THE SPIRIT OF EDWARD JOHN CARNELL

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Without question, for Fuller Theological Seminary the decade of the fifties belonged to Edward John Carnell. To sit under his teaching was to be mesmerized by the sheer brilliance of his mind and to be, at the same time, captivated by his passion to restore the imperative essence of love as the moral power of an orthodoxy gone cultic. His somewhat eccentric preoccupation with studying every page of a loose-leaf copy of the dictionary while walking up Madison Avenue from his home to the seminary each morning, wearing a black bowler hat, only led credence to his rapier-like mind when he dissected the semantic jungle of a student’s awkward question.

As student body president during the 1958-1959 academic year, I came to understand a bit more about the professorial persona. Carnell often shared with me aspects of his own tortuous faith pilgrimage, from his early fundamentalist church background through the corridors of a rationalist philosophy under the teaching of Gordon Clark at Wheaton, touched by the power of grace in the lectures of Reinhold—Continued on next page

I COME TO FULLER—I MEET LASOR

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William S. LaSor came to teach Old Testament at Fuller Seminary as the school’s seventh professor in the fall of 1949, the seminary’s third year of existence. He brought with him a wealth of experience. After receiving the B.D. degree (equivalent to an M.Div.) from Princeton Seminary, he had completed his Ph.D. in Semitic Languages and Literature earlier that year—a degree he earned at the same time that he chaired the Department of Religious Studies at Lafayette College.

Bill LaSor also had a wealth of ministerial experience, and his concept of and contribution to ministry was varied. He maintained an active membership as a chaplain in the Naval Reserve and in the National Military Chaplain’s Association, and was regularly involved in the recruitment and training of numerous military chaplains during his years at Fuller.

In those days the evangelical world was still suffering from the polarization created by the fundamentalist-modernist controversies of the previous 30 years. It was a time marked by a rampant anti-intellectualism, a time that—Continued on next page
Niebuhr at Boston, and finally teased and tormented by the existential passion of Søren Kierkegaard. At the end, he attempted a work in apologetics that scandalized his rationalist friends and stimulated a new evangelical ethos among his students. His book *Christian Commitment—An Apologetic* (Macmillan, 1957) marked the culmination of this journey, though he himself hoped it would be a threshold to a renaissance of orthodoxy under the healing and transforming power of love. It was not to be.

I listened to him once, in San Francisco, address more than a hundred prominent business persons about the distinctive quality of love as the quintessence of an evangelical theology. Upon returning to Pasadena, I went to his office and asked him to give that same talk in chapel. "This is why we are at Fuller Seminary," I reminded him. "My fellow students need to hear this." His reply was a revelation of his own personal pathos and an insight into the precarious relationship he had with many of his own faculty. "Ray," he said, "With my faculty sitting in the front row, I wouldn't survive. They would eat me alive."

His premature death was a tragic loss to those of us who knew and loved him. His legacy remains in hundreds of former students, whose lives, theology, and ministries were forever shaped by his passion for truth in the name of love. Today, despite the changing faces and facades, one can still catch the spirit of Edward John Carnell blowing in the breeze at Fuller Seminary.

Edward J. Carnell characterized one day in his class by saying, "Thirty years ago we evangelicals gave up our schools, our seminars, and our libraries, bought a secondhand circus tent and some sawdust, and started over."

In part, Fuller Seminary was founded to reverse that anti-intellectual trend, and Bill LaSor took up that task with great seriousness. He made significant and lasting contributions to scholarly studies, particularly in the area of Dead Sea Scroll research. But he also took up another part of the task with missionary zeal, that of broadening our concept of ministry. In the fifties and sixties at Fuller, one thought of ministry mainly in terms of the pastoral calling. Bill LaSor undertook to challenge students to broaden their concept of Christian ministry to include Christian scholarship and teaching.

I came to Fuller as a student in September 1954, having been very recently brought to faith in Christ, and feeling a strong sense of call to pastoral ministry. But then I met Bill LaSor. When I evidenced an aptitude for language and literature in the first half of the summer course in Hebrew, LaSor pushed me into an extra course in Hebrew reading during the second half. And he told me that he wanted to see me in his Akkadian class that fall. But because I was thinking in terms of pastoral ministry, I never registered for the course. LaSor, however, caught me in the hall on the second day of classes and challenged me to look seriously at whether God might not be calling me to a teaching career. I took the course, and all the other courses he taught, and did eventually broaden my conception of ministry. And I could name with each of my fingers other students from those early days who could tell a similar story.

In a tribute to LaSor in 1978, while he was still living, David Hubbard wrote, "Those of us who sat under his tutelage in work for advanced degrees owe him a special debt.... The amount of time he is willing to give away to inquisitive students knows almost no bounds. I can remember asking questions whose answers required his taking the time to browse and discuss a shelf of books. Yet I never felt he regretted the cost."
One day when he was a Fuller student, Matthew Welde (1957) was called to the Office of the President and offered an unusual field education opportunity. Would he accept a call to "The Church on Horseback"? "It probably doesn't fit the Reformed criteria for a church, but they need pastoring," said President Carnell.

Matthew was finishing his degree at Fuller after having completed the first year of his B.D. at Dallas. He had been an active preacher in street ministry and rescue mission work since the age of 13, and had a voice that Clarence Roddy likened to Harry Emerson Fosdick's (although the theology didn't match). Matthew learned that several Hollywood young people, in the habit of riding their horses on Sunday mornings, had been challenged to gather for church as they rode. So their Sunday routine began with church, with the kids mounted and the parents seated in a corral, 50-100 altogether, followed by trail riding and showmanship.

Mickey Rooney's sons, and Candice, the daughter of Edgar Bergen, were regulars during those years, although the parents didn't always come for the service. Matthew held nothing back of the good news of the gospel in his preaching: "They sure knew the way of salvation when I got through," he said. He distributed pocket-sized, or "trail-sized" Bibles to each of the equestrians, and continued to serve the church until his graduation.

That Sunday morning hour wasn't Matthew's only ministry commitment. Through Charles Fuller, a whole variety of ministry venues were opened to students. Matthew remembers preaching to Salvation Army audiences with Dr. Fuller in the audience. Fuller always accompanied the teams, but never preached himself, if Fuller students were there to do it. And he always had a word of commendation for them afterwards.

Matthew Welde's relationship with President Carnell bore fruit, as Carnell visited him and his wife in Florida a few years later—just at the time that Welde's ordination with the Presbyterian Church was at issue. Carnell spent an afternoon meeting with presbytery officials and helped convince them of the quality of Welde's seminary training. (Welde
says they were more concerned about the Dallas connection than about Fuller!)

Nor has Welde shirked further opportunities to take up ecclesiastical challenges, whether pastoring a drive-in church (before Robert Schuler) or maintaining a consistent witness for the authority of Scripture and the task of evangelism within the Presbyterian Church.

Talking to Welde, one is struck by the contemporary feel of parts of his story. Surely the opportunities before the church today have much more to do with the faithfulness of the service that ministry professionals give, than with their traditional or nontraditional form.