

later modified by John Locke and others.

Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712–78) represented the proverbial fly in the ointment. No friend of organized religion, Rousseau nevertheless argued that human beings need religion both as an expression of their natural goodness and as a moral compass. The “children of Rousseau” flourished in continental Europe, especially after the traumas of the godless French Revolution and the Napoleonic conquests. Immanuel Kant and G. W. F. Hegel were among the thinkers who embraced a romantic vision of religion’s purifying force. Hegel argued that religion alone could forge social bonds and encourage people to sacrifice for the common good—it was the source of *Volksgeist*, a people’s shared spirit.

Among both Protestants and Jews in 19th-century Germany, these ideas bred a stolid liberal theology that prescribed “a catechism of moral commonplaces” and dutiful citizenship. But the horrors of World War I put an end to this complacent belief system. Germans were not alone in demanding something more exalted—the purchase on redemption that is the ultimate promise of biblical religion—but it was in Weimar Germany that the demand got its fullest expression. The Jewish thinker Martin Buber, later regarded as a kind of ecumenicalist sage, called for a “Masada of the spirit” and declared that “a beautiful death” was preferable to a plodding bourgeois existence. The theologian Karl Barth forged a more

militant Protestantism, and though he never rallied to the Nazi cause, a number of others did. The respected Lutheran theologian Emanuel Hirsch, notes Lilla, “welcomed the Nazi seizure of power for bringing Germany into ‘the circle of the white ruling peoples,’ to which God has entrusted the responsibility for the history of humanity.”

Is there a new Hobbes lurking among today’s Muslim thinkers? Lilla is respectful but skeptical of those who simply promote a more liberal and tolerant Islam. “The history of Protestant and Jewish liberal theology reveals the problem: The more a biblical faith is trimmed to fit the demands of the moment, the fewer reasons it gives believers for holding on to that faith in troubled times, when self-appointed guardians of theological purity offer more radical hope.”

Lilla has more hope for theological “renovators” of Islam, such as Tariq Ramadan, the controversial Swiss-born cleric, and Khaled Abou El Fadl, a law professor at UCLA. Just as Martin Luther and John Calvin found theological grounds for modernizing Christianity—ending priestly celibacy, for example—Muslim renovators are working to renew Islam from within. But Ramadan and El Fadl have been harshly criticized by Western intellectuals because they do not necessarily accept the Great Separation. That’s too much to ask, Lilla believes. Even in the West, the separation is constantly challenged. A self-confident, modernized Islam that is able simply to coexist with the West ought to be enough.

RELIGION & PHILOSOPHY

Not Catholic Enough?

THE SOURCES: “The Faculty ‘Problem’” by Wilson D. Miscamble, in *America*, Sept. 10, 2007, and “Catholic Enough? Religious Identity at Notre Dame” by John T. McGreevy, in *Commonweal*, Sept. 28, 2007.

NOBODY REACHES FOR THE smelling salts when a college is accused of failing to have enough African-American, Latino, Native American, or female professors. But the University of Notre Dame is now embroiled in a growing dispute over whether it is hiring enough Catholics.

Catholic universities in the United States have a “Potemkin village” quality, writes Rev. Wilson D. Miscamble, a Notre Dame historian. With their crucifixes and chapels, they look like religious institutions from the outside, but inside the classrooms, students learn the same secular lessons they do in other universities. Notre Dame’s faculty was barely 53 percent Catholic in 2006, and a spate of Catholic retirements is coming. The history department, with 32 members, has only 12 Catholics, and when three new hires were made last year, only one was Catholic.

Notre Dame’s distinctive Catholic character and intellectual tradition are threatened by a hiring process that favors candidates who can boost its visibility among its secular peers, Miscamble charges. Despite a papal declaration that a Catholic university must “consecrate itself without reserve to the cause of truth,” Notre Dame hires atheists who deny that absolute truth even exists. Scholars who are branded “Catholic apologists,” or too polemical, meanwhile,

are shunned.

Defenders of the status quo say there is a weak Catholic supply chain in the arts and humanities—they claim that “all the really smart Catholics have gone into law or medicine or business,” Miscamble notes. Applicants are dismissed as “not good enough” if they lack the “imprimatur of an elite graduate school (the Ivy League, Chicago, Berkeley, or Stanford, with an occasional stoop down to Michigan).” Unless the university’s trustees seize the initiative, requiring two-thirds of all faculty hires to be Catholic, schools such as Notre Dame will surrender their distinctiveness, abandoning the prospect of creating communities “animated by the spirit of Christ,” Miscamble says.

John T. McGreevy, one of Miscamble’s successors as chair of the Notre Dame history department, says that

The University of Notre Dame is now embroiled in a growing dispute over whether it is hiring enough Catholics.

Miscamble ignores certain pesky facts.

Much of the work of a professor in a Catholic university is not confessional, McGreevy says. Rather, it involves the cultivation of areas of expertise that “resonate with the long, rich heritage of Catholic Christianity.” These include medieval philosophy, sacred music, the sociology of religion, and political theory. History classes are more likely to focus on religious history and on Latin America and Europe than at other institutions. To that end, Notre Dame has hired Protestants, Muslims, Jews, and non-

believers who are all enthusiastic about the university’s mission.

But McGreevy agrees that Notre Dame students need the “witness of Catholic intellectuals attempting to live out faith commitments in the modern world.” The problem truly is numbers, he says. Only six percent of the tenure-track scholars in the arts and sciences or business at the nation’s top universities identify themselves as Catholic, according to a 2006 study. Moreover, two-career couples are often reluctant to relocate to small college towns such as South Bend, Indiana, where one spouse may wind up without a job or underemployed. Despite these challenges, however, more than half of Notre Dame’s faculty hires last year were Catholic. Properly understood, McGreevy says, his university’s Catholic identity is quite secure.

SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY

The Checkers Terminator

THE SOURCE: “Checkers Is Solved” by Jonathan Schaeffer, Neil Burch, Yngvi Björnsson, Akihiro Kishimoto, Martin Müller, Robert Lake, Paul Lu, and Steve Sutphen, in *Science*, Sept. 14, 2007.

MARION TINSLEY, THE GREATEST checkers player who ever lived, managed to narrowly beat a computer in 1992. Today, the best a player of his caliber could manage would be a tie. That’s because computer researchers at the University of Alberta have managed to “solve” the game. By analyzing an opponent’s moves, their program can

counter with a winning strategy or, at worst, play to a draw.

Despite checkers’ reputation as an easy game, solving it, say Jonathan Schaeffer and his colleagues, “pushes the boundary of artificial intelligence [AI].” The game’s possible positions, with 24 pieces moving on 32 black squares, amount to 500 billion *billion* (5×10^{20}).

Efforts to construct a checkers-playing program capable of beating a human began back in the 1950s with pioneering work by Stanford

University’s Arthur Samuel; in 1963 his program won a game (but not the match) against a capable player. That victory was “heralded as a triumph for the fledgling field of AI,” say the authors, all of whom are connected with the University of Alberta. But it was the Chinook program, launched by Schaeffer in 1989, that took on Tinsley (whose declining health prevented him from finishing a rematch). The version of the program available at the time relied on a database of all possible endgame positions once players were down to four pieces a side. Anything beyond that outstripped existing computing capacity.

The current version of Chinook employs a five-piece-or-fewer-per-side endgame database (39 trillion