

“Higher Learning”

BY ALAN WOLFE

Published in *Lingua Franca*, March-April 1996 pp. 70-77.

"To pray, to understand, was for me one and the same thing." -- Raissa Maritan

I.

Intellectual fashions being what they are, the next major issue facing American higher education may well be the revival of religious faith. If politicians can discover values, perhaps even academics will. There certainly exist sufficient grounds for thinking they should. Universities, shaped by faculty priorities, are hands down the most secular institutions in American society. And at those institutions, disputatious professors, who quarrel about everything else, are all too quick to agree that religious education is a contradiction in terms. Meanwhile, students who had come to college familiar with at least one great literary work cannot now be expected to know the major biblical narratives--let alone the history and dogma of their own creeds. Across the spectrum, the college years are a time for questioning faith, not reaffirming it.

When everything modern is under attack, it can hardly be surprising that the secular university, modernity's most representative accomplishment, is also found wanting. The case for reintroducing religion into the American university crops up across the map. Relying on the arguments of University of Chicago law professor Michael McConnell, the U.S. Supreme Court recently ruled that the University of Virginia could not deny funds to a student group which published a Christian newspaper. In the January and February 1996 issues of *First Things*, a "monthly journal of religion and public life," distinguished scholars ranging from Gertrude Himmelfarb and Father Richard John Neuhaus to Stanley Fish criticize the liberal compromises which define the secular university. And recent books by George Marsden, Mark R. Schwehn, and Warren A. Nord together present a well-stated case for injecting more religious feeling and more religious content into the modern academy.



These arguments deserve a wide hearing. Although secular academics--with visions of the Scopes trial dancing through their heads--may think of the deeply devout as wanting nothing more than the reimposition of dogma, most of these writers present their ideas the way all academics should: through argumentation, appeals to history, and familiarity with the latest ideas in philosophy. Their accounts are among the most stimulating analyses of higher education one can find, far more profitable to ponder than the by now repetitive broadsides for or against identity politics or multiculturalism. And they lead in some unexpected directions. One of the ironies of the emerging debate over faith and knowledge is that outsiders necessarily become liberal and pluralistic in defense of religious values, while insiders all too often appear closed-minded and intolerant in defense of secular ones. But it is precisely the values of openness and tolerance to which advocates for religious inclusion appeal which ultimately undermine the case they so passionately make.

II.

If there is a movement to reintroduce faith into American intellectual life, George Marsden is its leader. Marsden taught for twenty years at a religious institution, Calvin College, in Grand Rapids, Michigan, before moving to Duke University and eventually to Notre Dame. His 1980 book, *Fundamentalism and American Culture* (Oxford), established him as one of the major historians of American religion. Although Marsden made his Christian devotion clear in an afterword, his book, perhaps reflecting the times, was hardly confessional or polemical. Not so for his later work and career. In a 1993 address to the American Academy of Religion, Marsden denounced the bias against religion inherent in the American academy. "I have seen cases in the field of religion," he wrote *The Wall Street Journal* at the same time, "in which applicants for teaching positions or for graduate schools have been dismissed out of hand because they revealed that religious motives would shape their scholarship." Marsden says that he wrote *The Soul of the American University* to prove that "it is perfectly possible to have strong evaluative interests in a subject and yet treat it fairly and with a degree of detachment."

In that he succeeds: His historical narrative can be read with profit both by those who welcome and by those who fear a greater role for religion in higher education. With typical fairness and



detachment, he writes that "there were undesirable features of the American Protestant establishment which led to equally flawed features of American disestablishment."

Early American universities, as Marsden relates, were explicitly sectarian and religious. Harvard and William and Mary followed Oxford and Cambridge in excluding dissenting sects. As a result, Presbyterian, Baptist, Congregationalist, and Dutch Reformed clergy took the lead in creating their own respective schools--Princeton, Brown, Rutgers, and Dartmouth among them. But if universities spoke to the faithful, they were also public institutions: Harvard College, for example, was created by the civil government of Massachusetts. The Bay colony's Calvinists saw no conflict between civil and church authority. But in a society in which there was no Church but many churches, it was only a matter of time before the sectarian and the secular impulses of the university came into conflict. When they did, the religious character of the American university survived, says Marsden, only by accommodating itself to civil authority. Well into the nineteenth century, American colleges and universities remained committed to their religious mission. Eighty percent of the presidents of denominationally related colleges were members of the clergy in 1840, as were two thirds of the presidents of state colleges. As late as 1879, G. Stanley Hall, the founder of Clark University in Worcester, Massachusetts, surveyed the teaching of moral philosophy in American colleges, and concluded that "the grounds of moral obligation are commonly deduced from Revelation."

Yet despite these signs of religious flowering, university expansion also had worldly aims: building the nation, re-enforcing common values, abolishing slavery, preparing the ground for industrial expansion. To meet those objectives, Marsden points out, dogma and sectarianism had to give way--and more or less promptly, they did. Religious commitments began to take the form of a generalized Protestantism not devoted to the propagation of any specific interpretation. "A university cannot be built upon a sect," Harvard's Charles Eliot proclaimed in 1876 (at the founding of Johns Hopkins), words that resonated with other university builders such as Andrew Dickson White of Cornell.

There need not be any conflict between religion on the one hand and science and humanism on the other, these men believed--as long as religion was cast in very broad terms.

Low-church universities were even quicker to accommodate themselves to secular forces. The University of Chicago may have sprung from John D. Rockefeller's Baptist faith, but the driving



forces which made it a major player in American academia were its ties to industry, its openness to pragmatic thought, and its commitments to science and medicine. The career of one of its most illustrious faculty members, John Dewey, captures the transformation of the American university in the early decades of the twentieth century. Dewey was hired, at least in part, because--as a letter of recommendation written on his behalf put it--he was "a man of religious nature, a church member, and believes in working with the church." In later years, however, Dewey came to define religion so broadly that it became indistinguishable from what is now called secular humanism. "The simple fact was that once a college expanded its vision to become a university and to serve a broad middle-class constituency," Marsden writes, "the days were numbered when any substantive denominational tradition could survive." That was surely why Methodist schools--Duke, Vanderbilt, Emory, Boston University, Northwestern, Southern Methodist, Syracuse--all followed the same secularizing path from sectarian origins to regional and national structure.

Even Catholic universities prove Marsden's point, though in a contrary sort of way. A long suspicion of Catholic education in the United States lasted well into the 1950s, when Paul Blanshard published an infamous book called *American Freedom and Catholic Power* (1949). In that and a subsequent book, Blanshard painted a lurid picture of a Catholic cabal against American democracy, especially against the schools, one no different in form (and one perhaps even more dangerous) than the Communist conspiracy. So hostile was the atmosphere to Catholics in higher education that, as Marsden relates, when William Buckley published his *God and Man at Yale* in 1951, McGeorge Bundy essentially accused him of ingratitude in not recognizing how generous Yale was in accepting Catholics.

With hindsight we now know that this picture is incomplete. In *Contending With Modernity: Catholic Higher Education in the Twentieth Century* (Oxford, 1995), Philip Gleason points out that Washington D.C.'s Catholic University of America (CUA), founded in 1889, was at first led by "Americanists," men who believed that Catholics "should accept what was good in modern civilization, integrate it with traditional teaching, and employ it as a resource in the church's evangelical mission of salvation." Between 1920 and 1930, ideas rooted in Aristotle and Aquinas revitalized conservative Catholic thought and influenced Protestant thinkers such as the University



of Chicago's Robert Maynard Hutchins and the "New Humanists" Paul Elmer More and Irving Babbitt. Considering their distance from Europe, and the suspicions of many immigrants toward higher education, Catholic institutions struggled against huge odds to establish themselves as seriously committed to education.

Yet for at least forty years the odds won. Pius X's encyclical *Pascendi Dominici Gregis* (1907) effectively brought Americanism, and the reforms of CUA, to an end. *Studiorum Ducem* (1923), issued by Pius XI, pointed out that the teachings of Aquinas have "given us a complete refutation of the erroneous views of the Modernists." To the Church, philosophy was a method for finding the answers that it already knew. Hostile to modern thought, the Church was unwilling to allow American Catholic institutions of higher learning to join the "mainstream." No wonder that a 1934 survey of the American Council on Education found only five fields at Catholic University qualified to offer graduate work, one at Notre Dame, and none in any of the Jesuit institutions in America. "Catholics," Marsden writes, "emerged from this era with one thing Protestants did not: universities with substantial religious identities." But they paid a very high price. Marsden notes that the 1927 *Who's Who in America* listed twice as many Unitarians as Catholics, even though there were three hundred times more Catholics in America than Unitarians.

After Vatican II, of course, things did begin to change. By the 1960s, Catholic educators had agreed to reforms such as allowing laity to serve on governing boards, and Catholic universities had established themselves as major centers of research and liberal arts education. But the history told by Marsden and by Gleason underscores the dilemma that religious universities have always faced: give religion priority of place, and a certain alienation from success in an increasingly secular and meritocratic culture followed; adjust to America's mobility and economic dynamism, and the old-time religion would have to go.

That dilemma remains to this day the defining reality in the conflict between college and church, whatever the denomination. Some institutions--primarily fundamentalist or Catholic--choose, with full appreciation of the consequences, to retain their commitments to a particular faith. A few others, such as Brandeis, Boston College, and Notre Dame, while retaining a religious identity, have followed the path of once denominational Protestant universities in establishing themselves as



inclusive institutions. Most of the rest have long lost any sense of religious purpose and have become, at least according to conservative critics, the spawning grounds of militant atheism. The founding bylaws of Duke, promulgated in 1924, stated that the aims of the university were "to assert a faith in the eternal union of knowledge and religion set forth in the teachings and character of Jesus Christ, the Son of God." A mission statement for the same university adopted in 1988 spoke of promoting free inquiry, supporting diversity, educating students, fostering the exchange of ideas, and enriching the lives of people in the region. Therein lies the story of how the forces of secularization won their victory over the forces of faith.

III.

Caught between its religious origins and its accommodation to modernity, the American system of higher education developed what Marsden calls "a righteous consensus, Whig style." That consensus, fashioned in the latter half of the nineteenth century, is still firmly in place today. Compulsory chapel has long been abolished; religious concerns are largely ignored in the classroom; and when professors do teach about matters of faith, they tend to do so in widely inclusive, nonevaluative ways. While there are no doubt many professors who are believers, they tend to keep their religion to themselves amid the university's secular and liberal culture. Meanwhile, parents who find this system contrary to their values can send their children to private religious universities, where efforts are still undertaken to teach from within particular religious traditions.

Is this a good compromise? For critics like Mark Schwehn, Warren Nord, and Marsden, the answer is emphatically no. It's their contention that the academy contradicts its own values when it insists on strict secularism. Modern universities say they are committed to academic freedom, but they discourage believers from following their truth wherever it leads. They organize themselves into disciplines such as biology and economics which, in assuming that they have final answers to questions about nature or society, shut themselves off from important arguments made by religiously inspired critics about human origins or the limits of self-interest. They teach moral philosophy but have little understanding of moral character. And they have convinced themselves that they can teach *about* religion without teaching religion, a mistake that could be corrected by reintroducing theology back into departments of religious studies.



The central argument of Mark Schwehn's *Exiles from Eden* is that religious virtues can act as a corrective to a dominant, and misguided, hubristic, view of the professor's vocation. Believing that their mission is to create knowledge, academics ignore at least two other historically important purposes of learning: shaping character and transmitting ideas and skills. How could the situation be different? For one thing, there is much to be said for humility. Both students and faculty make their mark by pointing out how Kant ignored this or Tolstoy neglected that. "Such quick, easy, and dismissive appraisals preclude the possibility of learning from these writers," Schwehn points out, asking us instead to be a little humbler in the way we approach greatness. Nor is faith inappropriate for an academic; to understand we first have to believe--if not in God, then at least in something. In the end, it is not mastery we ought to seek but understanding, which in turn "follows quite naturally from the affections of awe, wonder, and gratitude that constitute piety."

From this perspective, Schwehn offers a program for the reform of higher education. He would put less emphasis on pure scholarship and recognize many forms of academic writing, including more popular writing, as legitimate criteria for membership in the academic community. Teaching would not only count more, but would be expanded to develop the moral character of one's students. Even collegiality would be redefined to include love and friendship, the kind of pleasure in one another's company that the joint quest for learning best brings out. A university more open to the spirit would not pose false dichotomies between research and teaching but would ask "Why inquire?" or "What is the point or the worth of *this* inquiry?"

Where *Exiles From Eden* focuses on the profession of teaching, Warren Nord's *Religion and American Education* concentrates on the curriculum itself. Nord, who is director of the Program in the Humanities and Human Values at the University of North Carolina, argues that "all students should receive a liberal education that takes seriously a variety of ways of making sense of the world, religious ways included, if they are to be informed, reasonable, and responsible individuals." Our schools and universities, he believes, have become "tone deaf" to religion because we assume more of a conflict between religion and secular authority than the actual course of church and state in our history warrants. After all, religious thinkers themselves, especially Protestants, helped create the secular world.



To advance his argument, Nord takes his readers through some of the most contentious battles in our culture wars. Reviewing the leading textbooks in most high school subjects used in North Carolina, he finds that they contain "a coherent worldview, a loosely structured set of philosophical commitments," which considers religion "irrelevant to understanding the world." Taking his point one step farther, he insists that these texts, when combined with the actual curriculum in most schools, promote indoctrination, not education. Even when the subject of religion is introduced, the effort is so cursory-- "a few facts here and a snippet of insight there"--that the nature of religious experience is never conveyed. When a phenomenon so central to human experience is so thoroughly ignored, the tenets of liberal education are violated, for a liberal education requires not only critical thinking but "initiating students into the communities of memory which tentatively define them." At the very least, Nord would require all high school and college students to take at least one course in religion. He asks: "How can anyone believe that a college-bound student should take twelve years of mathematics and no religion rather than eleven years of mathematics and one year of religion?" Moreover, once we begin to teach religion, we should teach it in a serious way: "We routinely require students to practice science and music, to *experience* them, but in public education we do not allow students to participate in the practice of religion." We ought to approach religion the way we do history or the study of other cultures, by trying "to understand them from the inside, and engage them in the effort to discover more sensitive and reasonable ways of thinking and living for all involved." Although Nord speaks in a reasonable tone of voice, his proposals amount to a fundamental restructuring of the compromise under which American universities have operated for some time. As he puts it, we have chosen modernity over faith when what we should do instead is to restore the tension between them.

Reading Marsden, Schwehn, and Nord leaves one with the impression that thoughtful, respected scholars who wish for a more religious university believe themselves to be marginalized in contemporary academic culture. Their voices have none of the religious right's stridency. Yet when all is said and done, their arguments are unpersuasive, and their remedies unrealistic. In a fashion which surely none of them intended, their books serve as a reminder of why the compromises which



the contemporary university has reached on these issues are probably the best means we have of reconciling the contradictory demands of faith and knowledge.

IV.

In recounting how he came to write *Exiles From Eden*, Mark Schwehn begins by describing a 1982 meeting of the Chicago Group on the History of the Social Sciences, an informal colloquium of some of the leading academics in the Chicago area. One of the many stimulating products which came out of that group was Peter Novick's 1988 book, *That Noble Dream: The "Objectivity Question" and the American Historical Profession*. Novick's work, which argued that the eternal quest of historians for untainted knowledge can never be realized, supports the contention of all these writers that religious ways of knowing are as deserving of respect as any other ways of knowing. Yet the most comprehensive historian among these three, George Marsden, demonstrates why, despite Novick's argument, historical facts still matter when we discuss current controversies. Marsden, after all, does have a story to tell, and it is not one that necessarily supports his own case for religious inclusion. Under what Marsden calls Harvard's "Unitarian old-boy network," the College increasingly became an intellectual backwater until it finally rejected religious tests for appointment. When American academics in the mid-nineteenth century were learning from German professionalism, Columbia turned down distinguished scientist Oliver Wolcott Gibbs for a faculty appointment because he belonged to the wrong church. Before philosophy, psychology, and sociology could become proper academic subjects, they had to be liberated from theology. Yale's anti-Semitism, which, like Columbia's, lasted until the middle of the present century, was not only morally wrong, but kept the university mediocre in many fields, especially the social sciences. Although Marsden refrains from commenting on his own historical narrative, the burden of proof for his argument has to be somewhere in all this. A persuasive case on behalf of greater religious inclusion now would first have to show why the unhappy conflicts between faith and knowledge that have been so much a part of our history would not occur all over again.

That may be why, when it comes to advocacy, Marsden skips over the rich historical material he has presented and bases his case on other grounds entirely. Using a somewhat obscure term, but one popular among political and religious conservatives, he argues that the claims of "pure naturalism"



are unsubstantiated and unfalsifiable. Not only are objective facts hard to find in history, he is suggesting, they are hard to find anywhere. And consequently, Marsden concludes, "there seems no intellectually valid reason to exclude religiously based perspectives that have strong academic credentials." This is thin ice indeed. Marsden's attempt to rest his polemical case on dubious propositions associated with the postmodern critique of science weakens what is otherwise an outstanding narrative.

As a believer, after all, Marsden cannot really be a postmodernist. He rejects the claim that all truths reflect conventions for reaching the truth, since the truth of God's existence would in no way be altered if a community of interpreters, concluded otherwise. But, like Schwehn and Nord, he adopts many assumptions of the postmodernists.

Fashioning their own identity politics, all these critics become advocates for diversity, multiculturalism, and the thesis that power colors knowledge. Marsden praises feminists for incorporating personal details of their lives into their books and endorses Stanley Fish's view that "questions of free speech on campus can be reduced to issues of political power." Religious-oriented schools, he writes, "have been outsiders to the dominant academic culture." And now that diversity is the watchword of academic life, this is unacceptable. "Institutions that claim to serve the whole public and to be internally diverse," as Marsden put it in *The Wall Street Journal*, "should be challenged to apply the principle of diversity by openly allowing responsible religious perspectives in the classroom."

Claims of victimization are tiresome enough, even when advanced by real victims. There is something truly ill-fitting when they are advanced by white male Christians. For there is a significant difference between arguments for racial and gender inclusion and similar arguments made on behalf of people of faith: The latter have already been tried. "A biology textbook that tells the story of evolution without bringing religious points of view into the discussion is taking sides," Nord claims. But surely it matters that works by women or African-Americans were excluded out of ignorance while the present decision to exclude creation science from biology courses is informed by experience.



Nord's comment about biology textbooks raises another parallel between advocates of multiculturalism and enthusiasts for religious inclusion: their conviction that the liberal belief in neutral standpoints is a chimera. The claim that there is a contradiction between faith and knowledge is itself a faith, they believe; as Gertrude Himmelfarb writes in her contribution to *First Things*, the university is not so much secular as secularist, "propagating secularism as a creed, a creed that is not neutral as among religions but is hostile to all religions, indeed to religion itself." The beauty of this line of argument is that it enables advocates of religion to claim to be the genuine liberals in all this; we are the true believers in tolerance, they are saying, for it is only we who speak on behalf of including everyone. But the downside in this way of thinking is that, in claiming to be more liberal than the liberals, they open themselves to the charge of neglecting their own faith. In *First Things*, Stanley Fish argues that Marsden's newfound liberalism undermines "what Marsden should want: not the inclusion of religious discourse in a debate no one is allowed to win, but the triumph of religious discourse and the silencing of its atheistic opponents."

Fish is onto something here, but it is not necessarily his point that religious believers ought to be wary of liberalism because liberalism invariably dismisses religious belief. What is far more problematic for religious believers who use the language of tolerance and inclusion is that such liberal virtues are more demanding than many believers are prepared to accept. Tolerance and inclusion are two-way streets. One cannot stand outside a liberal institution and ask for admission without being prepared to extend to others the tolerance which one demands for oneself. If you believe, as Father Richard John Neuhaus does, that "a Christian university has as its premise the knowledge that all truth is one and all ways to truth are one because the Author and the End of truth is One," you will probably be uncomfortable in a secular university, and the university will probably be uncomfortable with you.

What, then, is a believer to do? If he remains true to his faith, he will put that faith first, as Neuhaus does when he endorses religious tests for appointments (in private religious institutions):

"Discrimination is necessary in hiring and promotion--not necessarily discrimination on the basis of religious belief but discrimination on the basis of belief in the great good of being a Christian university." But if he wants to be accepted in the secular world, he will, in praising the tolerance



which is that world's first virtue, have to open himself to questions that will sit uncomfortably with his faith. This is why some theologians argue that critical theology can be welcomed into the university, but not dogmatic or conservative theology--or why Jewish scholars frequently point out that "theology" itself is a Christian term. Such compromises are insufficient for Warren Nord, who writes, "I see no problem with an evangelical Christian or an orthodox Jew or a traditional Muslim teaching theology in a public university so long as they do not do it dogmatically, they are not subject to the control of religious authorities, and they are professionally competent." I would not see any problem either, but I would question whether such individuals, if we could find them, could be true to their religious beliefs.

In short, there is no escaping the historical dilemma faced by earlier advocates of a religious university. Marsden, Schwen, and Nord, unlike Neuhaus, are reluctant to be too explicit here; they prefer to soften the hard edges of sectarian doctrine, offering inclusive language that sits uneasily with deeply held beliefs. Hence Nord does not come right out and say that creation science ought to be taught in the university; he instead makes the weaker claim that it is a viewpoint which ought to be recognized. Nor does Schwehn argue for the end of academic careerism, merely for softening it by emphasizing Christian virtues. By qualifying their position to make it more acceptable to contemporary academic norms, these writers also make it far more unrealistic in a world of religious belief. They have either defined a difficult problem out of existence or ignored the dilemmas which would follow if their qualifications proved to be irrelevant.

V.

Of all aspects of the human condition, religion is the one which has had the hardest time with compromise. Schwehn reminds his readers of the tragic side of faith, the age-old resort to violence to silence those whose faith is different. But, he continues, while religious strife has been ubiquitous, so has secular strife; if anything, godless totalitarianism has killed more people in this century than all the religious wars of previous centuries. Yet surely this is an argument neither for politics nor for religion but for reason and accommodation in both. And although politics and religion both can lead to tragedy, civil authority has been far more often used to quell religious conflict than religious belief has been found to quiet civil war. Reason and compromise in politics we call democracy.



Reason and compromise in faith we call civil religion, or pluralism, a giant step toward secularization. Draw the line between church and state anywhere, and some religious believers will find it in the wrong place. So long as the university is committed to knowledge, some of the faithful will always be excluded.

But they can create institutions of higher learning designed to reinforce their own beliefs. Nothing in American law or tradition prevents the devout from attending their own universities: That is the genius of the distinction we make between public and private institutions. Mark Schwehn voluntarily (and, he says, happily) chose to teach at Lutheran Valparaiso University (where he had been an undergraduate), and many parents are delighted to send their children to denominational schools. The First Amendment requires only that the state neither encourage nor discourage such efforts. This compromise is unsatisfactory for those, like Neuhaus and Himmelfarb, who believe that their church has a responsibility for the "public" soul, not just for the "private" beliefs of its adherents. And it is not an arrangement which resolves such thorny issues as whether it ought to be legal for the government to subsidize private religious education with vouchers. But no compromise can ever be perfect, and given the fact that religious conflict has led so often to bloodshed, the American compromise, which has worked so well for almost a century, is not yet obsolete. Although all these writers make eloquent statements about why they are unhappy with it, none of them comes up with a compelling case for abandoning it.

It is because our public/private compromise does work that Marsden and Neuhaus are right on one major point. In the name of pluralism and academic freedom, they argue, we insist that all institutions, even religious-oriented ones, be alike. Marsden criticizes efforts by the Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools to strip Westminster Theological Seminary of its accreditation because the institution required that its board members be clergy (in a faith that refused ordination to women). Such efforts to turn every educational institution into a carbon copy of every other one are the secular equivalent of fundamentalism. Why bother to have a distinction between public and private if we allow the public to micromanage the private? American pluralism is strong enough to survive institutions which insist not only on doing things their own way, but on paying their own way as well. That is why Marsden and Neuhaus are correct in pointing out that efforts to apply



secular notions of academic freedom to private religious institutions deprive those institutions of a distinctive voice. If the distinction between public and private requires institutions in the former sector to be secular, it cannot prevent those in the latter sector from being religious.

VI.

Almost anyone who teaches in the contemporary university can understand why religious-oriented critics add an important voice to the debate over higher education. Suburban prosperity does funny things to college students. Often unable to grasp the tragic sense of life, blasé to the point of indifference about the miracles of nature, art, and culture, taking for granted what required centuries of deprivation and struggle to create--American students are in desperate need of something, anything, that will offer experiences of transcendence, paradox, and wonder. As a nonbeliever, I crave religious students. At least they have something in their backgrounds to which I can appeal that was not the subject of last night's prime-time programming. Teaching classes on abortion or AIDS to students who simply cannot understand that there really are people who think about such issues in other than utilitarian ways is incredibly frustrating.

I hope, then, we can agree that students ought to develop an appreciation of and respect for religion. The question is how. Efforts to reintroduce faith into public universities--and into large private research universities--are not the way to go. In part this is because students resist anything that others do in their name and in part it is because advocates of Christian identity politics, like advocates of other identity politics, are speaking to their own needs as well as to those of the objects of their attention. But there is an even more compelling reason why disestablishment is ultimately in everyone's interest, even the interests of the faithful. Recent debates over hate speech and sensitivity training should have taught us that the university ought not to be in the business of healing the afflicted or comforting the aggrieved; we have other institutions for that. In a similar way, if the debate over the inclusion of religion in the university teaches us anything, it is that faith is vital, religion ubiquitous, and belief admirable. But we have families, churches, circles of friends, and private religious institutions to serve those needs; the inclusive university should be for something else. If it remains committed to its core mission of advancing and transmitting knowledge, some students will emerge secular, others religious, and still others indifferent to the whole business. All of



us, secular and religious alike, have to take our chances with that, certain only that the university is not the place for certainties.

Alan Wolfe is university professor and professor of sociology at Boston University. His article "What Cognitive Elite?" appeared in the January/February 1995 issue of *Lingua Franca*.

