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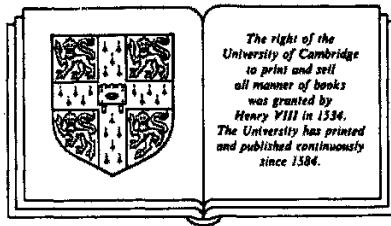
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# The making and unmaking of an evangelical mind

The case of Edward Carnell

RUDOLPH NELSON

*State University of New York at Albany*



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**For Shirley White Nelson**

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Let me say a word about that anxious breed of younger men who are conservative in theology but are less than happy when they are called “fundamentalists.” These men are both the cause and the effect of a radical atmospheric change within American orthodoxy.<sup>1</sup>

Edward Carnell

Man’s anxiety in leaving embeddedness is the one most powerful antagonist of his world-openness.<sup>2</sup>

Ernest G. Schachtel



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## Preface

In an attempt to explain the cluster of influences and circumstances that led him to write a biography of Harry Crosby, an obscure American expatriate of the 1920s, Geoffrey Wolff said: “It seemed to me . . . that any story that had stuck to my memory fifteen years was trying to tell me something.”<sup>1</sup>

Edward Carnell is surely just as obscure a figure as Harry Crosby, except to Protestant evangelical Christians of a certain vintage, and this preface would normally be the appropriate place for me to explain who he was, how I finally decided his story had been trying to tell *me* something for years, and why readers today – even those who feel no kinship whatsoever with evangelicals or fundamentalists – ought to be interested in a book about him.

However, since those questions are an integral part of what I have tried to do in the first chapter, I will not discuss them here. What I will do instead is offer my thanks to a number of people.

One of the first and most discouraging discoveries I made when I actually began working on this project, rather than merely thinking about doing it sometime, was that no collection of Carnell papers existed. Shortly after Edward Carnell died, his widow sold the family home, gave away his books and his opera recordings, and (with one or two exceptions) destroyed all his correspondence and personal papers – not for any dark, conspiratorial reason but simply because she assumed they were of no value to anyone. I was astonished to find out that Fuller Theological Seminary had no files of correspondence and papers covering Carnell’s five-year presidency – again with a few notable exceptions that I found scattered in cardboard boxes in a seminary basement storeroom. I had his published books and articles, of course, and official personnel files, but in the absence of these other primary source materials, I had to depend heavily on Carnell’s family, friends, colleagues, college classmates, and

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former students for the enriching details that are the lifeblood of this kind of book.

I am grateful most of all to Shirley Carnell, Edward Carnell's widow (now Mrs. John Duvall), without whose gracious cooperation the project would never have gotten off the ground. Carnell's older brother and sister (Paul Carnell and Dorothy Carnell Campbell) provided invaluable information and insights about their family life in the Midwest during the 1920s and 1930s. Donald Weber, Carnell's brother-in-law, provided a uniquely valuable perspective, both as a member of the family and as Carnell's intimate colleague in the administration at Fuller Seminary.

Gradually, as I interviewed and corresponded with scores of people, the informational lacunae began to fill up with facts, anecdotes, and reminiscences. Whereas it would be folly to try to list all the contributors, a few deserve special mention: John Graybill, the late Carlton Gregory, James Tompkins, the late Joseph Bayly, James Mignard, Paul Jewett, William Buehler, Bernard Ramm, Dan Fuller, Lars Granberg, David Hubbard, Joe Cosgrove, Lloyd Dean, and the late Glenn Barker.

Three members of the fraternity of historians (in whose territory I am something of an interloper) gave me considerable guidance and encouragement. Professor William McLoughlin of Brown University, mentor and model, planted a new thought in my mind one afternoon in 1968 when he challenged me to make a serious study of my evangelical heritage. Later he did a thorough and penetrating critique of an early version of one of this book's chapters, which subsequently became a journal article on the Harvard fundamentalists. That article brought me in touch with Professor George Marsden, whose published work on American fundamentalism I had already read with respect and admiration. At the same time that I was completing this book, George was working on his forthcoming history of Fuller Seminary.<sup>2</sup> It was his discovery of an entire file of Carnell–Ockenga correspondence in the attic of the Ockenga house in Hamilton, Massachusetts, that filled in the biggest and most significant gap in the missing primary sources. Without his generous sharing of that find – and without his later comments and suggestions on a draft of the entire manuscript – this would have been a far less valuable book. Several years ago, Warren Roberts, professor of history at the State University of New York at Albany, asked me a leading question about my Carnell project on a drive down the interstate from Lake George. He listened intently and asked further questions for sixty miles, and has been an active source of support ever since.

Although Professor Hyatt Waggoner, former chair of the American Civilization program at Brown University, played only an indirect role in the evolution of this book, his influence for good on my life and career at a crucial stage was incalculable and I am greatly in his debt.

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I wish to thank also for their timely and generous assistance the staffs of various educational institutions and libraries: Wheaton College, Westminster Seminary, Harvard Divinity School, Boston University, Fuller Theological Seminary, Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, the Billy Graham Center at Wheaton College, and the State University of New York at Albany. Two sabbatical leaves of absence from my responsibilities at SUNY-Albany enabled me to work full time on the project at two different stages. A grant from the SUNY-Albany Small Grants Program eased the financial pressure during the second of those leaves in the 1984–5 academic year.

Of the many people at Cambridge University Press who have made important contributions to this book, I have known only a few by name. In thanking David Emblidge, Katharita Lamoza, Susan Conn, and Joyce Blanchette, I intend also to express my sincere appreciation to all of their colleagues. As my manuscript made its way through the publication process, the skill and thoughtfulness of the Cambridge personnel lent credibility to my illusion that mine was the only book on their production schedule.

Finally, there is nothing quite like the experience of sharing married life with another writer who is just as deeply involved in her own creative projects. Let the dedication of this book to Shirley Nelson stand as a grateful recognition of the manifold ways in which she contributed to it, as a joyful affirmation of her central importance to everything I do, and as a witness to my love and affection.

*Albany, New York*  
*May 1987*

*Rudolph Nelson*

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