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# TSF BULLETIN

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## ACADEMIC CREDIT FOR EVANGELISM TRAINING

Every March Inter-Varsity Christian Fellowship sponsors an evangelism project in Fort Lauderdale during the so-called "student invasion" of south Florida. This year one part of the project will be a course, "Field Seminar in Evangelism," offered for academic credit through Westminster Theological Seminary's Florida Theological Center.

The week-long course will include 10 hours of in-class presentations, 20 hours of on-the-beach training, and additional reading and writing assignments. Five plenary sessions will focus on the gospel basics, like the message, messenger, methodology, and contextualization. Five elective workshops will focus on various problems (and opportunities) encountered as one presents the gospel, such as the need for audience analysis, theological translation of gospel jargon, and the practical transferability of beach evangelism strategy and skills for use in other settings. This course is designed to help the graduate student gain proficiency in communicating the gospel to people at the point of their felt needs.

One can take this course for any *one* of these weeks: March 7-13, 14-20, 21-27. For more information and applications, write Dietrich Gruen, 3006 Hayes St. NE, Minneapolis, MN 55418.

## INTERSECTION

*(The integration of theological studies with ethics, academic disciplines, and ecclesiastical institutions)*

### THE PUBLIC FACE OF EVANGELICALISM By Jim Wright, M.A. Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, M.S. Indiana State University, news director at WVTS radio in Terre Haute.

New ways of interpreting and responding to the political religious right came out of a recent conference on "The Public Face of Evangelicalism." The diverse group, including a tree farmer from Maine, an Inter-Varsity staff member from Texas, a college professor and his wife from Tennessee and scores more gathered November 13 and 14 at Huntington College, near Fort Wayne, Indiana. Most of those on the program were evangelical historians from around the country, with a couple of well-known journalists, a politician and an attorney thrown in for good measure. The featured speaker was Jerry Falwell's right hand man, former NBC correspondent and now Moral Majority's spokesman, Cal Thomas. His interaction with the other participants undermined some stereotypes of the right and provided glimpses of movement on its part. The discussion of particular issues, such as the

### NOTICE TO NEW SUBSCRIBERS

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right's historical counterparts, its priorities, and its response to pluralism, made black-and-white judgments harder to make.

Thomas, the witty, intelligent spokesman for the group most often associated with the political religious right, seemed more in step with the evangelicalism of his audience than the fundamentalism of his employers. Claiming he's a conduit between the right and secular and evangelical intellectuals, Thomas did espouse the Moral Majority's now familiar refrains: pornography must go; get drugs out of the schools and off the street; and secular humanism will be the ruination of America. Yet there were hints, on occasion, that Thomas is trying to use his influence to make the Moral Majority more acceptable to those evangelicals in the political center. Under questioning, he stated that the "Christian Bill of Rights," a tract that affirms the need for a strong military and suggests banning treasonous writings, is no longer being mailed. "It died a well-deserved death," Thomas said. One of his big concerns was the issue of abortion. Because the Reagan Administration has failed so far to set up a social agenda to tackle abortion and other issues, Thomas said the Moral Majority is getting more and more disenchanted with Reagan. He implied that civil disobedience on the part of the Moral Majority is not out of the question if the Reagan Administration does not begin to come around. As these and other comments at the conference show, the right is still in the process of deciding where it should go and what strategies it should use.

Those attending the conference also heard divergent evaluations of where the religious right is coming from, what it is, and what it is doing. Historian Donald Dayton carefully compared the current evangelical efforts to change life in America to the Ante-Bellum Evangelical Movement of the nineteenth century. He concluded that the present movement is less involved with life than the earlier one. It is less concerned about the plight of the poor and the need for world peace. It is more interested in being super-patriotic than questioning the sometimes questionable foreign policy of the United States. But colleague Denny Weaver took exception to Dayton in his response, saying it's difficult to compare one century with another. Furthermore, "it's a value judgment, not an historical judgment, on which movement is superior."

There was also disagreement about the nature of the right. Throughout his talk Thomas emphasized that the Moral Majority is a political, not a religious organization. Yet others disagreed, including Christian Legal Society President Lynn Buzzard. He said the Moral Majority is not really a political movement: its philosophy is not rooted in political theory, but in Judeo-Christian principles. Then Phillip Loy of Taylor University observed that politics is traditionally defined as a group struggle for power; if so, can one therefore be just and right and still be political? Loy said maybe we should "rethink politics as the search for the public good."

But what is the public's good? A big issue at the conference was that of the right's priorities. The consensus from several of the papers seemed to be that the political religious right should be tackling issues more important than America's ties with Taiwan and the rights of homosexuals. Michigan legislator Paul Henry suggested that for the Moral Majority to oppose giving the Panama Canal back to the Panamanians was to trivialize the Gospel. Buzzard echoed Henry's concern, saying the political religious right needs a bigger agenda. They need to start with racism and concern for the poor, then move on to the personal rights they feel are being violated (e.g., spread of pornography). Buzzard added that the Moral Majority may be simply a cultural movement "taking its cues from the community and not Scripture." The general consensus among the speakers was that the Scriptures call upon Christians to address themselves to issues of injustice, especially in the area of the oppression of the poor. It should be noted that Moral Majority's spokesman Cal Thomas

wasn't about to dodge this issue; he said Christians do have a responsibility to alleviate poverty. But he emphasized that the task should be attempted, not through government institutions but through individual volunteerism. Thomas claims that the government's working on poverty only makes the matter worse.

The Moral Majority has often been accused of not understanding the delicate nature of pluralism in America, so naturally that topic received some attention during the conference. Thomas emphasized that the Judeo-Christian ethic has a "better track record" than secular humanism, and so its values should win out. Buzzard made the observation that there is a version of pluralism definitely unacceptable to believers; a version that accepts any idea as long as it's *not* based on Christian principles or the nation's religious tradition: a pluralism "that allows for the teachings of Marx, McLuhan or Camus, but not Christ or Paul." To illustrate that unacceptable pluralism was already at work, Buzzard added that in one major American city a resident must now have a permit to hold a home Bible study.

One of the more theological position papers was read by historian Robert Clouse. Clouse pointed to an underlying confusion in the Moral Majority leadership. They want to maintain a traditional post-millennial vision of America, emphasizing the importance of its role in Christianizing the world. Yet they are essentially pre-millennial in eschatology, attaching importance to Israel in the end times. Clouse says they cannot have it both ways. If they are essentially pre-millennial then they must conclude that America is just another world power.

Although discussion on the political religious right dominated the conclave, some attention to other public representatives of evangelicalism served to provide balance. United Press International correspondent Wes Pippert, who covered President Jimmy Carter, spoke highly of the Georgian's personal faith in Christ and his commitment to utilize Christian ideals in domestic and foreign policy. Pippert said Carter's ideas on human rights were shaped by his understanding of God's word. Yet Pippert saw a weakness in Carter's failure to surround himself with sufficient evangelical policy makers and his unwillingness, outside of church attendance, to engage in evangelical fellowship.

Historian Richard Pierard focussed attention on Billy Graham, examining the socio-political changes in the evangelist's thinking. On the issue of racism, Pierard described Graham's transformation from a traditional segregationist into a model integrationist, though one who sees his role in the struggle as that of a pulpit preacher, not a street marcher. On the issue of Communism Graham has moved away from his earlier hardline position. On Christianity and America, Graham used to identify the Gospel with American culture, but now says the Gospel cannot be identified with any particular culture. Pierard observed that Graham does still slip on occasion, as, for example, when he retracted his criticism of Falwell for identifying the Gospel too heavily with America's culture. He apologized to Falwell when the press printed the rebuke, saying journalists were trying to drive a wedge between them.

Those attending the Huntington conference came away with a clearer, deeper understanding of how evangelicalism and the religious right are perceived by the nation today. The conference had a moderate evangelical slant and included much criticism of the political religious right, especially the Moral Majority's failure to address the issues of racism and the poor. Yet the remarks of John Oliver of Malone College raised an important question. He said Falwell does not have it all together, but neither does the evangelical left as when some of them call for the acceptance of homosexual activity as a viable lifestyle and allow for abortion under the label of choice. Should we impugn our Christian brothers and sisters on the right if we have confusion and failure on both sides? Such questions as these, raised at the Huntington conference, need much continuing discussion.

## **GUARDING THE ASHES OR TENDING THE FLAME: WESLEYAN THEOLOGICAL SOCIETY 1981 ANNUAL MEETING** **By Donald Dayton, Assistant Professor of Historical Theology, Northern Baptist Theological Seminary.**

A continuing search for a distinctive identity was in evidence as over 200 scholars gathered at Asbury Theological Seminary (Wilmore, KY), November 6-7, 1981, for the 17th annual meeting of the 1700-member Wesleyan Theological Society. President-elect Paul Bassett of the Nazarene Theological Seminary had put together a program asking whether there was a specifically "Wesleyan mode" in the several theological disciplines. Papers were presented on Christian education, Old and New Testament studies, and systematic and historical theology.

The meeting in some ways revealed a tradition repositioning itself on the theological map. The papers on biblical studies surfaced both a growing openness to modern modes of biblical interpretation and a parallel impatience with an "evangelical" resistance to such that had apparently been more influential on an earlier generation of Wesleyan scholars. Even a more conservative and less well-received paper by Gene Miller, Dean of Gulf Coast Bible College (Church of God, Anderson, Indiana) affirmed that "honest, critical study of the New Testament" should enhance faith rather than undermine it. Professor John Hartley of interdenominational Azusa Pacific College built bridges to "form criticism" of the Old Testament by working with the "inductive" or "English Bible" hermeneutical tradition popular in the Wesleyan schools (derived from approaches developed in an earlier generation at Biblical Seminary in New York as a way through the fundamentalist/modernist controversies). Sherrill Munn, reflecting in part some theological struggles at Northwest Nazarene College, was even more emphatic in responding to Hartley, arguing that an earlier Nazarene resistance to critical scholarship was "incorrect" and "prejudicial," as well as contributing to unnecessary barriers between theology and biblical scholarship.

There was more debate about the existence of a distinctive "Wesleyan mode" of biblical studies. Munn feared that a rush to find one might run the risk of distorting the reading of the biblical material in traditional directions. Hartley argued that the Wesleyan tradition supported a "synergistic hermeneutic" that allowed a greater recognition of the role of the interpreter and the creative role of the Holy Spirit. Others argued that the Wesleyan tradition has contained perceptions of the inter-connections of biblical themes that were demonstrably correct and needed broader articulation. Illustrative of the latter was the fact that Daniel Fuller had, after a long struggle with "dispensationalism," recently come in *Gospel and Law* to an essentially Wesleyan position without any awareness that this position had been characteristic of the Wesleyan tradition. Several skeptical questions from the floor pressed hard for concrete cases where a scholar's biblical interpretation *should* be influenced by his theological tradition.

The theological papers revealed some uncertainty about how to retrieve and restate the Wesleyan tradition in our own times. United Methodist Carl Bangs of St. Paul School of Theology, working in the tradition of historical theologian Jaroslav Pelikan, pointed to complexities in the Wesleyan tradition: the dual roots in English Puritanism and "high church" Caroline Anglicanism; its "tripartite" multifaceted ecclesiology expressed in local societies, the annual conferences, and the episcopacy; its complex integration of love and justice, justification and sanctification. Calling attention to the danger of "guarding the ashes rather than tending the flame," Ray Dunning of Trevecca Nazarene College, currently at work on a Wesleyan systematic theology,