

---

# Pro Rege

---

---

Volume 13 | Number 3

Article 9

---

March 1985

## Christian Critique of the University (Book Review)

Larry Reynolds

*Dordt College*

Follow this and additional works at: [https://digitalcollections.dordt.edu/pro\\_rege](https://digitalcollections.dordt.edu/pro_rege)

---

### Recommended Citation

Reynolds, Larry (1985) "Christian Critique of the University (Book Review),"

*Pro Rege*: Vol. 13: No. 3, 35 - 36.

Available at: [https://digitalcollections.dordt.edu/pro\\_rege/vol13/iss3/9](https://digitalcollections.dordt.edu/pro_rege/vol13/iss3/9)

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by the University Publications at Dordt Digital Collections. It has been accepted for inclusion in Pro Rege by an authorized administrator of Dordt Digital Collections. For more information, please contact [ingrid.mulder@dordt.edu](mailto:ingrid.mulder@dordt.edu).

*A Christian Critique of the University* by Charles Habib Malik. InterVarsity Press, 1982. 115 pages. \$4.50. Reviewed by Larry Reynolds, Professor of Education.

Charles Malik immediately establishes in this short volume a sense of urgency in articulating a Christian-critique of the university. Most of the leaders and decision makers of the world have been under the influence of the university, and with universal education most people have at least been taught by graduates of college or universities. Malik declares that the university is "the power that dominates the world" (p. 21).

Malik's credentials for evaluating the university are impressive as a leader in education, in the church, and in the world. He has held professorships at a wide variety of universities, including the Jacques Maritain Distinguished Professor of Moral and Political Philosophy at The Catholic University of America in Washington, D.C. This critique of the university is an expanded version of the lectures he delivered for the third annual Pascal Lectures on Christianity and the University at the University of Waterloo, Ontario, Canada. Malik held many positions of leadership in the organized church and in the area of religious education. He has served as president of the World Council of Christian Education and was appointed Fellow of the Institute for Advanced Religious Studies at the University of Notre Dame. As a world leader, Malik has equally impressive credentials. He served as president of the General Assembly of the United Nations, as president of the Security Council of the United Nations, and as Chairman of the Human Rights Commission of the United Nations.

These credentials alone, however, do not insure a *Christian* critique of the university, but the confessional stance of Malik that is abundantly evident throughout this book make his critique of the university worthy of serious attention by all evangelical Christians. It's hard to question what he considers to be the fundamental tenets of Christianity: "the Holy Trinity, the Incarnation, the resurrection, sin, repentance, the new creature in Jesus Christ, the Second Coming of Jesus, the life to come" (p. 44).

The main focus of Malik's critique of the university is on the sciences, and his critical analysis of the domination of the sciences in the twentieth century university is penetrating and insightful. He clearly sees the trap of reductionism that most scientists have become victims of—"a narrowing of vision whereby all truth, including the ordering of truths, is tendentiously reduced to some one particular truth" (p. 35). He laments that specialization within the sciences has all but destroyed the existence of a scholarly community, and is critical of the pride of knowledge and power that afflicts so many scientists today. Malik discusses how naturalism and evolution have permeated all of the sciences and warns that it is easy to "become so bewitched by the so-called scientific method as to disregard everything to which it

does not apply." To demonstrate the power of scientism even among evangelical Christians, he includes an excellent section on the "creationists," who in their attempts "to show the Bible is *also* science . . . demean the Bible rather than . . . exalt it" (p. 49).

The humanities are also found wanting in Malik's critique of the university. The list of "isms" that has led to "the absence of Jesus Christ from the curricula of the humanities" (p. 92) is a long one: naturalism, subjectivism, rationalism, skepticism, idealism, materialism, technologism, futurism, cynicism, nihilism, Freudianism, relativism, voluntarism, humanism, monism, immanentism, secularism, and the cumulative effect of all these "isms"—atheism. Malik claims that as a result of the contemporary status of science and the humanities in the university, there is a new kind of "superstition and magic in these enlightened and progressive times." One of his examples focuses on our use of probability:

There is an element of magic also in the prevalence of probability, statistics, the law of averages, in scientific doctrine and practice today. Of course there are situations where, scientifically, one can only talk in terms of probability. But it is not much (at least not sufficient) comfort for an anxious patient to tell him, for example, that the treatment he is receiving has been statistically shown to be curative in seventy (or even ninety) percent of similar cases, and therefore his "chance" of total recovery is seventy (or even ninety) percent. What if his "luck" (a "bad" one indeed) should fall under the remaining thirty (or even ten) percent? Even if the probability were ninety-nine percent, the remaining one percent would still hang over his head as a sword of Damocles. (p. 85)

Malik's critique of the university gives the reader an in-depth understanding of contemporary Western civilization—a civilization in which Christ has been "relegated merely to the family, to the church, to private feeling. . ." (p. 93). But Malik's solution for the secular university may not be as biblically grounded as he would like it to be. Malik would like to recapture the university for Christ, and in advocating this strategy he assumes that the Harvards, the Princetons, the Yales, the Oxfords, the Heidebergs were originally "founded on Jesus Christ" (p. 31). He fails to see how the founders of many of these institutions were influenced by the common sense philosophy and rationalism of the age in which they lived. The nature/grace dichotomy of scholasticism allowed reason to reign supreme in

nature's realm and Scripture's message of grace came to be regarded as matter of logic and truth. (See John Vander Stelt's *Philosophy and Scripture: A Study in Old Princeton and Westminster Theology*.)

Perhaps Malik's failure to evaluate the origin of the university is a result of his own view of knowledge and reality—a view which is more informed by the Greeks than by the Scriptures. He likes Aristotle's definition of knowledge. Knowledge assumes its own identity and exists apart from a human being's faith response to God:

What you know, or think you know, that you cannot articulate in such a way as to share it with all mankind is not knowledge. It could be faith, it could be feeling, it could be intuition, it could be hallucination, it could be daydreaming, but it is not knowledge. (p. 17)

Malik also seems to embrace a kind of Christianized

Platonism. God is the Beauty, the Goodness, the Justice that men like Socrates and Plato reasoned to exist in our world as only shadows of the real thing. While he admits that Socrates and Plato are still far from the living love of a personal God and are lost in a "deadly loneliness," he still declares: "How close the heart of Socrates and Plato to the living God—almost there!" (pp. 61-62). While Malik keenly recognizes the non-Christian character of the contemporary university, he has failed to embrace a biblically based epistemology and ontology.

Nevertheless, Malik has performed a valuable service for the evangelical Christian community in his critique of the university. And while there are problems with some of his basic assumptions, his critique provides an excellent starting point for trying the spirits of our Christian institutions of higher education—institutions whose faculty have received their graduate degrees from the secular university that Malik describes.

*A Documentary History of Religion in America*, by Edwin S. Gaustad, Ed., 2 Vols., William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1982, 1983, n.p. Reviewed by Louis Y. Van Dyke, Professor of History.

Edwin S. Gaustad, Professor of History at the University of California, Riverside, has compiled an encyclopedic array of documents on the history of religion in America from pre-Columbian times to the present. He chooses the time of the Civil War as the break between volumes one and two. Gaustad divides the work into chapters that correspond approximately with the various phases of political and economic development in North America such as pre-Columbian, discovery and exploration, colonization, independence, early national period, etc. Gaustad has included well-written introductions to each chapter and to each document as well as useful suggested readings at the end of each chapter.

Gaustad's aim in producing this monumental work is threefold. He wants the amateur historian to be able to reconstruct the religious history of America on his or her own; he wishes, by his choice of documents, to reflect the religious variety evident in America's past; and, asserting that "what is written by a committee often deserves to be read only by same," he desires that

private and personal voices speak as well as those of officials and bureaucrats.

On the whole, Gaustad succeeds admirably. The books will serve as excellent reference and resource material for teacher as well as minister and the "amateur" who has the courage to plow through every document will receive his or her own reward. Gaustad correctly includes documents from religions other than Christian in his attempt to demonstrate that pluralism as a religious phenomenon is as old as civilizations in America themselves. One can sympathize with the editor as he faces the choice of which private voices to include and which to leave out, but I would have liked to have seen more included than a fleeting reference to the Christian Reformed Church (II, 34). The CRC statement on war or its view on conscientious objection could certainly have been included to reflect the religious diversity of our own time.

This is the type of work that can be read enjoyably for five minutes or five hours.