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## Men at the Crossroads: Beyond Traditional Roles & Modern Options (Book Review)

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despite the British conquest of Quebec in 1760. Canada's Protestants, derived mainly from Loyalist and British origins, shared much in common with American evangelicals, but consciously repudiated republicanism and individualism. Instead they emphasized preservation of the social order and traditional ties with Europe, and were more committed than Americans to unity of the Christian community and to social responsibility. As exemplified in the education debates of the nineteenth century, Noll finds that Canadian Christians (particularly Protestants) reconciled evangelical piety with a form of establishment which, though it left church and state disentangled in education, nevertheless accepted a structured pluralism and a common view of the role of religion in public morality.

Ultimately, however, Noll concludes that Christianity fared no better in Canada than it did in America. In both cases, perhaps even moreso in Canada, the commitment of Christians to existing cultural forms left their societies vulnerable to secularization. Whether during the conflict of the Civil War, or the Quiet Revolution in Quebec, Christianity no longer seemed to offer universal and transcendent certitude. As the intellectual and social structures of modern North American civilization were reshaped in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Christianity was either frankly abandoned in favour of science, humanism, and materialism, or gradually surrendered to those new values.

Yet Noll does not despair about secularization, which he defines as a shift in focus "from the sacred toward a greater concentration on the circumstances of this world (425)." In the midst of the "wilderness" of secular modernity, Noll points to cases of the rediscovery of Christian faith, and devotion to living by gospel ideals. Albeit in disguise, secularization, Noll suggests, may be a blessing that frees Christians from the burden of commitments to their host cultures, to travel more faithfully the Way of Christ.

Noll's interpretation of North American Christianity, cast in terms of Augustine's classical eschatological tension between the other-worldly city of God and the temporal city of Man, is deeply critical of evangelicalism and yet shares its long commitment to Augustinianism (33, 380-381). Though Noll's criticisms are appreciated, one may well wonder whether he has misconstrued the problematic. Arguably, it is precisely through this Augustinian world-view that evangelicals allied their Christianity with

"secular" culture. Unfortunately, Noll offers little concise analysis of how evangelicals allied their faith with secularized culture. For example, his comments on evangelicals and the American revolution charitably treat Jefferson as a "heterodox" Christian, and suggest briefly that republican "natural political axioms" (132) were "compatible" with Christianity. Noll's organization does not help to shine light on this alliance, since he examines, again very briefly, the integration of evangelicalism and Enlightenment thought only in post-Revolution America, and thereby neglects the long engagement of evangelicals with the Enlightenment at least from Jonathon Edwards and John Wesley to John Witherspoon. Likewise, Noll's emphasis on the conservatism of Canadian evangelicals veils the liberal dimensions of the politics and philosophy of public education, and the later development of modernist Protestant thought. Although Noll refers often to the interaction of religion and culture, his identification of Christianity with church and theology treats other cultural activities as essentially extraneous to Christianity. Thus his attempt to disentangle Christianity and North American culture in some ways obscures evangelicals' divided world-view, and their deep commitments to both worlds: a secularized temporal world and an other-worldly salvation.

In the end, Noll's impressionistic assessment of the twentieth century wilderness, though certainly suggestive, may leave the Christian community in the lurch. Given the post-war resurgence of televangelism, gospel music, and the Moral Majority, it seems less than evident that evangelical Christianity has, for better or worse, disentangled itself from contemporary American culture. But more generally, is the separation of Christianity and culture to be expected, or desired? Put another way, are "law and gospel" to be held apart in tension or "delicate balance," (62) or is the gospel *for* the creation order? Christians inescapably must live their salvation, "with fear and trembling," not only in the cultural forms of church and theology, but also in politics, philosophy, science, and art. The problematic of North American Christians may be not so much their entanglement with cultural forms, but the specific way that their pietism has hindered their development of a consistently faithful culture, and led them to acquiesce in a secularized culture and society. While the disentanglement of Christianity from secularized North American culture may be welcome, it also compels us to work at an alternative Christian culture.

*Men at the Crossroads: Beyond Traditional Roles & Modern Options*, by Jack Balswick (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1992). 218 pages, paperback, \$9.99. Reviewed by Charles Veenstra, Professor of Communication.

"These are hard times for men. American society is short-changing males" (19), says Jack Balswick, professor of sociology and family development at Fuller Theological Seminary. Much has been written in the last generation by feminists who have encouraged men to discard the male

script that guided men. At the outset, then, this book appears a welcome balance. In addressing the challenges men face, the author attempts to develop a Christian perspective for men to follow in their relationships.

Balswick begins by tracing various explanations that

have been offered for differences between male and female in our society, ranging from the social-environmental to the sociobiological. He rejects both poles while admitting that nature and nurture contribute to gender differences: "The small differences produced by biology are made large by culture" (30).

In response to women's liberation movements, men began developing their own consciousness-raising movement. In 1983 the National Organization for Changing Men emerged, but it has not attracted a wide following. In the last five years, however, several books suggest ways for men to face the new challenges posed by the changing roles of women. The "new male" asks that men get in touch with the king, warrior, magician, and lover within themselves. The author is not satisfied with either the traditional male or the "new male" model. He carefully evaluates both. Then he looks to Jesus as the ideal model for manhood, and attempts to describe this model more fully at various points throughout the book.

However, in describing what he calls "male issues," such as male inexpressiveness, competition, aggression and war, power, male sexuality, etc., he relies too heavily on only a few sources and traditional stereotypes. For example, most of the chapter on male expressiveness contains little reference to the large numbers of research studies on differences between male and female communication. Recent meta-analysis of these studies indicates far fewer differences between male and female communication than popular literature claims (cf. *Communication Quarterly*, Spring, 1993). More careful study of communication would free Balswick from thinking of men as stereotyped by popular books. Indeed, his references include none from the field of communication. While many men might find themselves in his description of how men express themselves, many others would not. The same

criticism can be made of his handling of the other "male issues" in this section of the book. But he does offer his opinion forthrightly.

Most helpful is Balswick's chapter on "Fathering." He indicates that too many males in our society have not had a father present in the home to teach boys how to become men. Consequently, without men present, boys tend to develop their identity in reaction to women and too many find their standards in peer groups made up of boys who likewise have not had male models in the home. He very clearly provides a biblical model for fathering by drawing on a biblical description of God as Father to his people. The responsibilities for raising children belong to fathers as well as mothers. Fathers are capable of nurturing children as well as mothers. And it benefits them as well: "Strong fathering can do more than anything else to build strong, confident masculinity" (169).

In the final chapter, the author steers a course for men that asks them to avoid reacting negatively and defensively to all changes and to avoid welcoming all new definitions of masculinity as they are introduced. His own experience with men's groups provides the basis for his practical helps, which point the way for more communication and reflection with men particularly. His conclusion is noteworthy: "The signs of authentic Christian masculinity will be that men in Christian community will seek to *support rather than dominate women, empower rather than control younger men and mentor and complement rather than compete with other men*" (212). In spite of his tendency to rely too heavily on stereotypes, the author provides much reflection for both men and women as they consider how to handle changing sex-roles in our North American culture. He correctly emphasizes that Christians must lead the way in showing the face of normative male and female relationships.

*No Place for Truth: Or Whatever Happened to Evangelical Theology?*, by David F. Wells (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans) 1993, 301 pages, hardback, \$24.99. Reviewed by Michael Williams, Assistant Professor of Theology.

"Why do I have to study theology? It's irrelevant to my desire to minister to people in the church." This statement from a young seminarian is where Wells begins his indictment of an evangelicalism that has become happily illiterate theologically. It would seem that two terms beg definition for Wells' indictment to stand: evangelicalism and theology. Yet both are rather elusive terms for Wells, and his difficulty in definition forms both the particular strength and the weakness of the book. The irony is that as his definition of theology gets clearer and purer his definition of evangelicalism becomes more and more amorphous and evanescent. Upon reflection, I appreciate that, but it caused me some problems in reading the book.

Let me explain. First the issue of theology. Early in the book Wells appeared to function under a rather static, even

scholastic understanding of theology. Definitions ranged from intellection on the supernatural to "the cogent articulation of the knowledge of God" (3-6). I fear that such definitions will not help Wells in breaking theology out of the evangelical prisonhouse of irrelevance. Thankfully, Wells moves on to a more full-bodied understanding of theology, but not until a full one-third of the book has gone by. After he has led his reader to believe that he thinks of theology as rational discourse about otherworldly things, Wells marvellously opens up theology in two stages. First, he speaks of theology having three aspects: confession or the content of faith, reflection upon that confession, and finally the practice of spirituality or wisdom that comes from confession and reflection. While this clarification is extremely helpful, Wells doesn't really