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Fundamentalist Education Comes of Age

by Ed Hindson



I recently read Mark Noll's "Evangelicals and the Study of the Bible," an essay in *Evangelicalism and Modern America*. Interestingly, the statistical tables in this account of the rise of academic excellence in Evangelical education did not include a single reference to Fundamentalist colleges and schools. Was the author merely being selective, or does he think Fundamentalist schools do not qualify for such a report on academic prowess?

This prompted me to consider the rise of academic excellence in Fundamentalist higher education, whose coming of age parallels that of Evangelical institutions. The Evangelical schools are not the only ones receiving academic recognition. And though accreditation has been questioned by some Fundamentalists, and rejected by others, several Fundamentalist schools have recently received full regional accreditation.

On the graduate level, regional accreditation has been given to Liberty Baptist Seminary (Virginia), Grace Theological Seminary (Indiana), Mid-America Baptist Seminary (Tennessee), Grand Rapids Baptist Seminary (Michigan), and Baptist Bible College Graduate School of Theology (Pennsylvania). These schools hold strongly to biblical inerrancy. Several others are now pursuing accreditation. Among those who have refused to be accredited, Bob Jones University has a long-standing record of academic excellence.

The Fundamentalist label is worn by at least three of the largest Christian schools in America: Bob Jones, Liberty, and Tennessee Temple. The combined enrollment of these institutions exceeds 15,000 students! In addition to the 6,000 undergraduate students at Liberty, there are 16,000 Liberty Home Bible Institute students studying externally by audio-cassette. This fall Liberty University will launch its new School of LifeLong Learning, a fully accredited external study program on videocassette, which

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has an immediate goal of enrolling 10,000 undergraduate and graduate students.

Clearly, any serious evaluation of the impact of Christian higher education in America must include a thorough representation of Fundamentalist institutions. These schools are representative of the growing academic quality and influence

of Conservative Christianity on the American public. Fundamentalist schools are not only training ministers and missionaries, but teachers, journalists, coaches, counselors, psychologists, historians, social workers, nurses, musicians, artists, scientists, newscasters, and technicians. We have the manpower that can make the difference in the next generation.

Most Fundamentalist schools are less than 50 years old. They were born out of the separatist controversies of the 1920s and 1930s. Others are newer still. They represent the resurgence of Conservative Christianity in American academic life in the 1980s. Increased academic commitment, growing enrollments, and evangelistic fervor make the future bright for Fundamentalist educational institutions. To those who wonder whether this is just a passing phenomenon, we would say, no, we have only just begun! ■

Year	Institution	Accrediting Body
1968	Western Baptist College, Oregon	Western Assoc. of Colleges and Schools
1974	Cedarville College, Ohio	North Central Assoc. of Colleges and Schools
1976	Grace College, Indiana	North Central Assoc. of Colleges and Schools
1977	Grand Rapids Baptist College & Seminary, Michigan	North Central Assoc. of Colleges and Schools
1978	Baptist Bible College, Missouri	American Assoc. of Bible Colleges
1980	Liberty University, Virginia	Southern Assoc. of Colleges and Schools
1984	Baptist Bible College of Pennsylvania	Middle States Assoc. of Colleges and Schools
1984	Christian Heritage College, California	Western Assoc. of Colleges and Schools
1984	Tennessee Temple University, Tennessee	American Assoc. of Bible Colleges
1985	Clearwater Christian College, Florida	Southern Assoc. of Colleges and Schools