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Reviewed by Daniel Ebeling

Roberts, Professor of History at the University of Wisconsin, Stevens Point, and Turner, Professor of History at the University of Notre Dame, address the loss of Christianity in American colleges and universities. The book actually is delivered in three distinct portions with the inclusion of a lengthy introduction by John Wilson. These parts have substantially different character, which can be overcome; however, their redundancies are less forgivable. Wilson gives what masquerades as a summary of the remainder of the book. However, he has his own distinct take on the text. His view is much more apathetic to secularization or even apologetic on behalf of the universities. He appears to see the work of Roberts and Turner as dispelling nasty myths regarding universities. Wilson states: “The following chapters by Jon Roberts and James Turner ought to challenge unreflective assertions that modern universities are necessarily secular in the sense of displaying hostility toward religion” (15). He affectionately refers to the universities as “very special and precious kinds of institutions … independent of religious controls… capable of openness toward religiously inclined folk” (16). Roberts and Turner did not appear to have a similar attitude and may have been better served by limiting Wilson to simple praise and a brief summary of their work. One might have been inclined not to address this section of the book, but its relative size and position warrant critical review.

Roberts provides the most coherent and useful information in his three chapters. Roberts addresses primarily natural sciences and their relationship to religion. He begins with a picture of pre-civil war academia. At this time, higher education sought to integrate knowledge on Christian foundations. Natural science was taught in a “doxological” manner; the investigation of nature was a means of praising God. At times these studies would move beyond this end and into the realm of “natural theology.” This involved using natural science as evidence for God’s existence and divine attributes. Problems began to arise when, “on more than one occasion scientists arrived at conclusions that seemed irreconcilable with the prevailing views of the Bible” (25). In order to solve this apparent conflict, many conceded that the Bible is not a science book, nor a literal history book. At this point in the book, Roberts lacks some important commentary. Either due to his personal belief or as a professional precaution, he makes no judgment on the validity of these concessions. These two concessions are not equal. The Bible is not a science book, but it is most certainly a historically accurate book. Roberts does point out that what followed was revision of Biblical interpretation, most notably to accommodate the newly espoused evolution dogma. Charles Darwin effectively severed the relationship between science and supernaturalism and established “methodological naturalism” as the norm of science. This meant that science no longer worked in concert with theology. There was no room for supernatural explanations in science.

Also blamed for the decline of religion in universities is the movement toward research. Roberts expresses this well by stating “For true believers in the special sanctity of science, the really salient issue was not the possibility of apprehending truth, but the superiority of ‘rigid solid knowledge’ to speculation, faith, tradition and authority” (35). German universities had moved into a focus on
research and reinforced the same in American higher education. These factors brought about a movement from knowledge transmission to knowledge production.

Around this time at the end of the nineteenth century, other disciplines began to follow the example of the natural sciences. Roberts states as an example, “Philosophers, possibly wishing to express their allegiance to the efforts of scientists to limit their investigations to empirically based data, became increasingly hospitable to a neo-Kantianism that, in drawing sharp distinctions between knowable phenomena and unknowable noumena, became increasingly uncongenial to natural theology” (32). The broadly defined or undefined scientific method was espoused by nearly every discipline. In the 1890s many psychologists “began to insist that psychology would not be truly scientific until it freed the study of mind and behavior from any connection with theological categories” (52). It is no wonder that by the late nineteenth century, any reference to God was seldom made in scholarly publications. The use of such “God-talk” began to be associated with intolerance and obscurantism, and was criticized for hampering open minded inquiry.

Turner follows with a reiteration of much of the same, and with further examples in the humanities. His greatest contribution is in pointing out the growth of specialization around the turn of the century. He defines specialization not simply by an individual’s mastery of a particular subject, but also by compartmentalization of knowledge around which methodological fences had been erected. He attributes secularization in part to this process. “One sees the bite of the new specialization... in the growing tendency of university professors who believed in God, as most did, to keep their religious beliefs in one box and their academic ones in another” (88). Therefore the permeation of God into every realm of life was not possible, and “God no longer commanded in theory universal assent as a unifying principle” (102).

Turner provides some desired commentary near the close of the book. As philology and historical criticism began to take on a deconstructionist style, Turner laments, “Making everything depend radically on its historical setting undermines every stable norm” (119). How then could a belief in the Christian God or religious doctrines remain the framework for knowledge? Most Christians who have spent time at an American university must ask themselves at some point: “Where has Christianity gone?” The authors of this book attempt to provide the answer to that question. They do so in a manner that appears entirely unique to this reviewer. The authors have taken a fairly analytical look at historical data, various curricula, and educational trends. Did they provide the answer? They have definitely provided many insights and possibly part of the answer. Noticeably absent from their analysis is the obligatory whining and bemoaning regarding our current university climate. While their approach is objective, well developed, and refreshing on most levels, this reviewer can not help but feel that there is something missing. Is it missing the whining, or at least a healthy dose of commiserating? Deeper analysis will not allow this review to simply come to that conclusion.

In search of the source of this unrest, two factors are suspect. The first is the feeling of being left high and dry around 1910, wondering what steps might have occurred to bring us to the present state of affairs. The authors explain what may have planted the seeds for secularization of higher education by discussing the period from approximately 1865 to 1900. The reader is then left to assume that the stage is then completely set for American decline down the slippery slope of secularism. This could be satisfying as a sufficient explanation if one believes that there were no significant historical events that occurred during the twentieth century. The second suspect is a bit more elusive. It is the question of causality. Admittedly, the entire book is a statement on the cause...
of university secularization, but the causality being questioned here is broader. What effect did extra-university societal forces have on universities? The authors, by omission, seem to take the stance that these effects were minimal. Is it possible that the universities and the society as a whole have had a cooperative effect on their dismissal of Christianity? To be fair to the authors, the tackling of such a broad topic would have been a monumental task, necessitating a few more pages. However, the replacement of some of the often repetitive analyses with broader exploration may have cured the nagging “something missing” feeling.

Christian scholars and educators should learn some valuable lessons from the history that is provided in this book. An underlying theme seems to be the slow but steady expulsion of God from education. The changes did not occur at a rate and in a way that greatly troubled the predominantly Christian faculties of universities. The relationship of God to each discipline was limited more and more as time went on. It eventually appeared unprofessional, unscientific, and weak minded to invoke the name of God and incorporate Christian beliefs into instruction. This was not merely a phenomenon that was limited to public universities. Eventually most confessional Christian colleges lost their moorings in the culture of secularization.

The family of believers at Wisconsin Lutheran College should guard against this temptation of Satan. Each professor must focus on ways to demonstrate Christian principles in teaching, service, and scholarship. One cannot and should not separate faith from discipline by compartmentalization “If anyone serves, he should do it with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ” (I Pet. 4:11b). Each subject can be studied in a way that praises God and displays His glory. In this marriage, the supremacy of Divine Revelation over humanly ascertained knowledge must be maintained. Many of our predecessors made the mistake of demoting and adapting Scriptural interpretations as scientific conclusions arose that seemed to contradict the Bible. Here Scripture gives clear guidance: “We have renounced the secret and shameful ways; we do not use deception, nor do we distort the word of God” (II Cor. 4:2a). Scientific conclusions have changed and adapted, based on differing interpretations and new data. The Word of the Lord is unchanging. In the same vein, one should never attempt to base one’s faith on scientific proofs and theories. The Holy Spirit works and nourishes faith through God’s Word.

The authors have provided information about a pivotal historical period. They provide insights into the method that the devil has used to promote the decline of education from a Christian perspective. By prayerfully studying this process and with God’s help, the Christian educator can avoid repeating the same mistakes.


*Reviewed by John E. Bauer*

If the Age of Enlightenment is dead and the absolute relativism that plagued modernity for the past two centuries has been shown to be bankrupt, then where is this new post-modern age headed? According to Thomas Oden, Henry Anson Buttz Professor of Theology and Ethics at Drew University, many of today’s “young fogeys” are seeking truth in orthodox Christianity. In this
optimistic tome, Dr. Oden documents the emerging “resolve in worldwide Christianity and Judaism to reclaim the familiar classic spiritual disciplines: close study of scripture, daily prayer, regular observance in a worshipping community, doctrinal integrity, and moral accountability” (p. ix). If he is correct, then the conservative, confessional church should rejoice at the opportunities which lie ahead to provide essential spiritual food to a hungry generation.

To appreciate the conclusions of this author, one must first have a clear understanding of the effects the modern period – roughly 1789 to 1989 – on the intellectual processes of the intelligentsia as well as on the world view of the common man. With the scientific method serving as the only acceptable method of inquiry, things spiritual were eliminated as being less than worthy of inquiry. From the naturalism of Freud to the utopianism of Marx, from the narcissism of Nietzsche to the chauvinism of Dewey and Bultmann, modern thinking only served to create an absurd and empty absolute relativism that reduced moral thinking to the lowest common denominator of fairness to the individual, and contributed to several generations of liberal political ideologies which in spite of good intentions have denuded Western culture of its moral and spiritual foundations.

Why orthodoxy? Oden defines orthodoxy (in the lowercase form) as “integrated biblical teaching as interpreted in its most consensual classic period” (p. 29). For Christians, this means the doctrine taught during the period of ancient ecumenical Christianity – doctrine that is commonly called classic Christian teaching. The author provides a fascinating trip back into the apostolic and patristic periods when scholars wrote voluminous works on the scriptures and, ironically it seems, dealt with many of the same issues that plague the minds of Christians today: the nature of God, the divinity of Christ, the resurrection, the truth of the scriptures. And, it turns out, the ancient scholars anticipated many of the skeptical challenges that became evident in the Age of Enlightenment. Oden speaks with authority. Raised in the liberal social Gospel of the United Methodist Church, he describes his own theological training, ordination, and academic career as being on a parallel course with that of Hillary Rodham Clinton. Both attended Yale. Both adopted Methodist activism. He says of his own training, “I learned my agnosticism from Nietzsche, my social views from radical Methodists and existentialists, and my theology (God help me, I confess) from Alan Watts” (84). “When I look now at Hillary’s persistent situational ethics, political messianism, statist social idealism, and pragmatic toughness, I see mirrored the self I was a few decades ago. Methodist social liberalism taught me how to advocate liberalized abortion and early feminism almost a decade before the works of Germaine Greer and Rosemary Radford Ruether further raised my consciousness” (p. 85).

What turned him around? A Jewish colleague at Drew University challenged his ego by saying that he would remain theologically uneducated until he had read Athanasius, Ambrose, Basil, and Cyril of Alexandria. In other words, he was ignorant of the early scholars in his own discipline and faith tradition. He took up the challenge and after a number of years of study came to the conviction that the testimony of the scriptures provided by the consensual interpreters who “sought in their day only to give voice to the already coherent mind of the believing community that had preceded them in attesting the history of revelation” (p. 91) provided a foundation upon which believers could rely. Not only did he discover abundant textual evidence of certainty about the scriptures, but he discovered the methods which were employed and which opened for him a new and unfettered freedom of inquiry. Instead of buying the historical criticism of the modern age, Oden learned how the classic exegetes developed a highly refined pattern of scriptural cross-referencing. He observed how they “looked at scripture not only in relation to other texts, but also in relation to the broader context of its culture, history, and language, but never to the extent that the context or language
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analysis threatened the primacy of the text” (p. 103). Thankfully, most WELS and ELS clergy are well versed in this historical grammatical form of exegesis, although concerns continue to be heard about a movement toward the more dogmatic grammatical approach of other Lutherans.

To substantiate this rebirth of orthodoxy, Oden cites six “layers of evidence:” personal transformation, faithful scriptural interpretation, ancient ecumenical multiculturalism, well established boundaries, ecumenical roots reclaimed, and consensual ecumenical discernment (pp. 73-74). Some of the terms in this enumeration evoke social liberal ideologies of the present day and require explanation. For example, the frequent use of the term “ecumenical” requires clarification which Oden provides by contrasting modern ecumenism which ignores substantive difference in the interest of unity with the ancient ecumenical idea of *oecumenē*, as in “universal” or “whole world.” In this sense, Oden argues, it is orthodox Christianity alone which provides the means by which people can live in harmony.

This scholarly book provides the reader with much hope for the future of the confessing Christian Church. Oden is a scholar with few peers and credibly presents the argument that orthodox Christianity is indeed undergoing a rebirth. However, he also does not venture much outside of his own environment, namely, the academy and the seminary. How the observations cited by the author are translated by those in the public ministry to generations of lay people saturated with the relativistic hedonism of the present age is left for others. Needless to say, churchmen in every denomination should be evaluating the trends described in this book and weighing their applications to the life and ministry of the Church. This reviewer strongly suggests reading *The Rebirth of Orthodoxy* along with Colleen Carroll’s *The Young Faithful* which describes this movement at the personal grass roots level.


*Reviewed by John E. Bauer*

If Thomas Oden’s book on the new Orthodoxy paints a picture of confessional Christianity at the academic level, then Colleen Carroll’s new book provides a personal and street-level picture of the growing trend among many young Generation X’ers to seek out orthodox religion.

Ms. Carroll spent a year researching this phenomenon by interviewing sociologists, theologians, religion editors, pastors, and countless young orthodox Christians from many denominations. Her own Catholic background gave her a particularly keen sense of this movement within the Roman Catholic Church, but she speaks with equal authority about Eastern Orthodoxy, the Episcopal church, and other branches of Protestantism.

Her findings run parallel to those of Oden: young people have found absolute relativism bankrupt in terms of providing a grounding and direction for life. The liberal modern mindset of their parents’ generation has been shown to produce only emptiness and wasted lives. Consequently, young adults are actively seeking and finding meaning in the most unlikely of places – in the traditional, confessional, liturgical churches of their grandparents.

“An embrace of traditional religion and morality often begins with a rejection of relativism. In a culture where young adults are frequently told that no universal moral standards or religious truths
exist, many have begun to question that dictum and search for the truth that they believe is knowable” (p.7). Ms. Carroll’s research especially focused on young educated professionals who are in potential positions of future influence. Her findings about this cohort raises intriguing possibilities for the future of Christianity in US culture.

Most of the young professionals Carroll interviewed have already achieved secular success at a young age. They have been exposed to “watered-down” religion and crave its opposite. They know what practicing religion out of duty means and now want a more personal relationship with God. Finally, they may have had some personal religious devotion since childhood, but now want a faith that is integrated into every facet of their lives and which is supported by a religious community. These young seekers seem especially drawn to those churches which value the mystery and tradition of the sacraments and which emphasize the transcendent nature of God in worship and prayer.

In addition to deeper spiritual meaning, Carroll also documents the impact this return to orthodox religion is having on personal behavior. She provides evidence of increased sexual chastity, personal evangelism, involvement in community, activism against abortion and other injustices, concern for ethics in business practices, and personal evangelism. This youth movement is also gaining momentum on public and private college and university campuses – once the exclusive domain of secular thinking.

Finally, the young faithful desire to be part of fellowship communities which are both inside and outside established denominational boundaries and follow their own instincts with respect to confessional ecumenism. “Many committed young believers excel at ecumenism, precisely because they can clearly articulate the distinctiveness of their faith traditions... If [they] continue to embrace opportunities to work together across denominational and even interfaith lines without airbrushing significant theological differences, they have the potential to transform American religion and culture” (p. 266). It is this last observation that leads Carroll to view the future of American culture with guarded optimism, for her concern rises above personal spiritual renewal and extends to society at large. To her, this population cohort of young influential orthodox professionals has the potential to dramatically change the religious landscape in our country.

Ms. Carroll’s exhaustive research should hearten leaders of the evangelical Lutheran church as well. This book is a must read for those pastors and church leaders who are serious about drawing this seeking population into their churches. The young faithful are not put off by creed or liturgy, they are not necessarily offended by the “real presence” or the Catechism. But they are intelligent and want a much deeper involvement with the church than their parents had. Lutheran leaders should take this book as a challenge to find ways to connect the old and the traditional with a new generation that wants to embrace the truths and traditions of our ancient faith.


Reviewed by John E. Bauer

“Despite the constant complaints of feminists about the patriarchal tendencies of Christianity, men are largely absent from the Christian churches of the modern Western world. Women go to church; men go to football games.” So begins Leon Podles’ thorough examination of a well documented
fact which threatens to undermine many Christian churches. Not only do more women attend worship services than men, but on almost every measure of religiosity, women rank higher.

Podles provides biological, historical, anthropological, and sociological reasons for this phenomenon. Of one thing he is clear: the God of the Scriptures is masculine and it this masculinity which makes him separate, holy, and the creator. On the other hand, the Church is always referred to in the feminine. God is the giver, the Church is the recipient. God is the active creator and therefore masculine; the Church passive and dependent and therefore feminine. The gender metaphors used to talk about God and the church have greatly changed over the past century and have contributed to creating a climate which isn’t necessarily conducive to male participation.

Does the feminization of the Christian church spell continued decline of male participation? Not necessarily. Obviously, the Gospel has the power to turn the hearts of men. And Podles believes that Christianity has within it “the resources that allow it to appeal to men, to show that not only will Christianity not undermine their masculinity, but it will also fulfill and perfect it” (p. 197). However, he argues that the Church must understand three distinctive masculine modes of living: initiation, struggle, and brotherly love.

The more transcendent God is, the holier he is, the more separate he is, and the more masculine he is. Men seem to require an initiation into the faith that marks a new relationship or a new way of living. Conversion experiences are almost exclusively male experiences and pastors who can assist men in their initiation into the Christian faith can validate their separateness and reliance on God. Women rarely undergo the same dramatic conversion experiences but rather seem to move slowly into the nurturing relationship of the church.

Men also must struggle spiritually against sin in ways that women don’t. Men generally accept that they are expected to suffer in their roles as providers, husbands, fathers, and employees. They disconnect from their mothers, and sacrifice for others. Churches that recognize this by preaching the Gospel “without the modifications that make it easy and bourgeois” have a great advantage in reaching men. Podles continues: “The rawer fundamentalist churches and the more traditional revivalist churches reach more men than liberal or latitudinarian churches. Unless the Church takes its own message seriously, as indeed a matter of the uttermost importance, it cannot expect men to take it seriously either” (p. 206).

It is the misconception of love that has driven many men away from the church. Feminized love, including tolerance for homosexual love, cannot fill the need of men for brotherly love - a love for each other precisely because they are all sons of the Father and share their brotherhood with Jesus. Men seek brotherly love at the workplace, in gangs, in fraternal organizations, in athletic competition, and even in war, but rarely in the church. Unlike sexual love, brotherly love is not distorted or made perverse by suffering. On the contrary, those who suffer together become brothers and show the kind of love that would lead one to fall on a grenade to save each other.

Podles claims that “there is no modern, accessible model of saintly lay masculinity in Western culture. A man can be holy, or he can be masculine, but he cannot be both.” What is needed are such masculine saints “who alone can show to men that holiness is not the negation, but the fulfillment of masculinity. That can only be done by saints who are both dedicated to holiness, not by their own work, but by the work of the Holy Spirit, and who are fully masculine. These saints
will be ordinary Christians, who come into contact with other men in sports, business, or the military” (p. 207).

Leon Podles provides a timely challenge for the church. Translating a doctrine on the role of men and women in the church into gender relevant ministry provides a challenge and an opportunity for orthodox Lutherans.