

# REVIEWS

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**God on the Quad: How Religious Colleges and the Missionary Generation Are Changing America** by Naomi Schaefer Riley. New York: St. Martin's Press, 2005; 288 pp., \$24.95 hardbound.

*John M. Hintermaier*

Naomi Schaefer Riley's *God on the Quad* has apparently filled an important niche in American intellectual culture. Not only have journals on both sides of the culture wars warmly reviewed the book, but Riley has been given regular space on the *Wall Street Journal* editorial page. Part of the benefit of being so late in reviewing *God on the Quad* is that much of what is going to be said on the book has already been said and much of what should have been said is unlikely to make it into print. Riley's main contribution, if we can trust her critics, is to have pointed out that the students and faculty at religiously affiliated schools tend to be...relatively "normal" people. They may be more interested in larger cultural issues than other "normal" people, but they are hardly the snake-handling, shack-dwelling folk who some worry are busily planning to turn the United States into a theocracy. While it could be argued that only those suffering from rank ignorance would believe the contrary, apparently, if her critics are correct, until *God on the Quad* appeared, many people labored under this sort of misconception.

Now, before I continue, I should note that I am an insider to the story that Riley narrates. I currently teach at a religiously affiliated university and received my undergraduate education from another

religious university. Being a resident of the world that Riley is attempting to describe, my perspective frequently diverges from hers. This difference in perspective, rather than being a deficiency on the reviewer's part, should help both to validate the strengths of *God on the Quad* and point out its deficiencies.

*God on the Quad* is divided into two sections. In the first six chapters, Riley profiles six religious institutions: Brigham Young University, Bob Jones University, Notre Dame University, Thomas Aquinas College, Yeshiva University, and Baylor University. In the final six chapters, Riley explores how religious colleges have addressed feminism, racism, student morals, the presence of minority religious groups on campus, the integration of faith and learning, and political activism. Riley is often at her best in the opening chapters of the book. Her ability to provide sensitive commentaries on the schools she visits complements the more general observations that she proffers in the conclusion. For readers who are unfamiliar with religious colleges, *God on the Quad* is a faithful traveling companion that largely avoids the "ethnographic" trope that has predominated when intellectuals have written about American religion. Typically, previous works have viewed religious believers through the same lens that anthropologists tend to view tribal peoples in Papua New Guinea. In this light, believers are exotic, potentially dangerous characters, whom the author keeps at arms length through a series of rhetorical stiff arms. One work in this genre—a discussion of Christian media—intersperses accurate observation with editorial asides to assure a (secular)

audience that the author is aware of the “fact” that Christians, whatever their virtues, are part of a vast, regressive program to persecute homosexuals, destroy feminism, and make child-bearing mandatory.

Riley’s dealing with the natives is much more respectful and inquisitive. While she is willing to point out the uncomfortable moments she faced at the schools she visited, she largely balances these with the positive assessments. When she visited Bob Jones University (BJU), Riley, who is Jewish, found herself the target of an evangelistic appeal while talking to an administrator (37). As uncomfortable as this experience was for her, she dispassionately notes that one of the consequences of the university’s commitment to fundamentalism is that BJU students have a deep familiarity with classical music (popular music being forbidden) and have access to one of the world’s best collections of religious art in the university’s museum (50, 34). This ability to see the bright side of even the darkest clouds sets Riley’s work apart from the few authors who have tackled the issues presented by religiously affiliated colleges and universities.

Riley’s choice of case studies deftly mixes unique institutions like Bob Jones and Thomas Aquinas College with more mainstream religious institutions—Brigham Young, Notre Dame, Baylor, and Yeshiva. This strategy allows Riley to demonstrate that even religious institutions that have chosen to separate themselves from mainstream academic culture can make useful contributions to American culture. The downside to this approach is that it creates parity between institutions that differ vastly in

size, tradition, and influence. While it is perfectly valid to spotlight the great books curriculum and pious isolation of Thomas Aquinas College, does it make sense to give as much room to a school with a few hundred students as was given to Notre Dame, a university with a large student body and a valid claim to being one of the nation’s best institutions of higher education? It would seem relatively straightforward to claim that the controversies over the religious diversity of the student body at Notre Dame have broader ramifications than the dissatisfaction with Vatican II that Riley encountered at Thomas Aquinas. Yet, in *God on the Quad*, the former receives only as much attention as the latter.

While Riley might be forgiven for putting a major Roman Catholic university on par with an obscure one, her sins of omission in regard to Evangelical Protestant institutions seem much more difficult to absolve. Only Baylor University receives full treatment in *God on the Quad*. This in itself was a wise choice given the fact that Baylor has seen a protracted battle between those advocating a distinctly Christian approach to higher education and those who would prefer that Baylor students live as Christians but learn in much the same way as their counterparts at other institutions. Baylor has been at the center of an extended conversation about the merits of the Intelligent Design movement and has made a concerted attempt to attract world class scholars who take a self-consciously Christian approach to their research. Riley’s discussion of Baylor provides an interesting window into the debate there, but *God on the Quad* says very little about how these issues, which

are of primary concern to other Evangelical scholars and institutions, have been approached elsewhere. One could even go so far as to say that Baylor's Southern Baptist affiliation renders it largely incommensurable with other Evangelical institutions. While Riley visited other Evangelical schools, none of them receives the attention that Baylor does. Given that Evangelical institutions make up a significant percentage of the religious colleges and universities in the United States, this lacuna is strange and largely indefensible.

With these criticisms aside, *God on the Quad* is a significant book. Riley's case study of Yeshiva University sheds important light on the tensions within the leading educational institution of Orthodox Judaism. Riley's analysis provides a chilling counterpoint to the otherwise cheerful tone of the book that religious institutions can accommodate themselves to secularism and still retain their religious identity and vitality. In Yeshiva's case, the university has opted for a dichotomous approach that sharply divides religious education from the rest of the curriculum. These two parts of Yeshiva, which Riley refers to as the Hatfields and McCoys, literally exist in different worlds. While those students who are pursuing rabbinical studies are required to take "secular" courses, many of these students disregard their secular studies to the point that cheating is relatively common among rabbinical students (103). The fact that Yeshiva has largely failed to integrate its religious tradition with its larger educational mission demonstrates the challenges that religious institutions face in resisting secularization.

The final thematic chapters of the book are Riley's attempt to measure how well religious institutions are doing in combating secularism. Beginning with feminism, she notes that most religious colleges have largely accommodated themselves to some of the main tenets of modern feminism. Most religious colleges have more female than male students and thus can provide useful data on the impact of feminism on religious women. Riley notes that while the various critics of religious higher education have argued that religious colleges either oppress women or make them into secular feminists, she has found that most religious women have found ways to maintain their religious beliefs even as they take advantage of the educational and vocational opportunities afforded by modern feminist activism. While this is a useful observation, it leaves open the question of what sort of feminism religious communities are embracing. Given that most Americans have taken what they liked from feminism—the idea that men and women should receive equal pay for equal work, for instance—and discarded what they do not—like feminist hostility to traditional heterosexual marriage—one wonders if women at religious colleges are that different from their counterparts who attended non-religious schools.

The uniqueness of religious higher education is further called into question by Riley's discussion of race issues at religious institutions. She notes that most religious groups feel a theological imperative to advance racial reconciliation, yet it is hard to distinguish how the policy decisions they are making to effect this goal differ substantially from non-sectar-

ian institutions. Most of the administrators that Riley interviews profess the same faith in affirmative action policies that one finds throughout academe. Riley observes that the main difference between religious institutions and non-religious institutions is that the former have maintained a relatively traditional core curriculum and not set up special interest programs in African American Studies, Latino/a Studies, Queer Studies, Subaltern Studies, etc. As a consequence all students at religious institutions receive the same general education. The fact that this common-sense approach to general education has become rare at non-religious institutions is the real story here.

Riley argues that the major distinction between religious and non-religious institutions happens outside of the classroom. Most, but not all, religious colleges impose fairly strict standards on student behavior. Typically these ban the consumption of alcohol, premarital sex, and smoking. In concert with such prohibitions, these institutions typically house students in single-sex dormitories, provide on-campus religious activities, impose curfews, and restrict unsupervised contact between men and women. As a result, students at these institutions are less likely to engage in the typical array of bacchanalian activities that are common on most American college campuses. Riley considers the fact that by protecting students from “worldly” practices, religious colleges are doing a poor job at equipping their students to confront the real world once they leave the cloister, but, sensibly, dismisses this argument in favor of the notion that religious colleges generally are able to pro-

duce “graduates who are unafraid of the world, can participate in some aspects of it, change other parts of it, and all the while maintain their religious grounding” (189). She notes that very few students violate these rules and many of them have selected a religious college precisely because they do not want to be in a permissive environment where men and women share bathrooms, casual sex is the norm, and binge drinking is the major extracurricular activity.

One of the central claims in *God on the Quad* is that religious colleges are producing a “missionary generation” that is capable of addressing the major cultural conflicts of our age by relying on a coherently articulated set of religious beliefs. Most Evangelical colleges have adopted some form of the idea that faith and learning (or faith and vocation) are compatible and that a faith divorced from the major issues of life is a faith that is in danger of being overwhelmed by secularism. While I am less sanguine than Riley, her conclusion—that religious colleges have been largely successful at producing students who are capable of balancing the demands of living in a largely secular world with maintaining their faith—is generally true. She also notes that non-academic employers look kindly on the graduates of religious colleges, because they have a reputation for being honest and hardworking. As a result, the missionary generation (a rather odd appellation given the fact that, with the exception of Bob Jones, Riley found very little pressure placed on her or non-religious students to convert to the dominant faith of any of the institutions she visited) may potentially be able to exercise significant influence

in the spheres of law, politics, and businesses but not in academia.

While Riley does not take the time to discuss the need for reform in American higher education, it is a natural question to ask. Are religious colleges potential allies in the battle to return higher standards, traditional curriculums, and intellectual diversity to American colleges and universities? While I hate to hide behind a skein of nuance, the answer to that question is complicated. Many advocates for reform view the insistence that religious institutions place on theological orthodoxy as only a slight variation on the tacit academic orthodoxies that prevent dissenters from reforming higher education. For the “no orthodoxies” crowd, there is little to no benefit to be had from including religious institutions in the effort to secure genuine academic freedom for faculty of all viewpoints. Yet, and I may be accused of special pleading here, religious institutions occupy an important niche in higher education. The religious institutions that are most insistent on behavioral codes for their students see faster growth than those institutions that do not require them. The fact that more and more parents and students are opting out of traditional colleges and universities may provide some additional incentive for mainstream institutions to reform themselves. Even if non-sectarian institutions do not change their ways, Riley demonstrates that religious institutions and their alumni play an important, if relatively unnoticed role, in preserving some of the best aspects of traditional, liberal education. Those who cherish those same values would do well not to dismiss the contributions that

these sorts of institutions might make to the larger task of reform.

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***A Gift of Freedom: How the John M. Olin Foundation Changed America*** by John J. Miller. San Francisco: Encounter Books, 2005, 248 pp., \$24.95 hardbound.

*Herbert London*

John M. Olin was a rich, plain-spoken man who believed, based on his observation of economic life, that the United States was losing a sense of what made the nation exceptional. As he put it, “We have to recover the fundamentals of our country without delay.”

Thus a foundation was born that had a profound effect on America. In fact, the John M. Olin Foundation became the venture capital fund for the conservative movement. Lest it seem as if I exaggerate, the foundation, with a relatively modest endowment, launched and supported the law and economics programs at the Chicago, Harvard, Yale, Stanford, and Virginia law schools; the Federalist Society; the Collegiate Network—a consortium of conservative college newspapers; the philosophical basis for welfare reform; the intellectual cornerstone for school choice; foreign policy debates that still resonate through the corridors of the State Department and among intellectual opinion makers

at every major think tank and many of the nation's universities. I was one of the opinion makers who benefited from the largesse of the foundation.

The fact that the Olin Foundation did so much with relatively so little is testimony to those who managed the resources and made the ultimate decisions. In the mid-1970s "stagflation," the Watergate fiasco, and foreign policy setbacks seemed to sap national confidence. Mr. Olin, observing the national landscape, was convinced that his foundation might play a small role in turning things around. He had a vision that when the "nattering nabobs of negativism" limned a lugubrious view of the future, things might get better if national traditions could be recaptured. Instead of saying, "things will get worse before they get worse," he said things are bad, but could be better.

He translated that vision into foundation investments and set it rolling with the selection of Bill Simon, former Secretary of the Treasury, as the foundation president. Bill was an enormously talented man with philosophical underpinnings consonant with those of Mr. Olin. He was also a can-do guy with a mercurial temperament.

On one occasion Mr. Simon called me to lambaste, in very colorful terms, a colleague who refused to serve as a witness at the *Dartmouth Review* case—a suit brought against the *Review* by the then Dartmouth president, James Freedman. I listened intently to the fusillade of four-letter words. Finally, after regaining his composure, Simon asked me to serve as the witness. How could I possibly say no? Meekly, I said of course I'll do it; when should I leave for Hanover? His re-

sponse, "In about an hour-and-a-half. A private plane is waiting for you at LaGuardia Airport." Needless to say, I dropped what I was doing and went directly to the airport. You didn't trifle with Bill Simon. He was difficult, abrasive, and remarkably effective.

He also had strong opinions about university life. As he once noted, "America's leading colleges and universities—the training grounds for America's leaders—were increasingly pro-socialist, pro-government regulation, and anti-capitalist in their philosophy, direction, and mission."

Bill had a combat warrior at his side in the early Olin battles, the redoubtable Irving Kristol. Kristol warned that a new social and political reality was emerging among the "new class"—those hostile to the free market system. Ironically, Kristol noted, the beneficiaries of capitalism, those children of affluence, could turn out to be capitalism's gravediggers. For Bill and Irving a line was drawn in the proverbial sand.

When Richard Riley, the president of Firestone Tires claimed "the term 'free enterprise' is dead," Bill asked, if corporate leaders have given up, who will defend economic freedom? He had an answer and the Olin foundation had its mission.

It was clear to Simon and Kristol that the threat to the nation's economic foundations came from radicals on the Left. Bill noted, "Perhaps no other country in history has given greater liberty to those who would destroy that liberty, just as no other society in my memory has reached such heights of prosperity for its people and yet has raised an entire class of men and women who are hostile

to the very institutions that make progress possible.” When I read that comment I was reminded of the claim of a self-described middle class radical who said, “You don’t know what hell is like until you’ve lived in Scarsdale.” This was not said in jest and, in my opinion, this statement summarizes the ironies and absurdities of the radical sensibility in the 1970s, precisely the verbal shield of the privileged class of disaffected Americans.

Just as the American society was evolving in ways the Olin foundation found undesirable, the foundation itself was evolving in an effort to combat the metastasis of left-wing ideology. Its interests moved from the strict confines of free enterprise to include non-economic arguments rooted in culture and morals. The principals at Olin, namely the remarkably talented James Piereson, realized that free markets are only part of the free-society equation. That equation also includes such variables as social restraint, sobriety, virtue, and morality. It was in the 1980s that the foundation spawned conservative positions that melded economic and cultural characteristics into an agenda that helped inspire the Reagan administration policies.

When the Catholic bishops issued a Pastoral Letter decrying the capitalist system as unfair, Simon and his colleagues responded with a Lay Commission report that was not only a potent defense, but set the stage for the counteroffensive. The report noted: “Both Catholic social thought and American institutions are directed against tyranny and poverty, the ancient enemies of the human race.” The U.S. economy, the report argues “has freed millions of families from poverty, given them unparal-

leled domain of free choice, taught them virtues of cooperation and compassion, and unloosed upon this earth an unprecedented surge of creativity, invention, and productivity.” Most significantly in a direct rebuttal to the Pastoral Letter that called for governmental intervention to address poverty and income disparity, the report contends government may have the appropriate intentions, “but that does not mean it knows how to deliver.”

Curiously, the Olin Foundation knew how to deliver, particularly when it came to countering the politicization of the Academy by the legions of left-wing ideologues. James Piereson, a former scholar, had a special interest in the unfortunate transformation of universities from bastions of open exchange into an academic priesthood with a well-defined orthodoxy.

On the long march through institutions of higher learning, the children of Antonio Gramsci developed a narrow interpretation of Western history that emphasized exploitation and injustice and subordinated freedom and prosperity. The story of the rags to riches immigrant was supplanted by the nation of victims. Piereson and his colleagues understood that this was a battle for the very survival of Western culture. Bill Simon put it most colorfully when he said, “The inmates have taken over the institution.”

The Olin foundation assembled an extraordinary number of impressive assets to counter the anti-Western acolytes. *The New Criterion*, under the leadership of Hilton Kramer and later Roger Kimball, served as a bulwark for the great works of Western civilization; the Colle-

giate Network was the catalyst for the efflorescence of conservative and libertarian newspapers across the college landscape; *The Alternative*, edited by R. Emmett Tyrell, later called *The American Spectator*, gave voice to conservative student opinion and the beneficence of the foundation led to the creation of the National Association of Scholars led by Steve Balch.

I can recall the days when Barry Gross, Peter Shaw, Steve Balch, and I would lament the state of the Academy and the need to restore the traditions that once served as the foundation for university life. We were a group of disgruntled academics who had a mission. What we needed was a benefactor. With Steve at the helm we reached out to the Olin Foundation. The support from Olin, both monetary and philosophical, catapulted an idea and made it into one of the most formidable faculty organizations in the nation. From his podium at NAS, Professor Balch and his colleagues did more than engage in lamentations.

On the pages of this journal, *Academic Questions*, an agenda for the future was set. The easy-going nihilism that had descended on the field of higher education would be challenged. A full scale attack on the "equality of values" and cultural relativism, so pervasive in the 1980s, found its intellectual adversary.

NAS, in my biased opinion, has fought to keep the spirit of independent thought and the free exchange of opinion alive on college campuses. Instead of faddist distractions of the semiotics variety, NAS members consistently call for a genuine education free of ideological partisanship. The organization be-

came the faculty voice for responsible and thoughtful inquiry.

When the John M. Olin Foundation prepared to close its doors in 2005 after divesting its resources, James Piereson reflected on whether Olin support improved the climate for higher education. He said, "The campuses were a main focus of our activities though I'm not sure we were able to change them much." In one sense, Piereson was right; the left still has a stranglehold on higher education. But it should also be noted that despite this condition, the Olin Foundation, by dint of its grants and guidance, created a counter intelligentsia for an entire generation, broader and more influential than even Mr. Olin's grand vision could have anticipated. Perhaps the foundation did not transform the Academy, but through the support for organizations like the NAS, it kept afloat the dream of a university system where the best that is known and thought could be transmitted to the students of tomorrow.

John Miller's superb book is not only a history of an extraordinary foundation; it is the story of hope among those who despair over the future of American culture. Olin's leaders said, in effect: find the right people, offer them support, and let them be free to do the right thing. So many did. And for that, the principals of Olin, from John M. to Bill Simon, Michael Joyce, and James Piereson, deserve our undying gratitude.

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