

RELIGION AND AMERICAN HIGHER EDUCATION
IN AN AGE OF CULTURE WARS

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Imagine if you can, in this day and age, a professor who offers a course on contemporary America which features politics, religion, sex, and war. Imagine further that the professor offers this course, not once, but three times. That would be me.

Now at some point in early adulthood, most people overcome that adolescent sense of invulnerability which makes nineteen year olds such good soldiers. I must have missed that developmental stage, but the fact that I am now offering the third version of the course to Honors students at the University of Arkansas suggests that I survived the first two. Actually, all three have been great fun.

I first offered the course in 2003 at Georgia Tech, pitching it to very bright students like those in the Advanced Academy of Georgia. In fact, one member of the class *was* an Academy graduate. Two things led me to this course. One was my own interest in the rise of American political conservatism that swept from office the heirs of the New Deal tradition after 1968. The other was more personal than professional. In the months after 9-11 I met with a small group of students to discuss a set of documents which I hoped would shed light on what we had experienced and would allow us to share our deep feelings about those experiences. This talk grows out of two observations about my students.

When we read about the movement known as the Christian or Religious Right in the post-1968 course, students knew what it was and could recall pertinent information from the readings, but none could situate the Religious Right in the broad context of American history and culture. Similarly, when we read Samuel Huntington's 1993 article "The Clash of Cultures?" which helped frame public discussion about post-9-11 foreign policy, students appropriately criticized Huntington for ignoring the role of economics in world affairs, but while they questioned his equation of "western" culture with a monolithic Christianity, they had neither the language nor the conceptual tools to explain why.

I also noticed something in what was left unsaid, even in the informal conversations following 9-11. These bright young people shared their analyses of the readings without hesitation, but when the conversation drifted toward their own aspirations and fears or toward their deep sense of self, they pulled back, as if by raising such issues in a classroom they would be transgressing some invisible boundary. In sum, my students' study of human civilizations had not equipped them to analyze the role of religion in society, and they felt compelled to compartmentalize their own experiences into "learning" and "feeling."

At this point you may be expecting to hear what the Puritans would recognize as a narrative of declension, best summarized in the subtitle of an outstanding book on religion and American higher education, "From Protestant Establishment to Established Nonbelief."¹ But the truth of the matter is more complex and less linear.

¹George M. Marsden, *The Soul of the American University: From Protestant Establishment to Established Nonbelief*. (New York, 1994).

Public conflicts over religion and morality have ebbed and flowed since colonial times, and they framed some of the new republic's first partisan debates (think John Adams and Thomas Jefferson). Such clashes have been particularly acute in the past four decades, reflecting opposing views on the rise of a counterculture, rapidly changing sexual mores, and perceptions of an overall decline in morality and respect for the law. Add to the mix the divided mind of America about Supreme Court decisions on issues such as school sanctioned prayer and bible reading and legalized abortion, along with a long-simmering conflict over the teaching of evolution, and it is no wonder that Gertrude Himmelfarb could write of "one nation, two cultures."²

Like other conservative thinkers, Himmelfarb blames this cultural schism on the youth-led counterculture of the 1960s. We can argue about who is to blame for what, but without question many Americans *did* abhor the changes of the '60s, including changes caused by the non-violent civil rights movement. In February, 1968, a writer for the *Saturday Evening Post* reported on this backlash from bucolic central Pennsylvania, where a group of women shared with him their fear of a "communist plot to destroy us." It is, they said, "all part of the same thing. Crime, the streets being unsafe, strikes, the trouble with the colored, all this dope-taking, people leaving the churches. It is sort of a breakdown of our standards, the American way of life."³

The political mobilization of Americans who shared these concerns took various forms, none more powerful than the movement that came to be known as the Christian

²Gertrude Himmelfarb, *One Nation, Two Cultures: A Searching Examination of American Society in the Aftermath of Our Cultural Revolution* (New York: 2001). For a very different view presented by a leading sociologist of religion, see Alan Wolfe, *One Nation Afer All: What Middle-Class Americans Really Think About God, Country, Family, Racism, Welfare, Immigration, Homosexuality, Work, the Right, the Left, and Each Other* (New York, 1998).

³ Quoted in Godfrey Hodson, *The World Turned Right Side Up: A History of the Conservative Ascendancy in America* (Boston: 1996), 141.

Right. Ed Dobson, a pastor from Grand Rapids, Michigan, who helped found the Moral Majority, explained why theologically conservative but politically unengaged Christians mobilize politically during the 1970s: “I think a series of threats, broadly described as ‘secular humanism,’ caused a community that had been separatist for fifty years to act. It acted because, all of a sudden, the larger secular world was having an impact on their members’ ‘separated’ lives, through gay-rights issues, moral erosion, banning prayer in the schools, and government interference in Christian schools.”⁴

This last point referred to a 1978 ruling from the IRS which would have required independent Christian colleges and schools to show that they did not discriminate based on race or lose their tax exempt status. This ruling, though later withdrawn, helped bring down the wrath of the religious right upon an evangelical president. Jimmy Carter recounts how, in 1979, a conversation in the Oval Office with the newly elected President of his own denomination, the Southern Baptist Convention, ended with this admonition: “We are praying for you, Mr. President, that you will abandon secular humanism as your religion.”⁵

The mobilization of conservative Protestant and Catholic voters on behalf of Ronald Reagan certainly contributed to Carter’s defeat in 1980, and while the religious right lost some of its force thereafter, the culture war intensified in the 1990s. Patrick Buchanan set the tone when he declared to the 1992 Republican National Convention:

⁴ Quoted in Hodson, *The World Turned Right Side Up*, 178. An account of the movement up to 1990 is found in Michael Lienesch, *Redeeming America: Piety and Politics in the New Christian Right* (Chapel Hill, 1993.)

⁵ Jimmy Carter, *Our Endangered Values: America’s Moral Crisis*. (New York, 2005), 32.

“There is a religious war going on in this country, a cultural war as critical to the kind of nation we shall be as the Cold War itself, for this war is for the soul of America.”⁶

Not even a majority of those in the hall that night agreed with Buchanan, let alone the majority of American voters,⁷ but the divisions were real. Bill Clinton became a lightning rod for the anger of conservatives. “To them,” historian James Patterson writes, “Clinton was the epitome of all that was wrong with his baby boom generation—and with the elitist liberals, amoral Hollywood celebrities, and left-wing academics who supported him.”⁸ Elitist liberals, left-wing academics, secular humanists, Darwinian scientists: the vector of the culture war points straight to heart of the American university.

In 1951 a young Yale graduate named William Buckley published a little book called *God and Man at Yale*. The book, which quickly became a best seller, grew out of a speech that Buckley had been asked to prepare for Yale’s Alumni Day convocation in his senior year but was not allowed to deliver. Written over half a century ago, *God and Man at Yale* outlines the conservative brief against American higher education that can be heard today.

Rejecting Yale’s claim that it was still a Christian university, Buckley charged that faculty members loved to debunk religion and that “There is surely not a department at Yale that is uncontaminated with the absolute that there are no absolutes, no intrinsic

⁶ Quoted in Morris P. Fiorina, “What Culture Wars?” *Wall Street Journal*, July 14, 2004.

⁷ Morris P. Fiorina, Samuel J. Abrams, and Jeremy C. Pope, *Culture Wars? The Myth of a Polarized America* (New York, 2004). But for a contrary view on the extent of polarization see Robert Wuthnow, *America and the Challenge of Religious Diversity* (Princeton, 2005). Law Professor and author Noah Feldman sides with Fiorina and Alan Wolfe more than with Wuthnow and Himmelfarb on the issue of cultural polarization, but argues that there is a sharp division on how religion and government should be related. He labels the contending parties “values evangelicals” and “legal secularists,” and offers a middle way between the two. *Divided By God: America’s Church-State Problem—and What We should Do About It* (New York, 2005).

⁸ James T. Patterson, *Restless Giant: The United States from Watergate to Bush v. Gore* (New York, 2005), 260.

rights, no ultimate truths.”⁹ He named names, beginning with the Religion Department. While acknowledging the faith and good works of some professors, Buckley claimed that most of the men teaching religion at Yale were either atheists hostile to their subject or liberals who believed that religion was merely a useful superstition. Of the department chair, an ordained minister, Buckley wrote, “While respecting Christianity and what it represents, Mr. Schroeder does not seek to persuade his students to believe in Christ because he has not, as I understand it, been completely able to persuade himself.”¹⁰ In the same vein Buckley criticized his alma mater for undermining belief in individualism and free enterprise while promoting “collectivism.” Then the sharpest cut of all: since most of Yale’s wealthy alumni were both Christians and economic conservatives, Buckley opined, they should withhold their financial support until Yale got it right.

Believing that it had been maligned and misrepresented, Yale responded through alumnus McGeorge Bundy, later an aide to Presidents Kennedy and Johnson, and like Buckley a member of Skull and Bones. “I was somewhat concerned,” Bundy wrote in the *Atlantic Monthly*, “lest my readers refused to believe that so violent, unbalanced, and twisted a young man really existed.”¹¹ This young man’s unwarranted attack on his alma mater, Bundy insisted, stemmed from the fact that he was an ardent Roman Catholic, thus not really part of the gentleman’s club, and certainly incapable of judging an institution founded by puritans and sustained by Protestant values.

The main lines of Buckley’s brief against Yale and the arrogant tone of Bundy’s rejoinder are alive and well in today’s cultural clashes over public as well as private universities, with one change in the context which raises the stakes very substantially: in

⁹ William F. Buckley, Jr., *God and Man at Yale* (Chicago, 1951), 25.

¹⁰ *God and Man at Yale*, 8.

¹¹ Quoted in Marsden, *The Soul of the American University*, 10.

1951 Buckley's argument did not have the force of a major political party behind it, and indeed the two parties were far less culturally divided than they had been a half century before or would be a half century later. In 1951 McGeorge Bundy was still a registered Republican.

To understand those who criticize higher education on religious grounds it is important to know that in the formative stages of modern American universities at the end of the 19th century, "the Protestantism of the major...denominations acted as a virtual religious and cultural establishment." And not just in private schools: as late as the 1890s "almost all state universities still held compulsory chapel services and some required church attendance as well."¹² Well into the 20th century, on many state university campuses the virtual establishment of nonsectarian Protestantism was maintained through the Young Men's Christian Association, the YMCA.

Those days are gone, and this nation and its universities are better for it. The founding ideals of American colleges included advocacy for a particular form of Christianity. But the First Amendment and a commonsense understanding of education's role in a pluralistic society caution that it is not our place as professors to advocate for any religion, any more than to advocate against religion.

But we are nevertheless left to ask whether the baby has been thrown out with the bathwater, whether, as George Marsden put it, the "Protestant establishment" has been replaced by "established nonbelief." One need not accept the most strident, one-sided, and partisan critiques of higher education today to agree that in large segments of university life the precepts of Protestant Christianity have been replaced by the axiom

¹² Marsden, *The Soul of the American University*, 3.

that religion and spirituality have been rendered obsolete and thus have no serious role to play within the academic community. We are the poorer for this new “absolute.”

In the aftermath of 9-11 can anyone seriously claim that our students need to know less, not more, about the world’s religions and their truth claims? Thinking beyond the Middle East and Asia, can universities hope to equip graduates to understand the momentous changes taking place in the southern hemisphere without their understanding the deadly struggles between Christians and Muslims on the African continent or the explosion of non- and even anti-western forms of Christianity in Africa and Latin America, a phenomenon that historian Philip Jenkins calls “the next Christendom?”¹³ Indeed, how are we to comprehend contemporary America, where polls tell us that as many Americans as ever before hold religious views, participate in religious observances, and consider themselves to be spiritual beings. To quote Stanley Fish, the noted literary theorist and onetime bad boy of postmodernism:

“...the geopolitical events of the past decade...have re-alerted us to the fact...that hundreds of millions of people in the world do not observe the distinction between the private and the public or between belief and knowledge, and that it is no longer possible for us to regard such persons as quaintly pre-modern.... Some of these are our sworn enemies. Some of them are our colleagues. Many of them are our students.....Announce a course with ‘religion’ in the title, and you will have an overflow population....And those who come will not only be seeking knowledge; they will be seeking guidance and inspiration.”¹⁴

¹³ Philip Jenkins, *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity* (New York, 2002).

¹⁴ Stanley Fish, “One University Under God?” *Chronicle of Higher Education*, On-line Edition, January 7, 2005. Fish ends his essay thusly: “When Jacques Derrida died I was called by a reporter who wanted to

Remember my students, who lacked the conceptual tools to analyze the role of religions in contemporary society, and who exhibited discomfort about revealing their own inner lives? Here are two specific possibilities for change in American universities which could address both problems.

Curricula in the humanities and in the social and behavioral sciences have been battlefields in American culture wars for over a century,¹⁵ so textbook writers and publishers may have been understandably cautious about handling religious subjects, particularly ones that touch the present. It is impossible to open a textbook on American history from European settlement to the Civil War without encountering religion as a major theme, from Puritan New England, to the Great Awakenings that spread Protestant churches and spawned social reform movements, to the biblical debates over slavery, even to the Civil War itself.

Let me be clear that the inclusion of religion in this narrative is based on historical scholarship which, whether written by evangelicals or atheists, treats religion as an integral part of human culture. There is another shelf of books that approaches religion in America from a “providential” or “covenantal” view of history—America is the new Israel, God’s new chosen people. While this literature most certainly figures in the

know what would succeed high theory and the triumvirate of race, gender, and class as the center of intellectual energy in the academy. I answered like a shot: religion.”

¹⁵Time does not permit me to illustrate the point, but I will mention in passing one example, the public uproar over standards developed by academic historians for elementary and secondary courses during the late 1980s and 1990s. The development of standards in history, English, mathematics, and geography was initiated during the administration of the first President Bush and funded by two federal agencies. For the story of the “battle of the standards” as described by the defeated university historians, see Gary B. Nash, *et al.*, *History on Trial: Culture Wars and the Teaching of the Past*. (New York, 1997). I have written about a late-nineteenth century struggle over how the nation’s story was to be told in *American Populism: A Social History* (New York, 1993).

contemporary culture wars, I do not believe that it is any more appropriate for the textbook version of American history than creationism is for the biology texts.¹⁶

When we move beyond the Civil War in most textbooks something strange happens. While religious themes pop up from time to time after 1865, religion stands outside the organizing principles of most textbooks and, presumably the courses in which they are used. The civil rights movement, for example, is commonly treated from the perspective of its impact on politics and government, with little mention of its roots within the black church. Discussions of the new Christian Right seldom explore its theological roots in the 19th century or even hint that evangelicalism was a powerful force for progressive social change in the early twentieth century. And so on. Jon Butler likens this problem to a jack-in-the-box: “Religion pops up colorfully on occasion....But as with a child’s jack-in-the-box, the surprise offered by the color or peculiarity of the figure is seldom followed by an extended performance.”¹⁷

Speaking as the co-author of one such textbook,¹⁸ I do not believe the fault lies with a vast left-wing conspiracy. Nor is the problem a lack of specialized books and articles from which textbook writers and course developers can glean material. Over the past two decades the study of American religion has been among the most rapidly growing subfields within American history, and much the same thing has happened in political science and sociology. The tyranny of the “Presidential synthesis” that forces the story into the framework of our quadrennial election cycle has certainly contributed.

¹⁶ For a summary of this literature, including books by Pat Robertson, Jerry Falwell, Tim LaHaye, and Jesse Helms, see Lienesch, *Redeeming America*., 141-194.

¹⁷ Jon Butler, “Jack-in-the-Box Faith: The Religion Problem in Modern American History,” *Journal of American History*, 90 (March 2004), 1359. I am indebted to Professor Butler for the framework of the section that follows. His essay also provides a good introduction to the specialized literature on the history of American religion since 1870.

¹⁸ Arthur S. Link, and others, *The American People: History*, 1st ed. (Arlington Heights, Ill., 1981).

But as Butler points out (and by the way, he teaches history and religion at Yale), the problem “rests on a widespread conviction and assumption that the post-Civil War United States has been a society where religion receded, especially in public life.”¹⁹

The dominant interpretative framework of modern history and other social and behavioral sciences rests on the arguments of Max Weber, Sigmund Freud, and others that “secularization would be the irrepressible, inevitable outcome of industrialization, urbanization, and bureaucratization,”²⁰ and that as secularization increased, religion would decline in public significance, however important it might remain for some individuals. This organizing principle for how the modern world works has been overtaken by events. It simply cannot stand. Today secularism and religions of all sorts live side by side, sometimes comfortably, sometimes not. The exact shape of a new paradigm is not yet clear, but it will come, and in history, political science, sociology and other fields, the raw materials of original research are already available to construct it. Thoughtful books that compare world religions and others that wrestle with issues of religious pluralism can also help shape the new paradigm.²¹

The integration of religion into the meta-narrative of history is one thing, but what about my students’ dis-ease when the conversation comes close to their own inner selves? In short, what about the S-word? To speak of spirituality in higher education moves those of us who teach from the familiar territory of cognition to our own inner lives and

¹⁹ Butler, “Jack-in-the-Box Faith,” 1360.

²⁰ Butler, 1361. See also Christian Smith, ed., *The Secular Revolution: Power, Interests, and Conflict in the Secularization of American Public Life* (Berkeley, 2003).

²¹ On comparative religion, see especially, Karen Armstrong, *A History of God: The 4000 Year Quest for Judaism, Christianity, and Islam* (New York, 1994); Armstrong, *The Battle for God: A History of Fundamentalism* (New York, 2000); Armstrong, *The Great Transformation: The Beginnings of Our Religious Traditions* (New York, forthcoming); Huston Smith, *The World’s Religions: Our Great Wisdom Traditions*, revised ed. (New York, 1991); and Smith, *Why Religion Matters: The Fate of the Human Spirit in an Age of Disbelief* (New York, 2001). On issues of religious diversity in historical context, see Wuthnow, *America and the Challenges of Religious Diversity*.

those of our students, from the solid ground of demanding that students “know my material” to the shifting sand of “know thyself.” And we all remember what happened to Socrates when he talked to young people that way.

“Spirituality,” as I am using the term, is not synonymous with religion, though for many the two are linked. Spirituality has to do with our human consciousness and self-awareness, with “the values we hold most dear, our sense of who we are and where we come from...the meaning and purpose that we see in our work and life.” Spirituality is intentional, a “commitment to a process of inner development.”²² In this broad sense we are all spiritual beings, or can be if we so choose.

Who in the university is paying attention to this aspect of student development today? In an earlier time it would have been the president and faculty. Later it might have been the YMCA secretary, who on some campuses doubled as the university chaplain. Since World War II such concerns have come within the purview of campus ministers or chaplains, often sponsored by a denomination or established faith group. Some of them now collaborate with student affairs professionals, who on many campuses have included student spirituality in their area of concern.²³

While campus ministers are still engaged in the religious formation of young people within their own faith traditions, a broad coalition of student professionals, in concert with some faculty members, is creating programs that address the affective

²² Alexander W. Astin, “Why Spirituality Deserves a Central Place in Higher Education,” *Spirituality in Higher Education Newsletter*, April 2004, 1; Arthur W. Chickering, Jon C. Dalton, and Liesa Stamm, *Encouraging Authenticity and Spirituality in Higher Education* (San Francisco, 2006), 7. Special thanks to Ashley Tull, my Student Affairs colleague at the University of Arkansas, for bringing this second book to my attention.

²³ In 2004-2005 a group of campus ministers and student affairs professionals at Georgia Tech allowed me to join their discussions about this aspect of their work and to think with them about how their efforts might be more fully integrated into the life of the campus community. I am deeply indebted to the members of that group for their insights and friendship.

development of students. These include learning communities, “Freshman 101” classes, and service learning and leadership programs, along with other more traditional student programming. Some professors are involved in these activities, and more of us should be, but the constraints of our academic culture dictate that for most of us the greatest opportunities for meaningful contact with undergraduates come through the formal curriculum. How might we find common ground with our students in the ordinary rounds of teaching and research?

Before answering that it may be helpful to review what we know about the spiritual lives of college students and of the professoriate. Today researchers in the behavioral sciences are seeking to understand the spiritual beliefs and practices of both students and their professors and to explore ways in which issues of spirituality, broadly defined, can be appropriately integrated into the university. The most ambitious study was completed in 2005 by the Higher Education Research Institute at UCLA, where since 1966 Alexander (“Sandy”) Astin has been studying student attitudes and beliefs. *The Spiritual Life of College Students*²⁴ is based on responses from 112,000 undergraduate students attending a national sample of 236 colleges and universities. Three-fourths of participating students reported that they are “searching for meaning/purpose in life,” and nearly half say it is “essential” or “very important” for them to seek opportunities for spiritual growth. High percentages also reported that they had attended religious services during the past year, that they derived “strength, support, and guidance” from their spiritual or religious beliefs, and gained “spiritual strength by trusting in a Higher

²⁴ Alexander W. Astin and Helen S. Astin, co-principal investigators, *The Spiritual Life of College Students: A National Study of College Students’ Search for Meaning and Purpose*, Higher Education Research Institute, UCLA, 2005. For a campus-based ethnographic study of religious expression and activity based on interviews on four distinctly different colleges and universities, see Conrad Cherry, Amanda Porterfield, and Betty A. Deberg, *Religion on Campus* (Chapel Hill, 2001).

Power.” The study goes on to correlate these values with their orientation toward politics, global issues, community service, and other issues.

In 1999 Sandy and Helen Astin conducted a smaller but more intensive study of professors at four California colleges and universities. Interviewers invited the professors to define their spirituality in any way that they wished, and while some talked about religious beliefs and practices, many of them focused on their professional work, which they often considered to be a vocation. Those professors “saw their research as a medium either for expressing their spirituality or for finding meaning in their professional lives. Many others saw their work with students as a spiritual activity.” When asked about situations in which their own values were at odds with those of their institution, the most commonly cited source of conflict was the competing claims of teaching and research.²⁵ That concern is not unrelated to the conflict between “know my material” and “know thyself.” In fact both reflect a longstanding tension within American higher education.

In a 1987 report to the Harvard University Board of Overseers, Derek Bok, then President of Harvard, called upon universities to equip students to live ethical and fulfilling lives but acknowledged that “Professors...are trained to transmit knowledge and skills within their chosen discipline, not to help students become more mature, morally perceptive human beings.”²⁶ Bok’s early predecessors in the president’s chair at Harvard would said that moral development of students was precisely the role of the professor, but Bok was simply stating the prevailing orthodox view, as refined during the three-quarters of a century in which elite American higher education had internalized the

²⁵ Alexander W. Astin and Helen S. Astin, co-principal investigators, *Meaning and Spirituality in the Lives of College Faculty: A Study of Values, Authenticity, and Stress*. Higher Education Research Institute, UCLA, 1999. 7.

²⁶ Quoted in Mark R. Schwehn, *Exiles from Eden: Religion and the Academic Vocation in America* (New York, 1993), 3.

values of the German research university. Max Weber had stated those values most directly in a 1918 essay entitled “Science as a Vocation.” The calling of the professor, he said, was to immerse himself fully in the life of the scholar—discovering new knowledge in his field of specialization, writing about it for other scholars, and transmitting to waiting students. Challenging to reigning orthodoxy which held that the role of education was to cultivate the minds and spirits of the young, Weber declared that academicians were “true to their own calling when they steadfastly refused to address questions about the meaning of the whole or the purpose of human life. Under such circumstances academic life could no longer be understood as ‘the way to true being, the way to true art, the way to true God, or the way to true happiness.’”²⁷

American higher education never fully accepted Weber’s idea of the ideal professor, but, particularly in the more elite universities it has long been pretty close to gospel. So while some professors are conflicted about not having enough time for the teaching they love, many others fret about taking time away from “my work” (research) for other things (teaching). The question of how we came to view research as “my work” and teaching as a chore done for someone else is an interesting one, but for now I want only to suggest that more and more of us are questioning that orientation and searching for a way of practicing our craft that does not force us to separate scholarly expertise from our own sense of who we are. However, those of us who begin to think this way often realize that we are going against the grain.

I believe that students and faculty can, without fear, confront issues of meaning and purpose in the academic settings where they routinely meet, while honoring both the multiple aspects of their calling and the diversity of beliefs and attitudes of those with

²⁷ Schewehn, *Exiles from Eden*, 7.

whom they interact in the classroom and laboratory. Parker Palmer, who has been teacher and guide for many of us, suggests how this can happen.

I have on my desk a quotation from Palmer's book, *The Courage to Teach*, which reads "Good teaching is an act of hospitality to the young...."²⁸ The setting in which he describes such teaching is a circle with something called "Subject" at the center, surrounded by many participants, each called "Knower," each in communication with the subject and with each other. None of the "Knowers" is identified primarily as expert or professor. Palmer labels this group "the community of Truth," with Truth defined as "*an eternal conversation about things that matter, conducted with passion and discipline.*"²⁹

Now before you decide that Dr. Palmer and I have gone off the deep end, consider what happens when a professor and a group of undergraduates here at West Georgia gather around a research project, or when a class is organized around some form of discovery-based learning. The pedagogy Palmer described is not foreign to our own best practice! But he goes further. While Palmer draws insights from the way modern science works, especially the path breaking genetics research of Barbara McClintock, he begins with these questions: "Who is the self that teaches?" And "How can the teacher's selfhood become a legitimate topic in education and in our public dialogs on educational reform?"³⁰ Now, I've never heard those questions asked in a faculty meeting, and I doubt that any of my colleagues have either.

²⁸ Parker J. Palmer, *The Courage to Teach: Exploring the Inner Landscape of the Teacher's Life* (San Francisco, 1998), 50.

²⁹ Palmer, *The Courage to Teach*, 103. Without ever mentioning Weber, Palmer contrasts the "circle of Truth" with another form of teaching, in which an "expert," conveys knowledge to a group of students in a setting which discourages or prevents any meaningful feedback. This is known in the trade as the "sage on the stage," and this form of teaching is still alive and well in most universities.

³⁰ Palmer, *The Courage to Teach*, 3.

Palmer invites those of us who have chosen the academic life to consider the connections between the values that define who we are and the work we have chosen to do. He takes us back to the moment when we first encountered the research subjects that got us hooked (the “subjects that chose us,” he calls them) and to the days when we first considered a career that involved teaching. The language through which Palmer makes his case is the language of spirituality, broadly defined. The sentence from Palmer that I quoted earlier reads in full “Good teaching is an act of hospitality toward the young, and hospitality is always an act that benefits the host even more than the guest.” That sentence resonates with the deepest values of many traditions across the millennia, but it is also profoundly countercultural and subversive in higher education today.

By Parker Palmer’s lights, Julian Stanley was gloriously countercultural and subversive. Julian’s dealings with gifted students were marked by hospitality and by a profound empathy. These serious relationships with students who had an unmet educational need gave him deep insights into how our educational system needed to change. Julian challenged head-on some of the axioms of higher education, and he prevailed, in the process becoming the Johnny Appleseed of gifted education in America. The students of the Advanced Academy of Georgia—past, present, and future—are the beneficiaries of his way of being fully present with students and of his marvelous subversion of the system.

When I ask myself whether it is possible for professors to teach from within and to engage meaningfully with students who understand that they are more than the sum of their test scores and academic credits, I think of Julian, and the question answers itself.