No one wanted to reject any of the students' suggestions for questions to ask Peck during the conference call, and when one suggestion was received lukewarmly (Would Peck be as sympathetic today to sometimes breaking the rules of therapeutic treatment as he was in *The Road Less Traveled?*), considerable time was spent revising the wording to make it acceptable. The students I spoke to after class, all of whom planned to become either ministers or mental-health professionals, loved the class and loved Guy. Their jobs will require them to maintain an optimistic outlook on the world, and Peck's spiritualism will come in handy when they are plagued by doubts.

Sociology is another populist discipline that sees itself as speaking for the oppressed against the machinations of various power elites. Fuller has one sociologist, Jack Balswick, and except for the fact that he views the Bible as an authoritative text, Balswick's views are indistinguishable from those of many others in his profession. (Before coming to Fuller, Balswick taught for sixteen years in the well-regarded sociology department at the University of Georgia.) Balswick is committed to his discipline's core belief that individual life choices are shaped by social structures. He also believes that as a sociologist, he ought to teach his students, and to use in his research, the very best empirical materials available. A specialist in marriage and the family, Balswick offers parenting as an example of how sociological and biblical teachings work together. He believes that Christian parenting, properly understood, is not authoritarian but authoritative. Citing empirical studies demonstrating the negative effects on children of heavy-handed discipline, Balswick and his wife, Judith (Fuller's director of clinical training), wrote in their textbook, *The Family: A Christian Perspective on the*



Contemporary Home (1989), that "God's ideal is that children mature to the point where they and their parents empower each other."

What happens, I asked Balswick, when sociological research does come into conflict with Christian teaching? Admitting that such conflicts are possible, Balswick responded that he goes into a "spiritual deep freeze," holding both his sociology and his faith in abeyance until the conflict is resolved. Scientific truth is tentative, he said, and so is the interpretation of Scripture. But because both are true, any apparent conflicts between them must be because either the science or the Scripture has been improperly understood.

The one issue that seems to challenge Balswick's efforts to be both inclusive and committed to the truths of the Bible is homosexuality, and "spiritual deep freeze" is as good a term as any to describe the way he approaches the question. He accepts Fuller's strong commitment to heterosexual marriage but at the same time wants to avoid anything that resembles gay-bashing. The result is language like this, from a book written by the Balswicks called *Authentic Human Sexuality: An Integrated Christian Approach* (1999):

We acknowledge that some gay Christians may choose to commit themselves to a lifelong, monogamous homosexual union, believing this is God's best for them. They believe that this reflects an authentic sexuality that is congruent for them and their view of Scripture. Even though we hold to the model of a heterosexual, lifelong, monogamous union, our compassion brings us to support all persons as they move in the direction of God's ideal for their lives.

Fuller's culture of inclusion, though reluctant to endorse homosexuality, has no problem condemning homophobia. "It is important for Christians to understand the great pain many homosexuals have experienced and to be compassionate to them," the Balswicks write, and many at Fuller agree. "Did God make gay people gay?" I was asked by Lewis Smedes, perhaps Fuller's most famous theologian, who is now a professor emeritus. Obviously not, he said, for God created human sexuality to make children. But, he continued, God also did not ask mothers to give up their children--yet because they do, Smedes and his wife were able to adopt children of their own. "We have to do the best with what we have" is the lesson Smedes takes from his own life, and he sees no reason why gays and lesbians cannot be just as Christian as he is.



Fuller has evolved a "Don't ask, don't tell" policy with respect to homosexuality. Richard Mouw remembers the lesbian student who came to him shaking with hurt because another student had said in class that homosexuality was an example of "demon possession." Mouw told her that Fuller's policy was unambiguous: homosexuality violated the seminary's statement of faith, and his job was to enforce the school's policies. Moved by her, he then asked what it was like to be a lesbian at Fuller. She responded by saying that she had prayed many times for her sexuality to be changed, to no avail; she was attracted to women only. All she wanted was to preach the gospel, she told Mouw, begging him not to send her to a liberal seminary. Mouw asked if she would be willing to take a vow of celibacy until she graduated, which she agreed to do. "We want to be compassionate within the terms of our theology," he told me, justifying his action. Homosexual acts are sinful, but "homosexuality is not the worst thing in the world."

It would be inaccurate to describe Fuller's faculty as liberal. These men and women are, theologically speaking, conservatives; they have all signed Fuller's credal statement emphasizing that the Old and New Testaments "are the written word of God, the only infallible rule of faith and practice." Yet Fuller's widespread culture of care means that the faculty is hardly right-wing either. Jim Wallis, the editor of *Sojourners*, which describes itself as a "progressive Christian voice," has long argued that evangelical Christianity contains theological resources that make it a natural ally in struggles against social injustice. Once we leave homosexuality and other contentious issues behind, and focus on the way wealth and power are distributed around the world, Fuller seems little different from other campuses that have made issues of globalization and poverty central to their concerns.

Empowering the Poor was the name of a course taught by Jayakumar Christian, a visiting professor in the School of World Missions, whose class I attended. For the customary pre-class prayer Christian asked the students to name specific people living in poverty, so that everyone could pray for them. A student from Kenya offered an entire village; another, from the Philippines, added a family back home. A third student pointed out that a number of protesters had just been arrested in Washington, D.C., as they demonstrated against the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, and urged that any prayer thank them for their good works. The student assigned to offer the prayer that day was a member of the Vineyard Church, a fast-growing effort to combine conservative



evangelical Christianity with the enthusiasm of Pentecostalist and charismatic sects. This quintessentially Californian young man in yellow pants and a green sweater, his hair bleached two tones of blond, took it for granted that everyone in the class believed in social justice and asked that "God give us strength to do what is right." Missionaries inspired by their devotion to Jesus Christ once traveled the world seeking converts. Now they bring people from all over the world to Pasadena to introduce them to Western ideas about equality.

Fuller Theological Seminary was founded by men who made no place in their institution for women, Catholics, Jews, or blacks. In view of that, the democratic impulses that lead Fuller's faculty to emphasize individual growth and social justice are surely worth celebrating. Yet democratic impulses are also, from an intellectual standpoint, problematic. Mark Schwehn, the dean of Christ College, an undergraduate honors program at Valparaiso University, argued in his book *Exiles From Eden* (1993) that humility and other Christian virtues could create a positive alternative to the competitive culture of the secular research university. At their best, evangelical sympathies do exactly that. But a therapeutic sensibility and a culture of nonjudgmentalism are inappropriate for hiring new faculty members, evaluating them for tenure, developing a syllabus, grading undergraduates, mentoring graduate students, writing books, or conducting experiments. All these tasks involve making judgments about who or what does or does not achieve a certain threshold of validity or excellence.

In addition, the democratic sensibilities of many evangelical faculty members are, in the situations they create, not unlike the rigid identity politics characteristic of many secular campuses. Reflecting its own version of political correctness, Fuller includes the following in its statement of institutional commitments: "We recognize that many women and men no longer find 'man,' 'men,' and 'mankind' acceptable as generic terms.... As Christians desiring to support human equality, we intend to avoid exclusive language which might express or encourage discrimination within the church or society." Evangelical colleges, like secular ones, also want as many minority students as they can attract, yet once they attract them, they tend to treat them not as individuals but as representatives of their race. "What about you students from other cultures?" Jim Guy asked his class on M. Scott Peck, looking directly at one of the many foreign students. Turning to a black student,



he asked her how "white" she found the book they were discussing. Given the appropriate cues, the students responded in color-conscious ways. Peck does not use "an oppression model," one Third World student pointed out. Another wondered whether the book would work back home in Indonesia. If critical thinking involves the ability to debate ideas according to their merit, rather than according to the personal characteristics of those who hold them, then these students, paralyzed by their desire to treat everyone with respect, lack it.

Nathan Hatch wrote that the story of evangelical Protestantism is "how ordinary folk came to distrust leaders of genius and talent and to defend the right of common people to shape their own faith and submit to leaders of their own choosing." That is also the story of why so many of the institutions of higher learning created by evangelicals have been so persistently anti-intellectual. None of the religious traditions that have created first-class universities in America can rightfully be described as democratic. Whether Puritan or Presbyterian, Ivy League universities were typically founded by Calvinists who emphasized the inherent depravity of the individual and the need for stem instruction and against-the-grain moral discipline. Catholicism has a glorious philosophical tradition, one that continues to fashion the curriculum at most Catholic colleges and universities in America--yet of all Christian traditions it is the most hierarchical in structure, and to this day, of course, it excludes women from the priesthood. The tradition within conservative Protestantism that created a serious intellectual environment in America, the Christian Reformed Church, is anything but populist. When it comes to the life of the mind, democratic sensibilities are not always a help. Once sentenced to intellectual mediocrity because they kept too many ideas out, conservative-Christian institutions face the prospect of returning to mediocrity because they let too many in.

Faith Meets Foucault

"Heave an egg out a Pullman window," H. L. Mencken wrote in 1926, "and you will hit a Fundamentalist almost anywhere in the United States today." Heave one out of a classroom in the world of evangelical higher education and you will hit someone discussing postmodernism.

Imagine that you are a deeply religious Protestant, perhaps even the kind who occasionally speaks in tongues. Although a serious academic, you believe that the modern world made a wrong turn when it committed itself to the confidence in human reason so characteristic of eighteenth-



century secular thinkers. Always a bit ashamed of your old-fashioned views, you keep them to yourself--until the day you discover that left-wing professors of English at America's most prestigious universities share your misgivings about the Enlightenment. True, these professors seem unduly inspired by Michel Foucault, a gay man who may have died of AIDS, and they pronounce themselves committed to causes you cannot abide. But like you, they seem to blame liberalism for the world's problems--so maybe there is something to their views after all.

When evangelicals read authors like Jean-Francois Lyotard and Jacques Derrida, they cannot accept pronouncements about the insufficiency of meta-narratives or the impossibility of grounding truth, because they believe that the Bible is the greatest meta-narrative ever written, in part because they understand it to be true. But everything else about postmodernism appeals to them. Descartes and Kant posited the primacy of the knowing self, a direct slap at God's authority, and postmodernists are right, evangelicals believe, to take those thinkers down a peg or two. Postmodernism's skepticism about progress is a reminder that secular rationality does not have all the answers to life's mysteries. Its radical anti-humanism is compatible with the possibility of a superhuman intelligence. And its rejection of the notion that knowledge can be grounded by appealing to a reality that exists beyond interpretation gives equality to all possible interpretations, including Christian ones.

Joining me for dinner one night at Wheaton College were two members of the English department, Alan Jacobs and Roger Lundin. They are the kind of people one hopes to find more of in the humanities departments of elite universities: they read actual texts, from many different fields; they believe that such texts mean something; and they dedicate their lives to conveying what those meanings might be in both scholarly venues and venues designed for the serious general reader. Yet despite their old-fashioned belletristic qualities, they are tempted by, and occasionally seduced by, postmodernism's hermeneutics of suspicion.

Jacobs, an expert on W. H. Auden who also frequently writes reviews for influential conservative magazines such as *The Weekly Standard* and *First Things*, teaches a course in contemporary literary theory in which the four required texts are works by Mikhail Bakhtin, Judith Butler, Jacques Derrida, and Michel Foucault. "Several of these thinkers challenge or shed valuable



light on central Christian doctrines," Jacobs later told me in an e-mail, pointing out that "Foucault's universal suspicion is not too far from Calvin's emphasis on the utter depravity of unredeemed humanity" and that "Derrida's proliferation of interpretations certainly arises from his own understanding (from within Judaism rather than Christianity) of biblical study and commentary as a ceaseless activity." Roger Lundin, whose revivalist lecture style breathes passion and life into the poetry of Emily Dickinson, has published three books that, although critical of postmodernism, share its sense that the Enlightenment went wrong. "The hero of the anthropocentric world," as Lundin puts it, "became the free and powerful self," who, "under the program of the Enlightenment, and later in romanticism, ... sought to assume the authority once granted to God in historic theism." Neither Jacobs nor Lundin would ever call himself a postmodernist, but neither man dismisses postmodernism as part and parcel of secular decadence either.

Postmodernism appeals even more strongly to evangelicals far removed from the humanities. I attended a class at Fuller in Eddie Gibbs's course Applied Church Growth. Because they believe in spreading the word, evangelical Christians are committed to church expansion, and Gibbs, an Englishman, is one of the leading authorities on the subject. I was unsure what the class would discuss when I asked to attend, but my assumption was that I would learn how evangelical churches finance themselves and plan their strategies. Instead I was privy to a lecture on the way the "modern" church, described by Gibbs as elitist and hierarchical, is giving way to "postmodern" churches, organized horizontally through networking. The American churches that are growing the fastest, Gibbs pointed out, are "new-paradigm churches and movements"--those, for example, that reject the denominational idea of a central headquarters in favor of the idea that every church is a denomination unto itself. Perhaps pre-modern thinkers anticipated this postmodern development, Gibbs pointed out. After all, he explained, Jesus and his disciples were a kind of "hub and spoke" operation comparable to ones run by the airlines today, as they have responded to the postmodern conditions of deregulation and intense competition.

Postmodernism exercises such a fascination over the evangelical mind, I believe, because of the never-ending legacy of fundamentalism. In one sense evangelical scholars have moved away from Billy Sunday and in the direction of French post-structuralism: they cast their lot with those who



question any truths rather than those who insist on the literal truth of God's word. Yet these scholars are still battling over questions about the nature of science which have long been settled in other religious traditions. There is nothing in either Catholicism or Judaism, both of which have fundamentalist adherents, quite comparable to the conservative-Protestant suspicion of Darwin; in 1996, for example, John Paul II restated the Church's position that belief in evolution is compatible with Catholic faith. But contemporary evangelical scholars cannot make peace with science in quite the same way. And so postmodernism offers them a chance to replay the Scopes trial; science, they believe, will have to defend itself against Jacques Derrida in a way it was never forced to do against William Jennings Bryan.

Although postmodernism's suspicion of textual certainty is the very opposite of fundamentalist literalism, postmodernism and fundamentalism are in a similar relationship to questions of power and authority. American academics attracted to postmodernism question the meaning of texts because they have mixed feelings about any kind of authority, including their own. Some--including Jane Tompkins, who, along with her husband, Stanley Fish, recently left the English department at Duke for the University of Illinois at Chicago--are so uncomfortable with authority that they have qualms about teaching in a traditional classroom format. Others move in the opposite direction; attracted to political correctness, they seek to ban from their campuses speech considered offensive to women, minorities, and homosexuals. This shift back and forth from the rejection of authority to the imposition of authority mirrors perfectly the combination of populism and authoritarianism that has characterized the history of fundamentalist churches in America. Stanley Fish and Billy Sunday turn out to have more in common than at first meets the eye.

The Loyalty-Oath Problem

Stanley Fish, the dean of the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences at the University of Illinois at Chicago, has recently concluded that there is no such thing as academic freedom. Fish is not against the idea that academics should protect their interests; all guilds, he points out, try to do that. It is the arguments used to defend the idea that set his teeth gnashing. "Academic freedom," he writes, "rather than being open to all points of view, is open to all points of view only so long as they offer themselves with the reserve and diffidence appropriate to Enlightenment decorums, only so



long as they offer themselves for correction." Adherents of academic freedom claim to be liberals, Fish argues--but confront them with an extreme idea, such as the idea that God exists and his truths are real, and liberals try to drive it out of their world. Liberalism is not neutral and above the fray but active, taking one side in a battle over what should or should not be taught in the university.

Fish's attack on what is generally thought of as academic freedom--indeed, his general hostility toward liberalism--plays well in the evangelical world. Too well. For whereas Fish has spent his entire career in institutions that permit a wide variety of points of view, most evangelical scholars have not. It is this proclivity toward illiberalism that best explains why so many evangelical institutions insist on statements of faith. Contrary to what some evangelicals will say in moments of anger, liberals are not always hostile to faith. But they do tend to be hostile to oaths. The revivalist tradition in conservative Protestantism was built on the willingness of people to stand up in public and proclaim their sins--and the joy that followed when they let Jesus into their life. A requirement that students and faculty members sign a declaration is a legacy of that tradition--one that is bound to make a modern liberal uncomfortable. The mere existence of any such statement, let alone insisting on its periodic affirmation, would be rightly considered hostile to academic freedom, no different from forcing a student like Deborah Weisman to attend compulsory prayer. Evangelicals have a ready set of arguments in defense of their practice. "We in Christian higher education," Duane Litfin, Wheaton's president, wrote in 1998, "... believe that a healthy academic marketplace of ideas will view academic freedom as the right not only of individuals, but also of those institutions [made up] of voluntary groups or communities of individuals." Pluralism, in Litfin's view, requires the existence of diverse institutions committed to diverse objectives. If there is a threat to academic freedom, it comes from what he calls "dogmatic rationalism." Naturalism, the belief that everything that exists in the world has a natural origin and can be explained by laws of nature, "becomes dangerous when, like the dogmatists of old, it declares its way of knowing to be the only legitimate one and then seeks to disenfranchise other voices." Implicit in Litfin's argument is the idea that the best way to pursue knowledge and to form the character of students is, as Antonin Scalia emphasized in *Lee v. Weisman*, to work with traditions rather than against them.



These arguments contain some truth. There are political-science departments at elite universities that will not hire anyone unwilling to subscribe to rational-choice theory, just as analytically trained philosophers do not like to hire Continental philosophers and vice versa. To be sure, no formal statements of faith have to be signed, but there are all kinds of ways--from the jargon applicants use to the journals in which they publish--in which commitment to a particular orthodoxy can be established, and hiring committees will look with suspicion on any deviation from whatever happens to be prescribed. But such pluralism as does not exist within academic institutions can still be found among them. America's system of higher education includes women's colleges, historically African-American colleges, public and private schools, large and small schools, elite and non-elite, Catholic and Jewish; surely it ought to include Christian colleges, with their own distinctive identity.

Yet there are still reasons to shudder at the whole idea of statements of faith. When careers are at stake, it is hard to take seriously Litfin's insistence that signing Wheaton's declaration is a purely voluntary act. And once such a statement exists, so will the temptation to wield it punitively.

Another argument against credal statements grows out of the nature of evangelical Christianity itself. Last year the U.S. Catholic bishops approved *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*, requiring mandates from members of theology departments, so now Catholic colleges are having oath problems of their own. But unlike the Catholic Church, which is large enough to include many different theological perspectives as well as many different theologians, evangelical sects are small and tend to proliferate. When it comes to statements of faith, they therefore have two choices. One is to confine their requirements to membership in a particular denomination. Calvin College attempts this by asking its faculty members to belong to the Christian Reformed Church; they are all also expected to sign three confessional creeds of the Church: the Heidelberg Confession, the Belgic Confession, and the Canons of Dordt. Because there are only just so many members of the Christian Reformed Church in America, however, it is unlikely that Calvin could ever fill all its faculty positions under these requirements. It therefore adds a clause allowing faculty members to belong to any church in ecclesiastical communion with the Christian Reformed Church.



Nondenominational institutions such as Fuller and Wheaton, in contrast, draw up statements of faith meant to be inclusive of all evangelicals. Assembled through negotiation and compromise, they are, in the language of today's academy, social constructions. This means that they can change over time; until the early 1990s Wheaton asked its faculty to endorse a commitment to a pre-millennial understanding of Jesus Christ's return to earth--a doctrinal point on which it no longer insists. Such flexibility, though admirable in many ways, undermines the very rationale for the statements, which is that these institutions are guided by unwavering truths established by God.

No one can ever be sure, moreover, which denominations are rightfully part of the negotiations. The Christian Reformed Church's pietistic intellectualism never had much in common with the revivalism of Southern Baptists. Mennonites, Brethren, and Anabaptists were long looked on with suspicion by nativist fundamentalists, if for no other reason than their pacifism. Pentecostalism comes in both black and white versions; white Pentecostals are more likely than black Pentecostals to identify with evangelical movements.

Evangelical Christianity has porous boundaries, and thus signing a statement of faith regarding its tenets inherently presents problems. For if the meaning of "evangelicalism" can be expanded to include denominations that were once excluded, why, in the name of Christian scholarship, can it not be expanded to include Catholics? But this is a particularly sensitive question, because the term "evangelicalism," if it ever meant anything in American history, meant opposition to the Church of Rome. Evangelical institutions continued to wage the Protestant Reformation throughout the twentieth century--and they represent the side that won. "Catholicism," Harold Lindsell, one of Fuller's founders, wrote in 1949, is among the "arch enemies of America and our way of life and of the true faith"--a statement with which nearly all evangelical leaders of his era would have agreed. Many of the evangelical scholars I met at Fuller and Wheaton told me that their grandparents and parents were convinced that "Romanists" were the anti-Christ. Nevertheless, Notre Dame, the quintessential American Catholic university, has many evangelicals on its faculty, including its provost, whereas Wheaton has no Catholics. No Fish-inspired talk of liberalism's blind spots can excuse away an oath that excludes the largest single denomination of Christians in America.



Lingering anti-Catholicism harms the mission of evangelical institutions. For all its talk of God, fundamentalism left those institutions with a distaste for theology; if the Bible contains God's revealed truth, then who needs an academic department devoted to the mysteries and paradoxes of Christian doctrine? Consider the case of Pepperdine University, which is affiliated with the Churches of Christ. (It was Kenneth Starr's upbringing in this church, seemingly, that made him the ideal candidate for the deanship of Pepperdine Law School.) The Churches of Christ deny that they are a denomination founded by human beings, as if having a historical tradition would detract from a direct and personal relationship with God. As a result, they have no doctrine. "Churches of Christ claimed to have developed no theology except the message of the Bible, defined in the Bible's own terms," writes Richard Hughes, a member of the Churches of Christ who teaches at Pepperdine. What, then, does Pepperdine do, I asked, when it wants to teach its students theology? Hughes told me, "We borrow from the whole history of Christian theology, including Catholic theology." Unlike Wheaton, Pepperdine has a small but significant number of Catholic faculty members, including Douglas Kmiec, of the law school.

Even at Wheaton professors borrow from Catholicism to make up for the gaps in their own traditions. Wheaton's English department has a love affair with Catholic--and Anglo-Catholic--writers, including Flannery O'Connor and Walker Percy. Wheaton boasts of having important papers of C. S. Lewis, G. K. Chesterton, and Dorothy L. Sayers. Without a literature that is in one way or another a product of Catholicism, Wheaton could not aspire to a life of the mind. A college that would not allow on its faculty authors whose letters are welcome in its archives has a problem it needs to resolve.

When I spoke to Joel Carpenter, who at the Pew Charitable Trusts funded so much of the new evangelical scholarship, about the prospects for the future, he pointed out that "the old tensions are still there; the same old grassroots controversies still keep coming back." He was referring to periodic struggles over Darwinism, but he might as well have been making a larger point. As long as they have alumni and boards of trustees that tend to romanticize the good old days, evangelical scholars will find it difficult to sever the connection to their fundamentalist roots. And as long as evangelical scholars insist on drawing up statements of faith that shut them off from genuine



intellectual exchange, they will find it difficult to become the kind of intellectually exciting institutions they hope to be.

A Question of Self-Confidence

"Why are there in mainstream academia," George Marsden asks, "almost no identifiable Christian schools of thought to compare with various Marxist, feminist, gay, postmodern, African-American, conservative, or liberal schools of thought?" For Marsden, the answer lies in the imperial pretensions of the scientific revolution; the extension of its positivism into all corners of academia, he believes, is the triumph not of reason but of prejudice. Marsden, like many other evangelical scholars, thinks that the secular research university is determined to keep conservative Christians outside its gates.

I believe that Marsden is off base, for two reasons. First, evangelicals are trying to create a life of the mind at a time when secular America is questioning whether a life of the mind is worth having. Marsden's comment presupposes that the academic world, falsely committed to scientific objectivity in all its disciplines, will be hostile to anything it defines as unreason. Yet conservative Christians are entering the academy at a time when secular academics are experiencing their own crisis of faith. American academic culture, as riven by sectarian warfare as any religious movement, is no longer capable of insisting on one "hegemonic" truth to which all must adhere. When academic life is organized by subcultures, room can be made for any group, including conservative Christians.

The second reason to challenge Marsden's formulation is that many evangelicals prefer to stay out of mainstream universities. It is an article of faith among conservative-Christian academics that liberal Protestants (and most Catholics) have made the wrong decisions when it comes to religion and academic life. Marsden's influential book *The Soul of the American University* (1994) is, among other things, a passionate plea to Christians to save their schools from the fate of Duke or the University of Chicago. If the price of academic respectability is the modern research university and what Marsden calls its establishment of nonbelief, most evangelical scholars would rather not pay it.

It is because so many evangelicals heeded Marsden's warning that their scholarship, rather than storming the gates of elite academia, with its culture of peer review and demanding standards



for tenure, has taken its place as its own subculture, complete with journals, conferences, and publishing houses. Even in their best work evangelical scholars cite one another far too often. Their conclusions win more applause among fellow believers than among the unconvinced.

So long as they continue to marginalize themselves, evangelicals will be unable to equal the accomplishments of the generation that brought us Marsden, Noll, Plantinga, and Wolterstorff. That would be the true scandal of the evangelical mind. In the course of my travels through evangelical higher learning, I visited three institutions with strong undergraduate programs: Wheaton, Baylor, and Pepperdine. If their undergraduates are any indication, young people brought up in evangelical homes are desperate to engage in serious intellectual inquiry. The students at Wheaton, for example, as one would expect from those who took Anthony Kennedy's side in *Lee v. Weisman*, are uncomfortable with the anti-Catholicism of their institution. (Interestingly, they also do not share their professors' fascination with postmodernism.) These students, make no mistake, are dedicated Christians; one of them was close to tears as she talked about the efforts of student government at Tufts University to defund a conservative-Christian organization because it excluded gays and lesbians from leadership positions. Unlike those Tufts students--and, indeed, unlike Wheaton's own president--she and other students like her are genuine pluralists; in their view, evangelicals ought to be able to stand the competition of coexisting with other faiths.

Evangelical faculty members could learn from their students. Had they a greater confidence in their own convictions, evangelical scholars would not retreat from the secular academy so much as demand that it use its authority wisely. To be true to the life of the mind, they would say, we ought to insist on reading the great books in our tradition seriously, interpreting them in ways faithful to their meaning, and being prepared to defend those interpretations--as did Saint Augustine and Jonathan Edwards--with all the powers of persuasion and logic at our command. There would no doubt be dangers along that road for evangelicals, because the whole project might strike them as too close to either Catholicism or high-church Protestantism for their taste.

But consider the rewards. Fundamentalist Christians did neither themselves nor America a favor by fencing themselves off from the rest of the country. Withdrawal encouraged fanaticism and paranoia in them and confirmed to others a sense that if this was religion, they were better off



without it. Evangelical Christians who take ideas seriously can combat both tendencies. One need not agree with their view of the role that religion ought to play in the public square to consider it a credible, even necessary, view for Americans to ponder. And they bring to their advocacy an enthusiasm for ideas, and a commitment to debating them, that belies any stereotypes of sectarian fanaticism. To succeed in the university and therefore in America, evangelicals will have to put their defensiveness to one side. They will also have to learn to practice their faith as they see best while treating people of other faiths--and, indeed, people of no faith--with respect. The least they can be offered is respect in return.

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