

THE 1995 H. PAUL DOUGLASS LECTURE

YOU WHO WERE FAR OFF: RELIGIOUS DIVISIONS AND THE ROLE OF RELIGIOUS RESEARCH

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He came and proclaimed peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near. So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God.

Ephesians 2:17 ... 19 (NRSV)

INTRODUCTION

It is an honor to be asked to give this lecture. The list of previous lecturers forms a pantheon of major figures in your disciplines. Most of the lectures, some twenty years' worth of which I reread as preparation for writing my own, are authoritative statements about whole research territories. Such a tradition, in which major figures have made magisterial statements, is frankly daunting for someone like me, who wandered into the field of religious research, with no formal training, because I was convinced that it holds essential resources for my primary vocation, the leadership of a religious institution. I have hung out in this field for twenty years and worked in it as my other responsibilities permit, but, unlike most of my predecessor lecturers, I have not shaped the social study of religion in significant ways; nor can I lay special claim to any large piece of the subject matter.

In such circumstances, and with no further direction from the Religious Research Association than the gentle suggestion that the lecture should be relevant for those engaged in applied research, it is very tempting to take refuge in expertise. I do have an expertise. I have helped to organize a new cross-disciplinary subspecialty, the study of theological education, and my first inclination was to use this opportunity to introduce you to that body of work, which is probably unfamiliar to you because so much of it lies outside your disciplines.¹

Reading all those Douglass lectures changed my mind. It was not so much the narrowness of my special topic in comparison with broad subjects of the past like Catholicism, hypocrisy, and congregations. Rather, what impelled me to write this lecture on something besides theological education was a persistent subtheme of almost all the earlier lectures. The sub-theme is the role of religious research, its vocation, the question of *why* we are doing all this strenuous work.

Previous lecturers provided some provocative answers to that question. One studies hypocrisy, said David Moberg, "in order to change it" and undo its damaging effects on religion (1986:19). Carl Dudley suggested that religious researchers aim not only to increase knowledge, but also to "heal pain" (1989:209). Dean Hoge, in his fine lecture on American

Catholicism, was most explicit of all: "*Our* task," he said with emphasis, is research that "constrain[s] erratic ideological views," so that religious leaders can better "discern the Spirit" and "judge the validity of new movements and new spiritual energies" (1986:298).

All these statements are made in the last sections of these lectures, often in the last paragraphs, and they are never expanded or discussed. I propose to place up front the question behind them: "Religious research for what?" In the Douglass lecture tradition, I shall report on my own research, but, unfortunately for my sense of security, the focus will not be theological education, where I know my way around. Rather I will speak about a very recent ethnographic foray into the evangelical Protestant world, from which I have learned a lot, but by no means enough to claim expertise, much less authority. It was during my time among the evangelicals, however, that the question of vocation was posed most sharply for me. I am a mainline Protestant, who is president of a Presbyterian seminary, whose research is usually paid for by foundations and institutions that seek to build and strengthen mainline Protestantism. Should I be spending so much time - five years - observing, reading about, and conversing with adherents of a religious tradition widely portrayed as "the other side," one whose theology I find unpersuasive and whose positions on social issues I sometimes judge to be dangerously wrong? If so, how might this benefit the religious community to which I am firmly committed?

As you can tell, I pose these questions, as I was instructed and the other lecturers did, from the perspective of an applied researcher, and my answers will be addressed to the applied research community. At the same time, however, I must state that I see no categorical distinction between applied or sponsored and basic or academic research. I will not take time to argue the point that applied and basic are poles on a continuum rather than types of research, but I do want to make clear that by my definition, the applied research community includes anyone who has studied or written something at the direct request of a religious group. Especially these days, when the research staffs of denominations and agencies have shrunk and much institutional research is actually conducted by academics under contract, that makes many of you applied researchers. The applied research community also includes anyone who has interpreted their research for use by organizations that have stated interests in religion. Seminary faculty, for instance, who study their own traditions in order to teach them, are applied researchers in this sense. Even if you have never done anything of conceivable use to any actual group, you may want to listen, because the kind of research I plan to advocate for applied researchers and their sponsors - research that crosses the lines of religious division - has so far been most creatively conducted by those who are working at the basic end of the research scale.

The project that led me into the evangelical world did not have boundary-crossing as its primary intent. My research colleague Jackson Carroll and I are both members of mainline denominations who have done a lot of research on and for mainline Protestants. Our study had a practical goal: to help theological educators do a better job of preparing people for ministry. Attempts to change or improve the results of theological education almost invariably take the form of curriculum revision, but curriculum is only one factor in the educational equation.

In the tradition of Howard Becker (1961) and other ethnographers of education (Clark, 1970; Simpson, 1979; Kleinman, 1984; Peshkin, 1986; Wagner, 1990), we wanted to document the critical role of another factor: institutional culture.

We chose to study an evangelical seminary because it seemed methodologically advisable to do so. Ethos being what it is, an unfamiliar culture is more easily recorded than the one the researcher needs to survive and therefore takes for granted. On the same principle, our two colleagues on the project, both of whom had evangelical backgrounds, selected a liberal Protestant seminary as their research site. The major finding of the project is that the two seminaries we studied - though dramatically different in history, tradition, constituency and the content of what they teach - employ strikingly similar processes of educating, processes in which, as we had expected, school culture plays a very active part.

Even though our yet-to-be published book will emphasize the commonalities between our two schools' ways of educating, we could not help but become fascinated by the distinctive features of the larger religious cultures in which they are set. I, for one, became engrossed with both the popular culture and the intellectual life of evangelical Protestants. I experienced three years of continual exposure to evangelicals as I lived, off and on, in a dorm with conservative women students, ate in the cafeteria, went to chapel and special school events, copied the contents of bulletin boards in the middle of the night, sorted mail from my campus box by subject and source, and attended prayer meetings, Bible studies, church services, and engagement parties, as well as sat in classes. Yet I could not stop. Once I got a taste for religious difference (and I assure you that it is difference - I have never been tempted even slightly by the evangelical option), I seemed to need a regular diet. In the years since our field study concluded, I have continued to visit conservative churches and evangelical seminaries, to peruse Christian bookstores, and to read what evangelicals write and what outsiders write about them. I am the only non-evangelical member of a group of seminary faculty that meets several times a year. I am still trying to memorize the seven dispensations in my Scofield Reference Bible, and my car radio, to my family's deep distress, is permanently tuned to the local Christian family station.

CONTEMPORARY EVANGELICALISM: TWO OBSERVATIONS

My exposure to these various facets of evangelical life and thought has created two strong impressions of contemporary evangelicalism. Neither is contra-dieted in the current literature, but neither is salient in it either. One reason that I see things differently from other observers may have to do with cultural and social location. Most contemporary interpretations of evangelicalism are produced either by persons with roots in the evangelical world (whether they are still there or have left) or by researchers with no announced commitments. Only a few of the writers are openly committed to and working on behalf of a non-evangelical religious tradition, and most of those, unlike me, express some personal attraction to evangelical religion. Perhaps a different angle produces a different view. In any case, here are my observations.

There is an evangelical culture; it is prodigious, pervasive among the many varieties of white evangelicals, including most fundamentalists, and very powerful. Today's evangelicals are culture-makers. They have a common religious dialect, for example, "to have heart" for something, or "a burden"; "my walk," short for "my walk with the Lord." They pray what we and many other observers identify as "just prayers" ("Heavenly Father, I just want to thank you for just turning around my life, and I just love you and praise you..."). They produce an astounding number of leaders and celebrities who are widely recognized in the evangelical community - writers and pastors as well as media figures. They support hundreds of less prominent roving minstrels and inspirational speakers. They found new denominations and, even more, create and expand non-denominational organizations at a

very fast rate: big foreign mission and youth ministry agencies; less visible networks of prayer, fellowship and self-help groups; plus all those self-identified Christian service providers - chiropractors, contractors, exterminators, dentists - who link themselves together in the various editions of the Christian yellow pages.

And evangelicals turn out stuff: thousands of Christian recordings, even more books - a new Christian gothic novel, I was told by an avid reader of them, is published every week - along with almost every other kind of fiction, poetry, Bible translations and paraphrases, advice, celebrity biography, countless devotional volumes, magazines, pamphlets, newspapers, broadsides, leaflets, plaques, posters, greeting and note cards, bumper stickers, ceramics, jewelry. As various as they are, and as much as they have in common with the rest of American mass material culture, most evangelical artifacts are self-evidently evangelical. What makes them so requires much further analysis, but let me try to pin down this point about the amount and distinctiveness of the material culture with a story. I once suggested in jest that the ultimate evangelical icon would be one of those covers into which evangelicals zip their Bibles when they take them outside - I call them Bible cosies; the ultimate one, I proposed, would be made of fabric, which would be quilted, flower-sprigged, and Wedgwood blue or dusty rose - all features of what I had observed is a favorite decorating style in the homes of young evangelicals whom I had visited. I had never seen such an object, but those evangelical seminary professors with whom I met, who had heard me make this remark, went out and found exactly the object I had described. Evangelicals have a vast and distinctive material culture. Almost anything that you can imagine they make, they probably do.

I have seen much evidence that this culture - material and behavioral - is pervasive through white evangelicalism. (I did not see enough of Black or non-English-speaking evangelicals to make judgments about them.) I visited an Orthodox Presbyterian church in the Northeast, an independent charismatic congregation in Los Angeles, and a fundamental Baptist one in Kansas. They had many of the same pamphlets in their vestibules and shared other common features. Their members' testimonies in worship and Bible studies, for instance, used the same phrases and took the same narrative shape. The students at the seminary we studied, who came from many different wings of the evangelical movement, gathered outdoors on the first evening of new-student orientation and sang praise choruses, without any song sheets, for over an hour. Everyone seemed to know all of them.

Further, from what one can see, evangelical culture is powerful enough to make its way into many segments of evangelicals' daily lives. No doubt there is considerable variation on this score. Ethnographic portraits of fundamentalists (Ammerman, 1987:15-16; Peshkin, 1986:257-75) suggest that for many fundamentalists the religious culture is a total culture. The evangelicals I got to know best spend some time out from under evangelical auspices, but, still, a great deal of their attention is occupied by evangelical persons, activities, and products.

The amount, vitality, extent, and power of evangelical popular culture is imperfectly reflected in the scholarly literature. The two most respected interpreters of the movement to outsiders, George Marsden and James Davison Hunter, focus on ideas and world views (Marsden, 1984:vii-xix; Hunter, 1983). Marsden studies some pivotal institutions (1980; 1987) and Hunter (1987) explores attitudes and opinions, but ideas and ideologies dominate their analysis. One learns from them how evangelicals construct the world and what they believe, but not what everyday evangelical life is like.

The ethnographers are more helpful. Ammerman (1987:34-37, 134-146), Peshkin (1986:192-217) and Wagner (1990:43-67) provide schedules of religious activities and some vivid, detail-laden portraits of individuals. Randall Balmer (1989) has provided cultural sketches that indicate the amount and variety of cultural output. Some social historians (Moore, 1994) have treated nineteenth century popular evangelical culture as a phenomenon and assessed its impact under such rubrics as the commodification of American religion. There is scant attention, however, to the current cultural wave as a whole. Every so often, someone visits the Christian Booksellers Association convention and catalogs the outrageous stuff one can find there (Spalding, 1995). Recently some evangelical intellectuals in the Calvinist wing have attacked the popular culture for its tackiness and intellectual vacuity (Wells, 1993; Noll, 1994).² But nothing adequately advertises to those who want to understand the evangelical world how much of a mass culture it has and how many leaders, patterns of life, organizations, entrepreneurial producers, and commercial outlets there are, much less what the culture looks, sounds and feels like. Perhaps I was as impressed as I was with the culture's size and prevalence because I was so unprepared.

My second observation, which I will spell out more briefly, is that **the evangelical movement, though bound together by a common culture, is also riddled with deep and sometimes bitter internal divisions, especially among its leaders.** The faculty of the school that Jackson Carroll and I studied engaged in polemics all the time, but their salvos were only rarely directed, as we had expected them to be before we started, at religious liberals or secular humanists. Usually the target was other evangelicals. The faculty of our school, who were mostly Calvinists, denounced not only the popular culture of evangelicalism but also the lack of discipline of some of the movement's leaders. They expended even more energy on the theological errors of other evangelicals: fundamentalists for their anti-intellectualism; dispensationalists for teaching the wrong number of covenants; Arminians because their estimate of human capacities is too high; and especially pentecostals and charismatics because their emphasis on experience and the contemporary work of the Spirit (rather than the authority of inerrant Scripture) places them, in the view of some faculty, outside the boundaries of orthodox Christian theology.

Our seminary is not unique. Evangelical leaders seem constantly to be taking swipes at each other. One sees some of this from the outside: the turf wars of big-time television preachers and the Southern Baptist battles. There are many more such rivalries, organizational and political, and also, unremarked but just as passionate, deep enmities among scholars and writers. The group of professors I attend, which has Nazarene, Orthodox Presbyterian, pentecostal, dispensationalist, conservative Baptist, Southern Baptist, Mennonite and other members, is highly unusual. Everyone present reports that he or she has some faculty colleagues who would not meet with faculty members from some of the other seminaries.

Again, what we observed and what the literature describes are somewhat different. One group of evangelical interpreters, following the lead of Timothy Smith, admires the "kaleidoscopic" character of evangelicalism (1986). Others, like Grant Wacker (1984), offer maps of evangelical diversity without celebrating it. There is, however, no substantial account or analysis of the tensions and animosities. Marsden does admit that there is a spirit of competition among heads of large evangelical organizations, but maintains that they are still part of a caring family, and he says nothing about theological and intellectual rivalries (1984: xiv, xvi), even though the antagonism that emerged between him and Donald Dayton in their debate about the sources of the current evangelical resurgence is well known.³

Major non-evangelical interpreters seem also to have decided that the differences do not matter too much. Hunter persistently treats evangelicalism as a single phenomenon, only occasionally dividing fundamentalists from other evangelicals. Kathleen Boone (1988:9-11) argues that, despite their announced differences, all evangelicals treat the Bible about the same. No doubt some family fights look more serious to outsiders like me. Still, some leaders of some divisions of a religious movement are adamant that other divisions of the movement should not be part of it. That is what some reformed intellectuals and preachers I met think about pentecostals; that is what some dispensationalists think about ultradispensationalists, who date the Church Age from Acts 28 instead of Acts 2 (Ryrie, 1994:197-206). Such differences are worth recording and integrating into larger interpretations of what is going on.

VOCATIONAL ISSUES

I want to turn now to what I have called the vocational issues, the ones that usually remain for the last minute or two of these addresses. Let us assume that my ethnographic observations of evangelical culture and intellectual life have some merit. What good might they do? In the wide arena of basic research on American religion, they are very limited contributions indeed. At most, they might give Hunter, Marsden and others some additional bits of data and measures of perspective to incorporate into their broadly authoritative interpretations.

Marsden and his evangelical colleagues might, for instance, consider a brief time-out from their favorite activity, which is trying to devise a theological or historical definition of evangelicalism that includes every group that looks, sounds, feels or self-identifies as evangelical. During this moratorium, they might entertain the possibility that what defines contemporary evangelicalism, which certainly does seem to be something distinctive if not entirely discrete from other religious groupings and phenomena, is not doctrine or ancestry or warm family feeling or even, as Marsden says in one place, "allegiance to the same king" (1984:xiv), but religious culture. Maybe the best definition of an evangelical is someone who understands its argot, knows where to buy posters with Bible verses on them, and recognizes names like James Dobson and Frank Perretti. To reuse a phrase that William McKinney devised for other purposes, evangelicals might be best defined as those who participate in shaping the evangelical culture and who are willing to be shaped by it.

Ethnographic observations like mine might also prompt some self-consciousness about how we use the rhetoric of culture wars. I will comment on that matter shortly. But even if these observations made a much more substantial difference in how scholars describe American religion, that would not answer the vocational question: why should an researcher who works on behalf of one religious community study a different one? Of what value is my view of evangelicals to the mainline Protestant institutions that invite me with some regularity to do research that helps them to shape their policies, build their sense of identity, and figure out their place in the world by studying **them**?

I think that doing applied research across the lines of religious division can make a real and positive difference, and as I indicated early in this address, I am here to advocate that those of us who work for or on behalf of particular religious groups find ways to address the questions of those who commission us by studying other groups as well as by studying our sponsors directly. Let me list and illustrate what I think are the benefits.

First, **certain features of religious identity become clear only in comparison or contrast.** What is the matter with mainline Protestantism? Most of the diagnoses have suggested that its identity is weak or indistinct. One version of this view is that its theology is blurry: Presbyterians do not know what they believe, say many fascicles of the Louisville study of American Presbyterianism (Mulder, Weeks and Coalter, 1990:19-31; 1992:117-143), and it appears that the new Methodist study is reaching parallel conclusions (Carroll and Roof, 1995). A second view of the identity problem is that the organizational demands and ethical codes of mainline Protestantism are too weak and permissive. So says Dean Kelley (1977). My sojourn among the evangelicals suggests another way to understand the identity deficit: mainline Protestantism does not have enough of a culture. By comparison with the prolix popular culture of the evangelicals, mainline Protestantism's inventory of symbols, manners, iconic leaders, images of leadership, distinctive language, decorations, and sounds is very low indeed.

Without these elements of culture, mainline Protestantism cannot create something a religious tradition must have to survive: a piety. By that term I mean to include much more than explicitly religious forms of activity, which is what Dean Kelley thinks we need to increase (1984:9). I mean piety in the classic Protestant sense: a whole way of life - shared practices, a catalog of virtues, models of Christian adequacy in the church and the world. Mainline Protestantism, I now think, is struggling because we have not established among us patterns of life, some of them religious in the conventional sense but many not so, that are fitted to our religious identity.

Put this way, it may sound as if what I think the mainline Protestants need are some noble abstractions: practices, virtues, patterns of life. What I learned from the evangelicals, however, is that piety is most authentic when it is very concrete. Bible cosies are not as silly as I once thought. Evangelicals' almost universal practice of bringing a Bible to church, usually a big one, and the fact that so many put it in one of those covers to keep it warm and dry - those customary actions speak volumes. They express a reverence for the Book, certainly; a sense that the word of God is endangered and that it is the evangelicals' job to keep it safe; and a low ecclesiology: individual evangelical Christians, not the churches, own the Bible and take responsibility for its protection. By sharp contrast, most of us mainline Protestants do not carry Bibles, much less cherish them, and the ones that some mainline churches provide in the pews do not, I have observed, get handled very often.

In fact, mainline Protestants do not handle much of anything. I never would have realized this if I had not done research in such a different milieu. What I further gained from the evangelicals and now have to offer my own religious community is the realization that our lack of paraphernalia is a dangerous situation. We do not need the evangelicals' particular dry goods or pious practices, but we, like the evangelicals, are bodied beings, and a religious tradition that has little or nothing to look at, listen to, and touch cannot sustain us very long.

A second benefit of applied research that crosses religious divides is that **it can help a particular religious group to locate itself on the wider landscape.** Today the dominant descriptions of the American religious scene suggest that its fundamental structure is bipolar. Martin Marty, following Jean Miller Schmidt, divided churches into the categories of public and private (1970:177-187); Robert Wuthnow argued that a fault line runs through many religious groups as well as between them, dividing them into liberal and conservative parties (1988:132-240; 1989:68-94); and James Davison Hunter gained wide attention by pronouncing that we are poised for, if not already engaged in, a culture war (1991; 1994).

Puncturing these theories has become varsity sport for sociologists and historians of religion. The two-party and warring-cultures descriptions are now criticized for excluding groups that don't fit³ and for overstating the amount and level of conflict (Carroll and Marler, 1995:18-20). I will not join the leading players in taking a position on the adequacy of various bipolar explanations. But practical researchers like me are often asked by leaders of mainline Protestant institutions to help them understand their place and role in the larger religious and social arena. Most of the church and seminary leaders who make such requests accept some version of the culture-wars thesis. Although they recognize that mainline Protestantism and its constituent denominations are also internally divided, they understand the mission of mainline Protestants on the broader scene to be to fight to a standstill Protestant conservatives' attempts to impose their views on American social policy and cultural life. Most mainline Protestant leaders I know do not actually engage in much activity to that end, but they think they should. They believe that there are big evangelical ideological guns aimed at the religious and social institutions that the liberal Protestants built and shaped, and these leaders feel guilty to the extent that they are evading the draft to join in the combat.

My response to these mainline leaders, now that I have been exposed to evangelical life, is to confirm that there are indeed distinct and for the most part separate white Protestant cultures, probably more than two, but at least two big ones: evangelical and, for want of better terms, liberal or mainline Protestant. Bipolar theories remain plausible, despite the good offices of Roof and McKinney (1987:85-99) and others who have demonstrated that such descriptions flatten and oversimplify the data. There are two of something out there. I am convinced that we have two prominent Protestant examples of religious culture. So far Hunter is right.

These cultures are, however, much richer and more complex than he or most of his critics acknowledge. Ideology, the feature of culture that preoccupies Hunter, is not absent from everyday evangelical life, but it does not dominate daily life to the extent that it dominates Hunter's descriptions. The culture I saw, heard, copied from bulletin boards, diagrammed, and purchased from stores is, to use Ann Swidler's famous term (1986:277), a whole "tool kit," a very mixed bag of equipment for getting through life. Some views and values are in the kit, but, as I have recounted, so are many habits, aesthetics, patterns of activity, and practices for daily living that do not have much of an ideological valence. Most evangelicals spend most of their time creating and participating in an ethos. When things do turn polemical, other evangelicals may well be the target. There are, of course, anti-liberal culture warriors in the evangelical world, and it is now clear that there are also some real live terrorists who at least claim association with it. But most evangelicals are not at war or ready to do so, literally or figuratively. Most of them spend very little time thinking about, and no time actually fighting, the liberal Protestants and humanists who are supposed to be the enemy.

If this reading is right, it could make a real practical difference to liberal Protestant leaders. The myth of a culture war currently drains valuable energy, some of which goes into grandiose planning to "defeat" the other side on both political and church organizing fronts, the rest into staving off despair because that can never be accomplished. If evangelicals are not, in the main, out to defeat us mainline Protestants, however, maybe we need not focus our psychic energy on beating them. Maybe we should channel our energy into more fruitful projects, such as mending the holes in our own ethos and exerting a positive public influence, saving a minor portion for targeted political organizing on specific issues on which we and they do strenuously differ.

Last, I want to identify a set of benefits that may be the special mission of those researchers who either belong to the group who commissions their research or are willing to act as its agent, and who then study other religious groups in their sponsor's interest. I have given these benefits the appealing but perhaps unnerving labels of joy, love and peace.

Joy. The special contribution of the study of religion, writes Lee Yearley, is the "disciplined and imaginative understanding of ... religious perspectives" (1994:17-18). It is a tricky assignment, bringing the right amount of imagination and sympathy balanced with the right amount of critical discipline to understanding a religion, one's own or someone else's. To accomplish it over a lifetime requires the cultivation of certain virtues, "human excellences" that are more or less "permanent addition[s] to the self" (1994:10). At the heart of these virtues, Yearley says, "is the idea that to encounter any real good is to be drawn by it, to find it attractive, and thus to enjoy it." I think that Yearley has confessed the deep secret of many if not all scientific students of religion: we study religions, including other people's religions that we would not join and cannot endorse, because in them we encounter at least some goods that bring us joy.

This testimony is as true for those of us who claim allegiance to one religious tradition as for those who claim none or make no connection between religious observance and religious research. It is what happened to me among the evangelicals. I encountered real religious value. I have not gone native; I do not want to become evangelical; but I no longer vaguely wish evangelicals out of existence, as I once did. One of the most important contributions that those of us who use our research skills to help a particular religious community flourish can make is to introduce our religious communities to the good features of other religious groups, especially those they most fear. The evils and dangers of other groups will get catalogued without our help, though we can perhaps make the catalog more accurate. But finding the good in the threatening other takes disciplined imagination, and that is a virtue as well as a skill that religious researchers have to offer (Yearley, 1994:11-12).

Love. As you know, friendships often form between the studiers and the studied. I expected to make friends with some of my counterparts at Evangelical Seminary, the faculty and administrators, and I did. I was surprised, though, that deep friendships also developed with the ultra-conservative women students in whose dormitory I lived. They knew I was studying them and that I regularly engage in activities that they believe are wrong, such as instructing men in religious matters. From one of their common uses of the term Christian - "I was raised Presbyterian, but I became a Christian when I was seventeen" - it seems clear that in their eyes I do not count as one.

Yet they came to value their association with me. They sought my advice on academic and personal matters, invited me to their homes and weddings and, after our field study was concluded and I permitted it, came to visit me. They keep in touch. And I care about them. They are not just great material; they are also valuable human beings.

I do not sentimentalize such relationships. They have very real limits. My evangelical friends and I are and will continue to be opponents on the hot issues. I know, however, that I talk with and to religious conservatives differently now that I have friends among them. If there were more crossing over in the mode of research, with understanding as the goal and friend-making as the byproduct, religious controversies would not abate, but some of them would take on a more civil and considerate tone. Even those of us who care a lot about winning certain fights can acknowledge the value of that.

Finally, *peace*. "He came to proclaim peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near." In first century of the Christian era, there were numerous diverse religious traditions and groups competing in Palestine and Asia Minor, often by anathematizing each other. Those that did so most vigorously were easily recruited into various political causes, with the result that religious rivalries could be literally lethal. The letter to the Ephesians reminds them of a time when they, as a Gentile minority, were far off from the centers of power and suffered greatly at the hands of the religious and political leaders because they were unwilling to become Jewish as the price of participation in the Christian wing of the Jewish community. Now, as the letter is written, the Christian Gentiles have become a major party and have started their own anathematizing projects, and the letter writer feels compelled further to remind them of what they knew as a persecuted minority: that the founder of their movement intended to break down hostilities and divisions, including religious ones, not to set them up. No one, member or not, is ineligible for participation in the peaceful commonwealth that the founder died to establish.

In the United States in the twentieth century, there are many religious groups in competition, some of it intense, on intertwined religious and political fronts. It is also the case that all the traditions that have or are establishing stable bases in this society, even the most aggressive proselytizers among them, have some ultimate vision of a peaceful order that, like the one described in Ephesians, includes others as well as themselves and that transcends their particular ambition to be a winner in the religious competition. Most invest at least some effort in making the peace they envision, usually by talking: they join in dialogues in which groups tell each other about themselves in hopes of finding correspondences and common causes.

Practical researchers, including and perhaps especially those who work for particular religious groups, can augment this strategy in a modest but potentially vital way. Social research has a battery of methods and techniques - survey research, content analysis, participant observation - which are all species of disciplined listening. They can be used to accomplish what talking often does not: to gain a deep understanding of the religious groups that our group trusts the least, to discover among all the features our group does not like and cannot accept the good ideas, good practices and good people other groups harbor, and to interpret these things to our own communities. It will take some cleverness to build an interreligious dimension into sponsored, policy-oriented projects, but that can and should be done. So that those who are near and those who are far off may be no longer strangers and aliens, but fellow citizens, members of one peaceful commonwealth. That is an entirely worthy life purpose, a genuine vocation for religious research.

NOTES

1. For a bibliography of recent research on theological education, see Wilhelm (1993). 2. These attacks on evangelical culture, most from the Calvinist wing of the movement, became controversial when Richard Mouw, himself a Calvinist intellectual, published a vigorous defense of popular evangelical religion in which he urged on Wells and others a "hermeneutic of charity" (1994:15-19).

3. The debate between Marsden and Dayton began civilly (Marsden, 1977; Dayton, 1977). It escalated in a series of face-to-face and written exchanges, culminating in a "symposium" in the *Christian Scholar's Review* in which Dayton characterized Marsden's comments as a "barrage" and a previous public exchange of views between them as an "unmitigated fiasco" (1993:34, 62).

4. An on-going project at Messiah College, Grantham, Pennsylvania, "Re-forming the Center," has commissioned several dozen papers that present cases that are not adequately described or explained by bipolar interpretations of American religion. Douglas Jacobsen and William Tollinger direct the project. See Jacobsen (1995) for an example of the organizers' perspectives.

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