

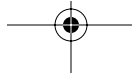


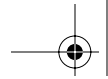
## Introduction

MUSLIMS HAVE THEIR DOME OF THE ROCK, Scots the Stone of Scone and Americans claim Plymouth Rock. Plymouth Rock is uniquely American. The rock under the dome in Jerusalem may or may not be the one on which Abraham was to sacrifice Isaac, the Stone of Scone is unlikely to be Jacob's pillow, but Plymouth Rock is supposedly grounded in history. When the Pilgrim Fathers set anchor in Plymouth harbor, so legend has it, they stepped onto shore on a small stone that is now an American icon. "The Rock has become an object of veneration in the United States," early tourist Alexis de Tocqueville reported to Europeans on his return home. Plymouth Rock, with the date 1620 carved into it, is a symbol of everything America represents. The Pilgrim Fathers arrived in the New World committed to a society based on liberty and equality.

And faith. These Puritans were deeply religious. On their ship, the *Mayflower*, before they made landfall, they had compacted "to plant the first colony in the northern parts of Virginia" "for the Glory of God, and Advancement of the Christian Faith, and the Honour of our King and Country." Plymouth Rock epitomized America's deep religious roots: several of the original thirteen colonies were established by rigid Calvinists, pious Quakers, runaway Baptists, evangelicals all.

As the Second World War was in its final year, thirteen men gathered at Plymouth Rock to reclaim the heritage which it represented.<sup>1</sup> On 18 August 1944 they signed their own compact, *An Evangelical Manifesto*. Two world wars in the past thirty years had signaled "the failure of modern philosophy, both idealistic and naturalistic, to save western culture from disintegration and collapse." There was a "general ethical irresponsibility" growing inevitably out of "a man-centered philosophy of life and





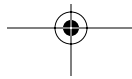
growing moral decadence.” The group described itself as the Plymouth Conference for the Advancement of Evangelical Scholarship. For the next generation the signatories would signal a renaissance of American evangelicalism.

They covered the gamut of contemporary evangelical academic leadership. Three of them were from the Bible school tradition, two came from Wheaton College, billed the Harvard of fundamentalism. Another represented a conservative ethnic tradition that had preserved the faith through linguistic and cultural isolation. Five came from breakaway institutions founded to protest the rise of liberalism in the historic theological seminaries. Their leader was minister of a historic church founded in 1809 to rise above the flood of Unitarianism that swept away the Puritan and Pilgrim heritage of New England. Harold John Ockenga would champion a new evangelicalism, a new seminary, just as he founded a new National Association of Evangelicals two years previously. His name was at the forefront of evangelical hopes for a new and brighter future after their cataclysmic isolation, decline and division in the 1930s.

And the remaining two, neither of them American, might have felt like intruders to a sacred mystery as they stood by Plymouth Rock as the other eleven made their vows. Both were immigrants, both raised Christian Brethren, both came to the United States to pursue a dream. John Bolten arrived from pre-Nazi Germany because he had confronted Hitler, a guest in his home, after making an indecent gesture to his wife. With an uncanny knack for anticipating the future, he found safety in exile and reestablished his fortune in a deserted mill town in Massachusetts’ Merrimac valley. He was the host for the event, picked up the tab at the Mayflower hotel, and made himself indispensable.

He would be a self-styled godfather of evangelicalism in the postwar period, his anonymous charities funding a variety of significant advances, including that of Billy Graham. At the time he had forged a close bond with his pastor, Harold John Ockenga, and enabled Ockenga’s enterprises. But it was with Stacey Woods that he bonded, and the story of Stacey Woods for the next thirty-five years is inextricably interconnected with John Bolten Sr.

The other outsider was a short bantamlike Australian. C. Stacey Woods was definitely the odd man out: he had neither money nor academic distinction. He did not share the fundamentalist legacy that energized the other men. His was a wider vision. His burning passion was to reclaim the Moody heritage of student evangelism and missionary recruitment that had been abandoned as the Student Volunteer





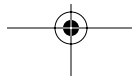
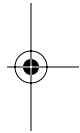
Movement, birthed at Northfield at the western end of Massachusetts in 1886, lost its vision and sank into a liberal morass. Stacey was the only one invited to speak on a nonacademic subject, evangelism. After only five years in America his organization was gaining a reputation for effective outreach. His was a fresh voice—enthusiastic, visionary, nontraditional.

Evangelism and the university simply did not connect in the thinking of most evangelicals in 1944. Historically they had watched each of their institutions slip out of their control. From Harvard to Yale and now Princeton, these schools who had taken their patrimony were no longer friends but enemies of orthodox Christianity, bastions of liberalism where no evangelical would venture without certain apostasy and abandonment of everything he or she had learned in the fortresslike churches they had been raised in. Christian young people went to Christian post-secondary schools: Bible institutes, missionary training schools or a college such as Wheaton or Taylor that would protect the faith of impressionable young people.

Such isolationism usually meant that evangelicalism was ill-equipped to engage the culture. There was an atmosphere of defeatism as intellectual pursuits were regarded as unspiritual. Few evangelical educators had graduate degrees from reputable institutions, let alone earned doctorates. The signatories to the Plymouth manifesto were a new breed. Three of them had Harvard Ph.D.s, Harold Ockenga received his from the University of Pittsburgh five years earlier, and others had (or were working on) similarly impeccable credentials. There was an atmosphere of renewed confidence, of optimism even.

Still there were those heathen universities. What was to be done about them? At the undergraduate level, it was thought, very little. Impressionable young people could easily be swayed by “the assured results of modern science.” They might be mocked by professors who brought up the 1926 Scopes “Monkey” Trial. A whole procession of children of evangelicals had gone out into what, to their parents, was a spiritual wilderness as a result of challenges to their faith while at secular schools. The pressure was too much, the resources they could muster to counterattack too few, and the protective fears on the part of the Christian community too great.

And then there was this young Australian saying that not only could evangelical young people survive in a hostile university environment, they could evangelize their peers, challenge them to faith, go from defense to counterattack. It seemed that postwar America might be hospitable to just such a Christian engagement with the university. Reports were coming back from the military overseas about the need



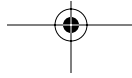


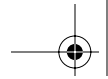
for religious belief, given the barbarity and evil of the war. From the Pacific, where islanders converted through missionaries rescued stranded Allied invaders, to heroic Christian resistance to Nazi tyranny in occupied Europe, faith gained new credibility. These were the men who would overcrowd the universities under the U.S. GI Bill and Canadian government educational subsidies. A new seriousness marked the postwar undergraduate, often older and seasoned by war. No longer were there goldfish swallowing contests, finding how many could squeeze into a telephone booth or so many wild drinking binges. The reality of the Holocaust, the rise of Soviet Communist imperialism and the mushroom cloud of an atomic bomb contributed to an earnest new generation of university students.

The meteoric rise of Stacey's organization, the InterVarsity Christian Fellowship, in the immediate postwar period can only be explained by this sea of change in the collegiate culture. In 1946 the organization hosted its first missionary conference. The Urbana Student Missions Convention (or simply Urbana), as it was later known, made InterVarsity a major player in the evangelical world as the missionary movement shifted from the historic denominations to faith missions. Missionary recruitment, shrunk by the depression and religious liberalism, regained momentum as a result of InterVarsity's emphasis on crosscultural evangelism. Seminaries, particularly but not exclusively the ones whose beliefs meshed with the movement, increased their enrollment thanks to IVCF alumni/ae. InterVarsity Press, founded in the United States by Stacey, gave evangelical scholarship new credibility.

Although he had both a quick mind and verbal fluency, Stacey Woods never regarded himself as an intellectual. He was too much a man of action and a pioneer to be engaged in head trips. He left a detailed philosophy of the university to his longtime colleague and successor Charles Troutman. He did, however, spot trends and was always thinking ahead. His shrewd insight into human nature meant that he could connect quickly with people across intellectual, cultural and linguistic divides. He had a prodigious memory for names, places and events, though his ability as a raconteur could obscure the accuracy of his verbal recall. His energy was unbelievable; his impatience with inefficiency and hypocrisy legendary. Only a man with his extraordinary gifts could have accomplished what he did.

Stacey Woods was a man of paradoxes and contrasts. He still remains to many of those who knew him best an enigma. His concern for the glory of God meant that he could never be a self-promoter. Essentially humble, even shy (though few would have said that of him) and very private, he was voluble, occasionally talked





too much, and could deeply antagonize individuals, even those once closest to him. He refused to accept numerous honorary doctoral degrees, not out of false modesty but rather the concern that such recognition obscured the sacrificial contribution of others to the movement to which he had given his life.

C. Stacey Woods has been dead for almost a quarter century. His contribution to evangelicalism, particularly in mid-twentieth century America but also to worldwide Christianity, has never been recognized or acknowledged except in his immediate circles. To follow his life in this book the reader will suddenly see the interconnectedness of so much of evangelical life in that era, the incredible networking that went on as well as the far-ranging interests of a man who started with a vision and went on to change the face of contemporary evangelicalism. It is time that his story is told. He helped American fundamentalism to come out of its self-imposed exile and engage the university, be responsible in addressing the culture, and raise evangelicals to new levels of intellectual and academic accountability. And his warm, spiritual passion inspired a movement and a generation.

