

THE PERILS OF PROSPERITY—*Neo-Calvinism and the Future of Religious Colleges*

Prepared by Joel A. Carpenter for the conference, The Future of Religious Colleges, held at the Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University October 6-7, 2000. This paper, along with others presented at the conference, will be included in a forthcoming book titled "The Future of Religious Colleges," to be published by Eerdmans in the fall of 2001.

The most important framing event for Calvinist academic and intellectual life in North America today did not happen in Cambridge, Massachusetts, nor in Princeton, New Jersey, for that matter. It happened not so long ago, but quite a bit farther away, in Amsterdam, in the year 1880. There, on a late October day, the redoubtable Abraham Kuyper, a Reformed theologian, social philosopher and political activist, stood in the New Church, the Dutch national equivalent of Westminster Abbey, to proclaim the beginning of a new university, the Free University of Amsterdam. The new university, Kuyper explained to his audience, was to be free to conduct its teaching and investigation from Christian principles. Skeptics might scoff at the very idea of a Christian medical science or Christian legal studies, but Kuyper answered that under the all-encompassing mind and will of God, "no single piece of our mental world is to be hermetically sealed off from the rest." That was true, he continued, because "there is not a square inch in the whole domain of our human existence over which Christ, who is Sovereign over all, does not cry: 'Mine!'"¹ Kuyper would write later that the Creator gave the human race both the ability and the charge to "unwrap the thoughts of God that lie embodied in creation." God also gave humans the mandate, as stewards of creation, to put their skills and knowledge to work in fulfilling the divine purpose. Those whom God was redeeming were to be, in turn, agents for the healing and restoration of a sin-infected world.² Explore God's creation and equip the saints for reform: that was the Dutch neo-Calvinists' two-fold warrant for diligent study and front-line research.

Most of what constitutes Reformed Christian thought and action in North American higher education today comes from the tradition set in motion by Abraham Kuyper. Older forms of Calvinist education in the arts and sciences, such as the Renaissance Christian humanism practiced at the early Harvard, or the Scottish Enlightenment's Common Sense philosophy, as propagated for a century out of Princeton, have largely disappeared from the American scene. Among the collegiate survivors of the great Presbyterian and Congregationalist educational initiatives, which accounted for a third of the colleges founded in America by 1865, few vestiges remain of the Reformed Christian convictions that once shaped and propelled them. Kuyper's legacy, by contrast, is alive and well, both in a network of Reformed educational institutions, and more broadly, as one of the most influential animating visions of a broader network of evangelical scholars. This Reformed Christian academic and intellectual movement is much more influential than its number of colleges and individual adherents would seem to suggest. It is well worth the effort, then, for learned observers of the American educational scene to understand its main ideas and assess its contemporary role.

1. The Educational Impulse in Reformed Theology

There are theological reasons why Calvinists have been so influential in Western higher education, and we should start with them. Someone once said that the Presbyterians founded so many colleges because it took a college education to understand their theology. Teaching and knowledge are indeed at the heart of the Reformed tradition; thus, the emphasis on learned preaching. The technical term for pastor in the Presbyterian Church is in fact "teaching elder." This structure is not simply a quirk of fate in the tradition; it stems naturally from the main themes of Calvinist theology.

Reformed theologians, from John Calvin forward, have started their theological investigations with the nature of God. They ascribe to God the greatest glory and majesty imaginable, seeing the Almighty One as the great creator and governor of the universe. Everything comes into being by means of God's decrees and owes its continued existence to the Creator's governance. The world that we see before us and its many wonders unseen beyond us, Reformed theologians insist, are expressions of God's glory. Exploring the intricacies of nature, therefore, is an act of praise to the Creator.

The Reformed see the world also as the arena for the biblical drama of salvation, whereby God's good and perfect universe, which became marred and besieged by sin, is being redeemed. To save the world, God became human in Jesus of Nazareth, to free humanity from bondage to sin and ultimately to restore creation to its unblemished glory. For the Reformed, then, God's plan of salvation goes far beyond the personal rescue of human souls; it involves society, nature, and indeed the entire cosmos. Jesus is both the messiah of oppressed humanity and the cosmic lord and savior of the universe.

This theology of salvation has important implications for education. Some faith traditions are inward-looking and mystical, but Calvinism is world-encompassing in its outlook. This world matters, and learning more about it honors its creator and redeemer. People whom God has redeemed, moreover, are called to be divine agents in the great drama of redemption. They serve God's redeeming purpose when they live according to divine law and when their work anticipates the restoration of God's reign of holiness, justice, peace and the full flourishing of nature and humanity—what the Hebrew prophets called God's shalom. Such work in the world, to which Reformed Christians feel called, requires much knowledge, both of the world itself and of God's purposes for it. It takes much learning.³

2. Reformed Higher Education and the Secularization of the American Academy

Calvinist strategies for higher education dominated the American collegiate scene for two and a half centuries. Their first American incarnation was in Harvard College, founded in 1636. Its role was to supply the learned pastors, magistrates and school teachers that the Puritan Commonwealth of Massachusetts needed in order to sustain its redeeming purposes as a harbinger of the reign of God. Harvard's education was a Renaissance humanist appropriation of the ancient pagans' wisdom alongside Christian theology. Calvin's doctrine of the "common grace" of God made this approach to learning possible, for it teaches that God graciously allows flawed and fallen humans to accomplish much that is good and useful, in order to protect them from self-destruction and sustain their society as the arena to which salvation might come. The assumption, however, that Harvard prepared the leaders for a Christian republic ordered by Reformed principles, began to break down in the eighteenth century as the colony and its neighbors grew more diverse. In order to preserve its cultural role, Harvard broadened its emphasis, moving away from divine revelation in Scripture and toward the Enlightenment's faith in reason and nature to

uncover the principles for right living.

At the same time, Calvinists at Princeton College were trying to make the Enlightenment their servant rather accommodating to it as a rival. They drew on the Reformed teaching that God created the universe to run in an orderly manner and ordained laws for the right ordering of human affairs. The Princeton theologians and philosophers taught that by rational and objective observation of nature and society, humans could discern God's laws at work in each realm and thus effect improvements in both of them. Rationality and morality could continue to grow in the New Republic then being established, the Princetonians believed, given the proper educational approach. They saw no need to make hard choices between reason and revelation, the national commonwealth and the community of faith. The Princeton idea of an objective moral science caught on widely across the Protestant spectrum, and it became the prevailing school of thought in mid-nineteenth-century America, profoundly shaping the rapidly growing movement to found colleges in the West.

As the nation grew more diverse, Protestant intellectual leaders tried to stretch their religious convictions ever broader. George Marsden's history of the secularization of American universities points out that the leaders of the first modern research universities in America were not pioneering secularists fighting a war against traditional religion. They were liberal Protestants who stood for openness and free inquiry while embracing both evolutionary science and the ethical teachings of Jesus. Their vision, which formed the heart and soul of the progressive movement, was moving in a more broadly moral and less distinctively Christian direction.

Eventually, this close equation of Christianity with the advancement of knowledge and the promotion of American cultural norms led secular-minded academics to wonder what it was that Christianity added to the university, other than the hegemony of old-line Protestant elites. As a harder-edged scientific naturalism became the dominant intellectual force in twentieth-century academe, religion was pushed to the margins of academic life. In an increasingly plural cultural and intellectual scene, even the blandest sort of nonsectarian Protestantism seemed too particular to speak for the whole. The older, broadly Protestant ideals gave way before the forces of instrumental pragmatism and scientific naturalism.⁴ By the 1970s, concludes educational historian Douglas Sloan, "the engagement of the Protestant church with American higher education had collapsed, and its forces were in rout."⁵ American social and religious pluralism and the rise of scientific naturalism undermined both Calvinist and broadly Protestant attempts to serve as schoolmasters to the entire nation.

3. Abraham Kuyper's Response to Secularization

The forces of secularization were advancing at least as rapidly in the Netherlands as in the United States by the late nineteenth century. According to James Bratt, Dutch Calvinists responded in three ways: "by claiming that religion involved ethics, not intellect, so that secularism did not matter; by hunkering down into sectarian clusters, giving up claims to public life; or by identifying God with country and working to roll back pluralism."⁶ Bratt might as well have been speaking about American Protestants, whose liberal mainline tended to separate faith and knowledge into separate realms, and whose conservatives alternated between sectarian retreat and fundamentalist crusading. Abraham Kuyper rejected these three responses and sought a new way forward.

Kuyper's solution was to embrace pluralism and to emphasize the value-laden, commitment-driven nature of knowledge. He reasoned that people quite naturally formed communities of the like-minded that shared a singular view of reality, a distinctive pattern for living and a sociopolitical agenda. A just society would recognize this social, intellectual and religious pluralism and encourage the various communities to negotiate the common good. Likewise, Kuyper insisted, one's knowledge of the world was inevitably colored and shaped by one's prior commitments—most fundamentally, religious commitments—concerning the nature of reality. Knowing was never value-free; science could not be completely objective. Scientific naturalism thus had no claim to a privileged position over against other worldviews.

Kuyper was not calling for the fragmentation of public life, however. Given God's common grace, he argued, there would be much overlap in humans' efforts to understand nature and humanity, and thus opportunities for conversation, debate and negotiation, both in learning and in politics. Yet the social, intellectual and religious differences that drove outlooks and agendas were real, and they should not be forced into unitary national establishments, whether religious, intellectual or political. Various communities of faith and values could play public roles, yet not feel compelled to choose between domination, accommodation or withdrawal. They would have the social and intellectual space to work out of their particular convictions, but would retain the right to put their ideas into play on an equal basis.⁷

Kuyper's principled pluralism attracted a strong following in the Netherlands. There he headed a movement that had already developed a Protestant confessional political party and was organizing a separate Reformed denomination, Christian day schools and labor unions. The Free University was founded to be the think tank and leadership training center for the movement. At the height of his influence, Kuyper was chosen by a coalition government in 1901 to be the nation's Prime Minister.

4. Kuyper in America: Making Higher Education Christian

In 1898, Kuyper came to America to give the Stone Lectures on Calvinism at Princeton Theological Seminary. His addresses were subsequently published, thus affording an English-speaking audience some access to his ideas. After visiting Princeton, he traveled to the Midwest to meet with Reformed leaders there. These communities of Dutch Reformed immigrants put Kuyper's thought to work in an American setting. Calvin College and Calvin Theological Seminary, which were founded in 1876 to serve the immigrant-based Christian Reformed Church, were among the first American institutions to wrestle with Kuyper's thought. Kuyper's ideas of principled pluralism, world-view analysis and cultural engagement eventually prevailed at these two institutions, and indeed at a number of Reformed institutions of higher learning in North America, including Dordt College, in northwest Iowa; Trinity Christian College, in south suburban Chicago; the King's University College, in Edmonton, Alberta; Redeemer University College, near Hamilton, Ontario; the Institute for Christian Studies, adjoining the University of Toronto; and two colleges affiliated with conservative Presbyterian denominations: Covenant, near Chattanooga, Tennessee; and Geneva, not far from Pittsburgh. Together these institutions have formed the Association of Reformed Institutions of Higher Education (ARIHE), for a variety of cooperative purposes, among which is the hope that some day a Reformed research university might arise from their efforts.⁸

Among the one hundred or so evangelical Christian colleges in the United States, these Reformed institutions distinguish themselves as

seedbeds of Kuyperian "presuppositionalism." This is a mode of Christian thinking that stresses the importance of worldviews in the shaping of thought and research in the academic disciplines and public learned discourse. Kuyperians do not believe that reason or rationality alone drives such investigations, nor do these modes of thought determine the context from which our thinking emanates. Differences between scholars very often go all the way back to differing worldviews, divergent basic assumptions, and opposing religious beliefs. Even work in the natural sciences is socially situated and conditioned by the predispositions that the scientist brings to the bench. What makes Christian higher education Christian, then, the Kuyperians insist, is not the existence of chapel services and prayer groups on campus, nor is it the place for Christian theology and biblical studies in the curriculum. It is Christian because a Christian worldview drives the learning there, because classroom studies and basic research emanate from Christian presuppositions.

This school of Christian thought has had a pervasive influence within the broader evangelical academic enterprise. Faith-learning integration is the unifying purpose of a collegiate coalition of 100 institutions called the Council for Christian Colleges and Universities, based in Washington, D.C. The depth of thought and thoroughness of practice along these lines vary significantly within the Council. Among some of its leading institutions, however, such as Wheaton College in Illinois, Seattle Pacific University, and Gordon College in Massachusetts, the commitment to the integration of faith and learning is both deep and conscious of the Kuyperian heritage. Reformed perspectives on the task of Christian higher education have become so pervasive in evangelical academia that a backlash of sorts has erupted. In a recent book on the varieties of Christian higher education, the co-editors state that "it is easy to imagine that the Calvinist model for Christian higher education is the only available model." The book then presents models from various Christian traditions, some well-articulated and others rather hastily constructed.⁹

This Christian college network is but a tiny corner of the vast knowledge industry in America that has some 4,000 tertiary institutions. Reformed educational and cultural thought has played an inordinately large role among evangelical colleges, but that role amounts to being the big fish in a very small pond. If the Reformed presence in American intellectual and academic life was confined to these colleges, it would warrant a footnote, perhaps, but there is more. Within and beyond this institutional setting, there has been a modest renaissance of evangelical Christian scholarly achievement over the past two decades, and here too the Reformed have played a salient role.¹⁰

5. Reforming Fundamentalism: The Evangelical Scholars Movement

The framing event of the contemporary evangelical intellectual movement might well have been another inaugural speech, the one delivered by Dr. Harold John Ockenga at the Civic Auditorium of Pasadena, California, in the fall of 1947. Ockenga, the scholarly pastor of the Park Street Congregational Church in Boston, was also the newly elected president of Fuller Theological Seminary, being established just then in Pasadena. With the support of Charles and Grace Fuller, the hosts of the nation's leading religious radio program, "The Old Fashioned Revival Hour," Ockenga was recruiting a young faculty of great promise and high intellectual pedigrees, including doctorates from Harvard, Penn and Boston University. Now, as he launched the new school, Ockenga called for a resurgence of evangelical theology to meet the daunting challenges of the postwar era. Fuller Seminary must be a place, he urged, where scholars would spark the "revival of Christian thought and life," needed to restore the foundations of the postwar world. That was a tall order for a new school, which in its first year had just four professors and fifty students, and met in the Sunday school wing of a church in Pasadena. Yet the professors there were convinced that they were engaged in a great and noble enterprise, and they set out to write books that they hoped would herald a new evangelicalism.¹¹

The Fuller professors were theologians, but their vision for a renaissance of Christian thought and culture ranged more broadly. Carl F. H. Henry, one of Fuller's founding professors, laid out a capacious agenda for the new evangelicalism in his first two scholarly books, *Remaking the Modern Mind* (1946), and *The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism* (1947). Henry called, first, for a powerful reassertion of an evangelical Christian "world-and-life view" to address the cultural crisis of the postwar West, and second, for the reformation of fundamentalism in order to equip it for that task. Henry's analysis owed much to the Kuyperians. He dedicated the first book to "three men of Athens," his Calvinist philosophical mentors Gordon Clark of Wheaton, William Harry Jellema of Calvin, and Cornelius Van Til of Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia. Jellema and Van Til were using Kuyper's worldview analysis to interpret the intellectual history of the West. Henry borrowed that method for reaching his conclusion that postwar Western culture was collapsing because of the failure of the modern, secular "mind." The West's only hope, he insisted, was for a resurgence of Christian faith and social action driven by the "controlling ideas of the Hebrew-Christian world-life view."¹²

Likewise, *The Uneasy Conscience* argued, in good Kuyperian fashion, that a Christianity that was more interested in curbing individual sin than combating social evil, more interested in marking all the details of the Second Coming rather than working for Christ's kingdom now, was irrelevant and not up to the contemporary challenge. Henry's manifesto brimmed with hope for an evangelical religious and cultural reformation. He did not really expect, despite his grand, world-remaking rhetoric, that evangelicals could create a fully Christian civilization. He did hope that they could have a profound positive influence, as "salt and light" throughout society.¹³

By the 1960s, the outlines of an evangelical intellectual movement had appeared. It began among theologians and biblical scholars. Under the initial sponsorship of the National Association of Evangelicals, they formed the Evangelical Theological Society in 1947. Fuller Theological Seminary, the first of several evangelical theological seminaries that would embrace the cause, was an important institutional base for the movement. So too were evangelical colleges like Wheaton and Gordon, especially as the movement ranged out into the arts and sciences. Carl Henry left Fuller in 1956 to found a new magazine, *Christianity Today*, which provided a forum for thoughtful discourse. Meanwhile, the Inter-Varsity Christian Fellowship, a British import, was building networks of evangelical intellectuals on secular campuses and providing a seedbed for younger scholars. Evangelical scholarly societies arose in the arts, sciences and professions, including the Society of Christian Philosophers, the Christianity and Literature group, the Christian Legal Society, the Christian Medical Society, the American Scientific Affiliation, and the Conference on Faith and History.

Theological publishers became important drivers in this network, especially the William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company of Grand Rapids. Eerdmans' broadening portfolio was one of the first means of linking this movement with a similar one in the United Kingdom.

Erdmans also published the *Reformed Journal*, a monthly commentary founded in 1951 by professors from Calvin College and Seminary, to address the salient issues of the day. The RJ was thoroughly Kuyperian in its outlook, and it aimed more consistently at learned discourse than did the mass-circulated *Christianity Today*. Although never large in subscriptions, the RJ attracted a broad readership among evangelical intellectuals, and it eventually added some of them to its masthead. Since the early days, then, the contemporary evangelical scholars movement has had a decidedly Grand Rapids Reformed flavor.¹⁴

As late as the mid-1980s, the evangelical intellectual movement was scarcely visible to mainstream academia. Some of its scholars had produced important works by then, such as the Calvin College philosopher Alvin Plantinga's *God and Other Minds* (Cornell, 1967), and *On Universals* (Chicago, 1970), written by his departmental colleague, Nicholas Wolterstorff. Both of these works became standards on graduate reading lists, as did *Fundamentalism and American Culture* (Oxford, 1980), written by the Calvin historian George M. Marsden. Eventually these Calvin professors moved to research universities, pursued scholarship more intensively and mentored dozens of graduate students, but twenty years ago they were kept very busy teaching in an undergraduate institution. There were a few evangelical scholars scattered across the major universities, such as historians Robert Frykenberg at Wisconsin and Timothy Smith at Johns Hopkins. Yet they often worked in isolation from others of like mind and felt the duress of representing a marginal religious and cognitive community.

Such conditions exist for many evangelical scholars today, but there have been some dramatic changes as well. Nick Wolterstorff now works at Yale, but not in isolation from other evangelicals. Alongside him in the Divinity School are historians Harry Stout and Lamin Sanneh and a theologian who moved recently from Fuller, Miroslav Volf. Both Wolterstorff and Plantinga, who now teaches at Notre Dame, have delivered the prestigious Gifford Lectures in Great Britain. Marsden, who now is also at Notre Dame, has created a stir in the academy with *The Soul of the American University* (Oxford, 1994), and a sequel, *The Outrageous Idea of Christian Scholarship* (Oxford, 1996).¹⁵

Evangelicals' scholarly production is showing up with more frequency in the main channels of intellectual discourse. A case-in-point is the body of work produced by the grantees of the Pew Evangelical Scholars research awards program. Titles listed on the program's web page range from religion's role in the French Revolution, the American Civil War, and the American Civil Rights movement to studies of anthropology in the Philippines, the philosophy of mathematics, communication ethics, and moral psychology. The Pew Scholars publish with mainline academic and trade presses: Cambridge, Oxford, Princeton, Yale, Doubleday, Johns Hopkins, California and Macmillan, to name a few.¹⁶ Skeptics might ask what makes these works Christian, yet these books reflect assumptions, worldviews, assessments of nature and humanity and choices of methods and topics that are deeply influenced by their authors' Christian faith. Observed the Catholic historian James Turner, evangelical scholars "have helped to nurture in the academy a heightened sensitivity to Christian faith as a factor important in its own right. They have hardly conquered the high citadels of academe, and they have a long way to go before becoming anything like a major presence in the universities, but they have made their presence felt."¹⁷

Kuyperian neo-Calvinism still plays a prominent, but not an exclusive role in the evangelical scholars' movement. The evangelical scholars draw on a variety of Christian influences, such as an Anabaptist ethic, which emphasizes the Gospel's call for social justice and peacemaking and for a personal witness based in communal patterns and a simple lifestyle. Evangelical scholars have made common cause with Catholic intellectuals as well, as the presence of leading evangelical scholars Marsden and Plantinga suggests at the University of Notre Dame, whose current provost is the evangelical historian Nathan Hatch. The patron saint of the movement today would most likely be C.S. Lewis, the Anglican literary scholar, novelist and Christian apologist. These contributions from a variety of traditions notwithstanding, James Turner still judges that "the decisive influence of the revival remains neo-Calvinism."¹⁸

6. Does Neo-Calvinism Have A Future? The Potential for Secularization

Calvinism, quite against its will, has been a major historic force for secularization. A case in point would be the great Congregational and Presbyterian enterprise in American higher education largely resulting in post-Christian institutions. Even Kuyper's great academic experiment, the Free University of Amsterdam, no longer carries the Reformed confessional torch, although scattered members of its faculty persist in the cause. It is quite natural, then, to wonder whether the contemporary American neo-Calvinist intellectual and educational movement also carries the seeds of its imminent demise.

The specter of secularization preoccupies many evangelical college leaders – they who know quite well the story that James Burtchaell, Douglas Sloan and George Marsden tell. This narrative shows secularization coming because of the inability of Christian colleges to sustain the position that Christian beliefs have "a privileged insight," as Burtchaell put it, into the realms of science and culture. They were pressured into conceding their religious purchase on the realm of knowledge, argues Sloan, because they were unable to counter the increasingly imperial claims of scientific naturalism; and adds Marsden, because of the loss of Protestant social and cultural hegemony. A founding purpose of most of these colleges and universities was to serve a broad public constituency, so they saw no alternative to broadening out their own identity as American society diversified. If domination was no longer an option, secularization had to be their fate. Protestant colleges like Wheaton that refused to broaden out experienced marginalization. Today, as the evangelical colleges, Reformed and others, advance their reputations, recruit faculty who have been educated within a secular milieu, and create new academic products to reach new groups of students, will they not become more secular? I suspect that many will.

The Reformed institutions have two advantages over other evangelicals in the struggle against secularization. The first is that sustaining a particular point of view in a pluralistic situation is firmly engrained in these institutions' habits and outlook. Not only has principled pluralism been a main point of Kuyperian ideology, but it has been fortified by the Dutch-American Calvinists' social location within religious communities that have valued and sustained their distinctiveness. The second strength is the positive, capacious, yet ultimately modest vision that neo-Calvinism offers. For Protestant communities, including the Reformed, that have seemed trapped between the alternatives of liberal accommodation to the secular world, fundamentalist crusading to regain cultural power, or pietist world-retreat, neo-Calvinism posits a way out and a way forward. It has a world-encompassing view of God's saving action and a world-engaging understanding of the Christian calling. One does not have to reflect the surrounding world's norms and patterns in order to engage it and serve in it. The Reformed people's

vision of God's reign of shalom encourages them to sustain the tension of being in the world but marching to a different set of orders. They can serve the common good without seeking to dominate the scene or feeling dismayed by an apparent lack of sweeping success. God will make all things right, in God's own good time, so the Reformed can be who they are, bloom where they are planted, and get along with their neighbors. This simply is a different outlook than the one shared by both liberal and conservative Protestants.

There is another narrative in American higher education that may be more relevant for the Reformed than is the secularization of mainline Protestantism. It is the story of American Catholic universities, as described in Philip Gleason's magisterial history, *Contending with Modernity: Catholic Higher Education in the Twentieth Century* (Oxford, 1995). Gleason's history, which explores the attempts of a religious community outside the Protestant establishment to make higher education Christian, has some remarkable parallels to the Reformed encounters with modernity.

Gleason describes a revival of neo-scholastic philosophy in American Catholic thought during the first half of the twentieth century that inspired new confidence and creative energy among Catholic intellectuals. Modern democratic culture was in crisis in the wake of World War I, they believed, and the Catholic faith had the remedy. In the thought systems of St. Thomas Aquinas, Catholic intellectuals found a unified worldview for shaping higher education and providing a comprehensive vision of life. Catholicism is not merely a religion; it is a culture, said Catholic intellectuals; Catholics have a unique vision for economics, psychology and ethics, their own history, heroes, art and tradition. Catholic colleges and universities, they insisted, should be creative centers of Christian culture. Catholic cultural activity flourished in the 1930s and 1940s while Catholic colleges and universities rapidly expanded. By the end of World War II, they offered post-graduate education in every major profession and academic field of inquiry, increased their share of national enrollments, and had representation on important government commissions. By the 1950s, the Catholic intellectual tradition seemed well-established and riding high. Neoscholastic philosopher Jacques Maritain was teaching at Princeton, while John Courtney Murray, the renaissance scholar of this Catholic renaissance, was at Yale.

Catholic intellectuals soon found that success had its own perils. The church's support for the New Deal and labor organizing, plus its advocacy on issues of public morality, began to prompt some anti-Catholic sentiment in national cultural politics. The most notorious instance was a diatribe by the liberal Protestant leader, Paul Blanshard, *American Freedom and Catholic Power*, which equated American Catholic activism with the Church's alliances with right-wing forces in Spain and Latin America. This brief flare-up of "culture wars" in the late 1940s and early 1950s caught Catholic intellectuals in a bind. On the one hand, they eagerly supported the call to "redeem all things in Christ." On the other hand, they were not culture warriors, and they were shocked when in 1954 the Vatican cracked down on John Courtney Murray, the brilliant Jesuit philosopher, for arguing that the separation of church and state was fully in accordance with Catholic thought. They were growing impatient with the Church's siege mentality, and many yearned to break out of the immigrant religious ghetto and enter the mainstream of American cultural and intellectual life. Their earlier triumphal posture, that the Catholic faith had the answers for the crisis of Western civilization, gave way to openness to modernity, and especially to its emphasis on human freedom. A liberal movement began within American Catholicism, which was eager to engage in the spirit of the age.

Meanwhile, Catholic university leaders were losing confidence that they could integrate their entire curriculum. Several major national attempts to state a distinctly Catholic vision for higher education failed. Professional competence in specialized fields was replacing a distinctively Catholic intellectual vision that encompassed all of learning and all of life. Catholic educators thought they could build graduate research programs and professional and technological schools without affecting the fundamental commitments of their universities. They found out that these programs were not value-neutral; they favored scientific naturalism as the way of knowing about the world and promoted an instrumental outlook on education. Catholic science, business and engineering professors increasingly questioned the relevance of neo-scholasticism for their work. Humanities faculty lamented American Catholicism's religious and intellectual separatism, triumphalism, and alleged preference for religious orthodoxy over professional excellence. And many philosophers and theologians had tired of neo-Thomism. They found European existentialism more relevant to the contemporary world's situation and mood. They responded to Vatican II's call for a new opening up to the modern world by sweeping away, almost entirely, the old philosophical structure of Catholic higher education.

The result, Gleason argues, has been an identity crisis among Catholic colleges and universities. They have continued to improve academically and very few have abandoned their Catholic character entirely, but they share no consensus about religious beliefs, moral commitments, or academic mission. The problem, Gleason concludes, "is not that Catholic educators do not want their institutions to remain Catholic, but that they are no longer sure what remaining Catholic means."¹⁹

One does not have to look far within the neo-Calvinist and neo-evangelical academy to see similar trends afoot. One of the principal concerns for neo-evangelical and neo-Calvinist scholars has been their relationship to the larger evangelical movement. Just as the Catholic academicians benefited from the Catholic Church's growth and its parishioners' aspirations of upward mobility, so too the evangelical and the Reformed intellectuals have ridden a resurgent evangelicalism and tried to guide its cultural and intellectual course.

Modern evangelicalism is not particularly friendly to intellectuals, however. Arising out of protests against the worldly elites of mainline Protestantism, it is suspicious of intellectuals and academics, and has an abiding fear of their "sell-out" to secularity. Even the Christian Reformed people, who cultivate complex religious ideas and are passionate about education, still worry that their own academics might betray them. Mark Noll's *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind* (Eerdmans, 1994), describes and decries the inhibiting effect of religious populism.

Evangelical and Reformed scholars, like Catholic intellectuals before them, may be growing weary of this tension. For the past twenty years they have endured the flare-up of a "culture wars" mentality, led by spokesmen such as Jerry Falwell and Pat Robertson, and spurred on by the old Protestant quest for a "Christian America." This movement blames many of the nation's ills on its intellectuals, as the purveyors of a secular humanist worldview. Many evangelical and neo-Calvinist scholars, in a reaction reminiscent of the Catholic intellectuals of the 1950s, bristle at the ways their worldview analysis has been mangled and twisted by neo-fundamentalist crusaders and grow weary of explaining and defending their own educational and intellectual moves. Some of them are becoming so ashamed of the excesses of their combative compatriots that they are starting to sympathize with ideas and perspectives of which they should be more critical. Evangelical scholars' embarrassed

reactions to the New Religious Right may be triggering a self-fulfillment of the crusaders' worries about them.

Like Catholic institutions, Reformed and evangelical colleges may underestimate the secularizing potential of graduate and professional programs. Very few of these colleges seem headed toward postgraduate programs in the arts and sciences, but their undergraduate departments constantly encounter the secular outlook of the universities in which their professors were educated and the guilds with which they affiliate. Many Reformed and evangelical colleges are also adding professional programs. There is no inherent problem with enfolded a professional program, such as education, nursing, business, engineering or social work, into a Reformed Christian vision for culture and education. Abraham Kuyper insisted on their congruity with Christ's lordship in his inaugural speech for the Free University. Yet the mainstream practitioners of professional training have an instrumental view of education, and professional program accreditors work against colleges' attempts to give students the broad liberal arts exposure that a Christian vision requires. Graduate professional programs, which attract students and professors with educational aims even more focused on credentialing and marketable skills, draw the host institutions deeper into education that has little regard for breadth and coherence. The more an institution expands into graduate and professional programs, the greater the potential for a fragmenting of its vision.²⁰

Like American Catholic intellectuals before them, Reformed and evangelical scholars have enjoyed a remarkable flowering of accomplishment emanating from a vision of serving the reign of God. Yet the more an intellectual vision gains acceptance and adherents, the more it tends to become diluted and stale. Such visions experience trouble especially in the passing and rising of generations. Rather than being the wellspring of fresh insight for younger scholars, a school of thought can come to be seen as a body of clichés that have been worn out by one's intellectual parents. Gleason shows that scarcely a half-century after neo-Thomism became the ruling philosophy in Catholic thought, and very soon after it energized the likes of Christopher Dawson, Jacques Maritain and John Courtney Murray, it seemed old, tired and irrelevant to the rising generation of Catholic professors. Abraham Kuyper's vision for sustaining a Christian witness in a pluralistic world has inspired a generation of postwar intellectual leaders, such as Nicholas Wolterstorff and George Marsden, whose work now has come to full flower. But is what we are seeing now an "Indian Summer" of the tradition? The more commonly accepted Kuyperian thought becomes among evangelicals, the more likely that younger Reformed and evangelical intellectuals, like the Catholics of the 1960s "aggiornamento," will tire of Kuyperian thinking and become attracted to postmodern philosophies, which resist architectonic "grand narratives" as attempts to impose hegemony, and celebrate not a world made whole, but the contemporary world's fragmentation and incoherence.

7. A Hopeful Future for Neo-Calvinism?

Having stated some possible scenarios for the demise of the neo-Calvinist movement and its educational projects, let me cite two reasons to hope that the tradition might well remain strong and energized for many years to come.

First, the neo-Calvinist outlook has some particularly attractive features for contemporary evangelical Protestant intellectuals. It offers them this-worldly engagement rather than otherworldly flight or New-Right crusading. It has a way of affirming culture and learning from it without losing a critical and countercultural edge, a way of operating within modern social pluralism without giving up one's principles, and a penchant for analysis rather than mere activism. Now, on the apparent downside of the New Religious Right's trajectory, when a number of evangelical activists are disillusioned with public engagement and are retreating to the confines of churchly activity, the Kuyperians offer a way to stay the course.²¹

Despite evangelicals' attempts to extract and elevate models for Christian higher education from a variety of traditions, most of American evangelicalism lacks its own tradition to guide an intellectual apostolate (as Catholics once called it). Evangelicals must borrow such ideas and practices, and there are not that many sources that attract them. Anglo-Catholic Christian humanism, in the tradition of John Henry Newman, G. K. Chesterton and C.S. Lewis, enjoys some abiding interest. Likewise, the Anabaptist vision of education for service, which calls for close communities of the faithful to live out a Gospel ethic of justice and peace, is gaining interest. Yet Anglo-Catholic humanism seems better suited to help Christian intellectuals preserve the wisdom of a Christian past than to discover new knowledge, and an Anabaptist vision for education and intellectual life is only beginning to receive careful articulation.²²

Because of Kuyper's experiences with evangelical pietism, secularity and cultural pluralism, he anticipated many of the needs felt most urgently by evangelical intellectuals. Many an academic who is both an evangelical Christian and a scholar yearns to see some integration of these two spheres of her life. Secular scholars and pietist Christians alike say integration is impossible, but neo-Calvinists make it happen. As James Bratt put it, neo-Calvinists insist that what makes higher education Christian is "not required chapel or Bible courses, not opportunities for extracurricular 'service,' not the cultivation of 'character' or 'citizenship,' not the baptism of middle-class decency with Christian rhetoric or the frosting of Christian conviction with cultural refinement, not the promotion of piety alongside of scholarship or professional preparation; but the classroom as a chapel, scholarship as devotion, Christianity at the base of the curriculum and suffusing all studies, the norms of faith guiding professional development — that was the essence of Christian education, honoring the integrity of learning and the faith alike and promoting their genuine integration."²³

The future for Reformed Christian perspectives in higher education looks hopeful because the leaders of the Reformed colleges share Bratt's passion for it, and their evangelical collegiate neighbors still are attracted to it.

The second reason why the neo-Calvinist movement appears to have a future in academia and public intellectual life is this: secularization, the historic modern trend that the Reformed have found it so difficult to counteract, or to avoid abetting, may well be waning. America, says historian Conrad Cherry, is "too shot through with religion" to give full credence to the idea that this nation will become progressively more secular. Even the postmodernists, Cherry says, despite their rejection of metaphysics and universal norms, "have been too passionate in their commitments, too earnest in their criticisms of the perspectives of others, and too eager to preserve worldviews within the boundaries of the group" to seem like anything else but quasi-religious evangelists.²⁴ The main cultural problem that Christian colleges and universities will face going forward may not be staving off further secularization, but rather negotiating a radically plural and contested field of outlooks, ideologies, pieties and communities.

As Bratt and others have pointed out, Abraham Kuyper's thought anticipated some of the features of postmodernism, and it offers a way to navigate through the cultural bayous. Kuyper insisted that there was no such thing as value-free knowledge, that what one might know was very much shaped by the knower, and that particularity and pluralism should be celebrated in society and honored by the state. His critique of Enlightenment objectivism was that of a late nineteenth century Romantic, but it has a strangely contemporary resonance a century later. Kuyper will not sit comfortably, however, in the camp of postmodern anti-realists. He insisted, as Bratt put it, "on the absolute truth of Christianity and the hard reality of the world as given."²⁵ Yet he offers evangelical intellectuals and their academic communities a sturdy set of analytical tools for ferreting out the fundamentally religious motives that drive the present age. His other great gift is the concept of principled pluralism, which enables Christian intellectuals to oppose the relativism and nihilism of postmodern culture while preserving plural access to the public square.

Not only is America "too shot through with religion" for us to believe that secularization will continue as a dominant narrative, so is the rest of the world. In the field of international relations, conversations have begun concerning the growing "religion factor." They have been stimulated by, among other things, the model posed by Samuel P. Huntington of the global competition of civilizations, in which religious traditions play a powerful role. These considerations have been difficult to accept in the West, where as early as the Peace of Westphalia in 1648, a bargain was struck to keep the all-too-volatile ingredients of religion out of international relations. Other civilizations, however, have no intention of keeping them out, and contemporary world affairs are shot through with religious dynamics.²⁶

One of the most dynamic religious movements worldwide today is one that does not fit neatly into Huntington's civilizational schemes: nonwestern Christianity. At the beginning of the twentieth century, Europeans accounted for more than 70 percent of the world's Christians. Today, more than 60 percent of the world's Christians live outside of Europe and North America, and the total population of Christians worldwide has nearly doubled in the past thirty years. Especially dynamic is the pentecostal-charismatic family of evangelical movements. Pentecostal-style religion now has more than 500 million adherents worldwide, who constitute more than a quarter of the world's Christians.²⁷

What is the relevance of the worldwide growth of evangelical Christianity for the future of the neo-Calvinist intellectual movement? Much like their ancestors in seventeenth-century Puritan communities and in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century revival movements, the nonwestern evangelicals are founding Christian colleges to educate their leaders and make a difference in society. According to a Mexican evangelical academic leader, there are now fifty Protestant Christian universities across Latin America.²⁸ African leaders casually estimate at least as many new Christian universities springing up across their continent. One of American Calvinists' historic roles has been to be the evangelical movement's theological mentors and schoolmasters. There will be plenty of this work available in the new century as well.

Studies of these new Christian movements note their lack of concerted thought and strategy regarding a public role.²⁹ In the context of Africa, for example, the need for Christian faith to play a constructive public role could not be more urgent. Says Isaac Zokoué, an evangelical theologian from the Central African Republic: "While whole societies are being shaken, . . . the evangelical churches are hardly even aware of changes." Yet Zokoué insists that "the Christian has an obligation to invest fully the values of the gospel in every part of human existence."³⁰ Personal piety alone will not solve the problems of Africa, Christian leaders there are discovering. Their expressions of need are of exactly the kind that Reformed intellectuals feel most eager and best able to address.

In recent years a small organization with a large name, the International Association for the Promotion of Christian Higher Education (IAPCHE), has emerged along the international networks of Kuyperian Calvinists. Its mandate is to link educators involved in Christian higher education worldwide for fellowship and mutual assistance. IAPCHE began among institutions of Dutch Reformed heritage, such as the Free University of Amsterdam, Dordt College in Iowa, the Institute for Christian Studies in Toronto, and the Potchefstroom (South Africa) University for Christian Higher Education. In August of 2000, when the group held a conference at Dordt College, evangelical, Reformed and Orthodox educators from 30 nations participated. IAPCHE leaders encountered multiple invitations and opportunities for service, of the kind that the neo-Calvinists are most passionate about and best equipped to handle, for the development of integrally Christian higher education and cultural thought.

More than the IAPCHE organizers may realize, these opportunities to build relationships, teach and learn may benefit the neo-Calvinists at least as much as they benefit their Third World partners. Neo-Calvinism in North America runs the risk, insist several of its commentators, of becoming complacent in its success, of losing its critical edge toward the consumerist culture in which it resides.—How tempting it is, in the name of common grace, to find God's hand of blessing spread over our shopping mall and e-business culture.³¹ Solidarity with Christian educators from elsewhere brings both a sobering perspective on the challenges facing the Christian cause worldwide, and some critical distance from which to view one's own situation. American consumerist culture, colleagues from Mexico, Kenya and the Philippines remind us, seems obscene in the face of such great human need and suffering elsewhere.

Other, more subtle insights arise from such conversations as well. Reformed and evangelical scholars' revulsion toward the Religious Right becomes a rather lame excuse for toying with the relativistic intellectual trends when one sees some of these beliefs' implications played out on the streets of today's Russia.³² When Latin American scholars reveal how the World Bank and UNESCO are pushing university technical programs while cultural studies starve, the secularizing potential of professional programs in North American Christian colleges seems clearer.³³ When African evangelical leaders call for an African Christian public philosophy, the old phrases and concepts of Kuyperian Calvinism take on a new luster.³⁴ Calvinism was designed by refugees and it was propagated by fugitives. To remain vigorous, it needs the critical perspective it calls "the antithesis," which depicts the conflict between ideas and practices that contribute to God's reign of justice, peace and human flourishing, and those that are arrayed against it. To keep their edge, Calvinists have to take their game out to the edge. The rising evangelical university movement outside of the West is a great new frontier, and engagement there can help Reformed and evangelical intellectuals sharpen the game they play here. That should help a great deal, for the key to a vigorous future for the neo-Calvinist academic and intellectual movement will be to stay keen. It must sustain the creative tension within principled pluralism, so like Daniel of old, it will serve the common good while also remembering that the setting for public service is Babylon, the land of exile.

END NOTES

¹ Abraham Kuyper, "Sphere Sovereignty," in *Abraham Kuyper: A Centennial Reader*, ed. James D. Bratt (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 463-490, 488 [quote].

² Kuyper, "Common Grace in Science," in *Abraham Kuyper: A Centennial Reader*, 442-460, 444 [quote].

³ I am indebted to James Bratt for this description of the links between Reformed theology and the Reformed people's drive for education. See his nuanced and detailed discussion, "What Can the Reformed Tradition Contribute to Christian Higher Education?" in *Models for Christian Higher Education: Strategies for Success in the Twenty-First Century*, ed. Richard T. Hughes and William B. Adrian (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 125-140.

⁴ This section follows the main themes of George Marsden, *The Soul of the American University: From Protestant Establishment to Established Nonbelief* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), as well as the account in Bratt, "What Can the Reformed Tradition Contribute." On the Princeton theology and moral science, see Mark A. Noll, *Princeton and the Republic, 1768-1822* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989).

⁵ Douglas Sloan, *Faith and Knowledge: Mainline Protestantism and American Higher Education* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1994), 206. See also James Burtchaeall, *The Dying of the Light: the Disengagement of Colleges and Universities from their Churches* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999).

⁶ Bratt, "What Can the Reformed Tradition Contribute," 137.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 138; Kuyper, "Common Grace," 167-201. "Common Grace in Science," 442-460, and "Sphere Sovereignty," 463-490, in Bratt, ed., *Abraham Kuyper: A Centennial Reader*. Richard J. Mouw, "The Protestant Theology of Abraham Kuyper," *The Weekly Standard*, January 4/January 11, 1999, 28-31, provides a very helpful summary of Kuyper's principled pluralism. Kuyper's entire project receives an able summation in chapter two of James D. Bratt, *Dutch Calvinism in Modern America: A History of a Conservative Subculture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984). The best book-length overview of Kuyper's thought is Peter Hieslam, *Creating a Christian Worldview: Abraham Kuyper's Lectures on Calvinism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998).

⁸ Their model is, of course, Kuyper's Free University, which, ironically has experienced a substantial secularization since the 1960s.

⁹ Hughes and Adrian, eds., *Models for Christian Higher Education*, 5.

¹⁰ For a recent explorer's account of this movement, see Alan Wolfe, "The Opening of the Evangelical Mind," *The Atlantic Monthly*, October 2000, 55-76.

¹¹ George M. Marsden, *Reforming Fundamentalism: Fuller Seminary and the New Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 60-63; Harold J. Ockenga, "The Challenge to the Christian Culture of the West," summary of the convocation address, 1 October 1947, p. 10, from the archives of the Fuller Theological Seminary.

¹² Carl F. H. Henry, *Remaking of the Modern Mind* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1946), 7.

¹³ Carl F. H. Henry, *The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1947), 88, 89.

¹⁴ For additional detail on the origins of a "neo-evangelical" scholarly movement, see Marsden, *Reforming Fundamentalism*; Bratt, *Dutch Calvinism in Modern America*, chapter 12; Mark A. Noll, *Between Faith and Criticism: Evangelicals, Scholarship, and the Bible in America* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1986), chapter 5; and Joel A. Carpenter, *Revive Us Again: The Reawakening of American Fundamentalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), chapter 11.

¹⁵ James Turner cites some of these facts in "Something to be Reckoned With: The Evangelical Mind Awakens," *Commonweal*, January 15, 1999, 11-13.

¹⁶ I found the Pew Evangelical Scholars booklist on the Notre Dame Web site, at <http://www.nd.edu/~pesp/pew/PewBooks.html>.

¹⁷ Turner, "Something to be Reckoned With," 12.

¹⁸ Turner, "Something to be Reckoned With," 13.

¹⁹ Gleason, *Contending with Modernity: Catholic Higher Education in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 320.

²⁰ A recent study conducted at Princeton University concludes that adult education programs at Christian colleges also have secularizing potential. See the report of the Mission, Formation and Diversity Project, written by project director Diane Winston: "Adult Degree Programs at Faith Based Colleges," (Princeton University: Center for the Study of American Religion, 1999).

²¹ For a leading example of conservative evangelicals' growing disillusionment with public engagement, see Cal Thomas and Ed Dobson, *Blinded by Might: Can the Religious Right Save America?* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999). "Worldview thinking" is gaining common currency just now among evangelicals; witness, for example, the recent and popularly hailed book by evangelical pundits Charles Colson and Nancy Pearcey, *How Now Shall We Live?* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 1999). Says the blurb on the back of the book jacket: "True Christianity goes far beyond private faith and personal salvation. It is nothing less than a framework for understanding all of reality. It is a worldview." Broad dissemination of this vision, Reformed intellectuals would agree, is a good thing. Yet over time, dissemination can bring dilution as well, and fuel intellectual jadedness and reaction.

²² Says a leading Mennonite educator, "A coherent philosophy of Mennonite higher education still waits to be written." Rodney J. Sawatsky, "What Can the Mennonite Tradition Contribute to Christian Higher Education?" in *Models for Christian Higher Education*, 192.

²³ Bratt, "What Can the Reformed Tradition Contribute," 139.

²⁴ Conrad Cherry, *Hurrying Toward Zion: Universities, Divinity Schools, and American Protestantism* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1995), 266.

²⁵ Bratt, "Introduction," *Abraham Kuyper: A Centennial Reader*, 4.

²⁶ Huntington first laid out his theory in "The Clash of Civilizations?" in *Foreign Affairs* 72 (Summer 1993), 22-49; then in fuller fashion, in *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1996). See also Douglas M. Johnston and Cynthia Sampson, eds., *Religion: The Missing Dimension in Statecraft* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994); and Peter L. Berger, ed., *The Desecularization of the World: Resurgent Religion and World Politics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999).

²⁷ Statistics from David Barrett, "Status of Global Mission, 2000, in Context of 20th and 21st Centuries," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 24 (January 2000), 25; and Dana Robert, "Shifting Southward: Global Christianity Since 1945," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 24 (April 2000): 50-58. For assessments of the record of the recent growth of evangelicalism, see David Martin, *Tongues of Fire: The Explosion of Protestantism in Latin America* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990); and Paul Gifford, *African Christianity: Its Public Role* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1998).

²⁸ José Ramón Alcántara Mejía, "Be Transformed through the Renewal of Your Understanding: The Christian Challenge at the Crossroads of Latin-American Higher Education," paper presented at the IAPCHE International Conference 2000, Dordt College, Sioux Center, Iowa, August 14, 2000, p. 5.

²⁹ This is one of the major themes in Gifford, *African Christianity: Its Public Role*; see especially his summation in chapter 7.

³⁰ Isaac Zokoué, "The Crisis of Maturity in Africa," *Evangelical Review of Theology* 20 (October 1996), 357, 355.

³¹ See, for example, Harry Fernhout, "Through the Needle's Eye: A North American Perspective," paper presented at the IAPCHE International Conference 2000, Dordt College, Sioux Center, Iowa, August 14, 2000; and James D. Bratt and Ronald A. Wells, "Piety and Progress: A History of Calvin College," *Models for Christian Higher Education*, 141-162.

³² Comments of Dr. Natalia Pecherskaya, director of the St. Petersburg School of Religion and Philosophy, at the IAPCHE International Conference 2000, Dordt College, Sioux Center, Iowa, August 14, 2000.

³³ Alcántara, "Be Transformed through the Renewal of Your Understanding," p. 4.

³⁴ Kwame Bediako, "Africa and Christianity on the Threshold of the Third Millennium: The Religious Dimension," *African Affairs* 99 (April 2000), 303-323.