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Jesus With a Genius Grant

Fuller Theological Seminary is teaching that smart Christians can have it all--science and the Bible, body and soul, left and right. To some, that's apocalypse now. To others, there's no turning back.

By Alan Rifkin

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The woman behind the name tag nancey murphy looks marooned, albeit cheerfully. even in a swirling sea of misfits—a New York Academy of Sciences conference on Madison Avenue—she stands out. She has green eye shadow, dumpling features, eyes that hum on the edge of surprise. Eventually a scientist from Denmark wanders over to ask a collegial question, which she answers—but in a herky, Captain Kirk cadence, as if she's replying by satellite.

Then the lights flicker and it's time for Murphy's presentation—the first slot on the day's program, which says she is a professor of Christian philosophy at Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena. No wonder she looks marooned. Usually Christian

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academics don't address international bodies of the scientific elite. If they do, they fly in from a liberal school of religion such as Claremont in Southern California or Yale, not from one of history's bellwethers of the born-again, conservative, evangelical Christian world—a place founded by a fundamentalist radio preacher, a place chartered to train pastors and missionaries and supply scholarly defenses of the Bible.

Signing a Statement of Faith every year in the miracles of the New and Old Testaments does something to a scientist's social standing. Once at a San Diego event, Murphy plugged a book by the acclaimed neuroscientist Paul Churchland—half of a team with wife Patricia Churchland who assert that religious experience is all a pack of neurons. Murphy's support was an olive branch from religion to science, but with a thorn: She also insisted there were levels of the self greater than their parts, up to and including what Christianity calls the soul. To which one scientist, invoking the scientific martyrs of the Dark Ages, complained that he would "get nervous if she asked to borrow a match."

Still, if science wanted a token Christian ambassador it could wrap its brain around, Murphy was a pretty good choice. She was vaguely postmodern. Before coming to Fuller in 1989, she had studied at Berkeley's Graduate Theological Union, a school so broad-minded that she considered marketing a bumper sticker: I LOST MY FAITH AT GTU. Hard-core fundamentalists—those whose bible on science and history is the Bible—tended to despise her. New York University neuroscientist Joseph LeDoux, a self-described atheist who organized the New York conference, first warmed to Murphy at a Vatican Observatory meeting in Poland. She had been known to argue that God and Darwin were compatible—just the sort of utterance that makes biblical watchdogs groan: What next? As if to answer, she later told Reason magazine that cloning was inevitable, and that Christians should start thinking about how to use it.

Now, in Manhattan, she'd be restating her case that nothing in the Bible requires belief in any extra-physical, billowing-sheet, astral sort of soul—that smart Christians had come alongside modern science. The good news for fundamentalists was that this would make the coming resurrection a physical, Lazarus-style event after all, just like the Bible said.

Murphy's life's work, when you looked at it, was an attempt to reconcile Everything: Advance religion a little farther under the radar of the secular world. Win respect from a scientific milieu

that equates Christian scholars with the people who read "Left Behind" novels. Meanwhile hold on to the conservative, born-again donor base, whose organized criticism Murphy fears.

After Murphy speaks for 20 minutes (modestly, tersely), she is swarmed by curious questioners. Even Patricia Churchland, after meeting an evangelical who doesn't believe in an afterlife with actual harps, proclaims that Murphy "seems like a sensible person." But what she seems above all else is new and strange.

For a while now, Murphy and her peers at Fuller Theological Seminary have been advancing a Christian philosophy that reconciles science and Bible, body and soul; opposes both war and abortion; goes to Hollywood parties and even hosts them; and leapfrogs the two-party political divide. All while refusing to renounce its conservative-evangelical tag.

Significantly, this philosophy has begun attracting a vocal vanguard of younger Christians who call themselves "Post-Evangelicals." Many of them Fuller graduates, many of them Murphy-trained, they have tasted the peyote of postmodern ambiguity and been steadily coming on. Now they want their intellectual heroes to seize the moment and stick flowers in the gunstocks of the evangelical Christian establishment. ("The Chuck Colsons of the world," says San Francisco neuropsychologist Kate Rankin, a former Murphy disciple, "will not be postmodernists in about 15 to 20 years, but the Christian world will.")

Biblical inerrancy to this crowd is not so much right or wrong as a divine waste of time. "It's not where we're going to land the plane," says Tony Jones, a Fuller alumnus who is a leader of The Emergent Coalition, an international post-evangelistic group, and a doctoral candidate at Princeton. "My money is on a post-evangelical future. And Fuller is uniquely poised to be the one seminary that ushers in this epistemological shift."

Not only is Fuller the largest evangelical seminary in North America—and arguably the most influential, by number of pastors and educators trained—but its philosophy is gaining pivotal play both in Christian and secular arenas. Fuller professor Glen Stassen—a former strategist for the Nuclear Freeze campaign—completed the policy paper on the ethics of peace and war for the powerful, and historically conservative, National Assn. of Evangelicals. Fuller president Richard Mouw led a group of six faculty members to mainland China for groundbreaking talks with the government's religious affairs bureau. Professor Robert K.

Johnston—a cinema expert and specialist in the "dialogue between theology and popular culture"—was named president of the American Theological Society, a 92-year-old body whose past leadership includes theological revolutionaries Paul Tillich and Reinhold Niebuhr.

Most recently, on NPR's "Talk of the Nation," Fuller professor Edmund Gibbs expounded on his latest book, "ChurchNext," which calls upon evangelicals to show an "unshakable faith" while confessing that "our knowledge is indeed partial . . . Such frank admissions will strengthen rather than weaken our testimony." To traditionalists, he's talking in oxymorons. But the conservative cutting edge, which is what Fuller is trying to be, hears a death of arrogance that is both inevitable and the future's greatest hope.

Even as fundamentalist Christians of all stripes appear to be in ascendance—among Catholics, the wishful thinkers desiring to roll back the calendar to pre-Vatican II; among Protestants, the burgeoning Asian converts fiercely conservative in practice—there is also a groundswell of support for just the sort of Third Way theology that Fuller embodies, an unmet yearning among believers to reconcile the most compelling features of two divergent worlds.

"Just last year, we did a convention in San Diego, expecting 300 or 400 people," says Jones of The Emergent Coalition. "And we had to stop registration when it reached 1,100. In the last year, doing book proposals, I've spoken to half a dozen publishers desperate for anything on this emergent church we're talking about. Even evangelicals in the California mega-churches have a sneaking suspicion that something is missing in their success, that someone's about to pull the rug out from under them."

The story of Fuller Theological Seminary, and of the battle for Christianity's future, has its origins in a fall. Not the fall from Eden, although that keeps replicating in and through everything—the woodworm in the Ark.

This fall was the divide between liberal and fundamentalist Protestants, which has been widening almost since the Reformation. In the seed of the Protestant revolt—which held that Bibles, not popes, were authoritative, and that every believer was a priest—you could see a new, individualist authoritarianism waiting to be born: the mascara of Tammy Faye Bakker, the emphasis on personal responsibility, the separatist-oath Bible-thumpings of James DeForest Murch, former editor of the magazine of the National Assn. of Evangelicals, who in 1949

labeled the interdenominational peacemakers in his ranks "Ecumaniacs."

Murch wasn't even talking about liberals. He had been complaining about a new breed of conservative such as Billy Graham, who feared that evangelicals could become irrelevant through isolation. Vanquished for yoking up with "nonbelievers" on his crusades, Graham would later found the glossy evangelical monthly *Christianity Today*, not to please fellow fundamentalists, but to compete for the souls of liberal intellectuals.

Graham's allies were among the founding constituents of Fuller Theological Seminary. In 1947, radio evangelist Charles Fuller and Boston minister Harold Ockenga acquired land on South Orange Grove Boulevard, later moving to two suburban blocks north of Colorado Boulevard and west of Lake Avenue, with the Pasadena-inflected hope of becoming the theological world's Caltech. Fuller never meant to alter the fundamentals of Christian conservatism. It meant to smarten up those fundamentals, rub elbows in the marketplace, send into the world an educated class who could hold their own in a worldly debate. Thus the seminary would marry fundamentalism with modernity—a union that, various observers say, went the way of the Apple. There were three crucial bites.

The first was a remarkable 1955 speech by the school's second president, Edward Carnell—it disaffected the Christian far right in an afternoon. Issuing a call to faculty and students for tolerance of opposing viewpoints—the courage to listen to one's theological enemies—Carnell didn't stop to notice the murmurs of alarm. Specifically he had been interpreted as potentially too soft on historical criticisms of the Bible.

Bruised by a series of snubs, Carnell succumbed to severe depression. Shortly after his resignation, he died after taking an overdose of sleeping pills.

The second bite, dramatized in George Marsden's history "Reforming Fundamentalism," began as a fascination with the ideas of Swiss theologian Karl Barth, who upset the fundamentalist crowd with his metaphorical takes on scripture. ("The virgin birth has nothing to do with hymens," he reportedly antagonized one audience.) The climax, at the end of the 1960s, was a change in Fuller's official Statement of Faith. The Bible, though still "infallible," was no longer "inerrant on all matters of science and history"—an abdication that some fundamentalist

Christians still commemorate on their calendars as Black Saturday.

News of a third bite began surfacing only recently. In 1995, historian Roger Olson wrote about a "new mood, if not movement" in theology called "Post-Conservatism." Almost no one at Fuller publicly embraces the term (Nancey Murphy likes "postmodern evangelical" — it's early yet), but Olson linked Fuller faculty to its tenets. Foremost among these is a spirit of intellectual humility. Post-conservatives see doctrines based on the Bible, whether liberal or fundamentalist, as merely human — fallible interpretations through which divine light can leak from time to time. But there are other identifying traits, too, which at least one Christian magazine has charted, scorecard-style. You're post-con if: You still believe that the Bible is morally authoritative, that Jesus atoned for your sins, that He rose again and that He orders you to spread the good news — simultaneously emphasizing some of Jesus' most daring and progressive views on peacemaking, socioeconomic justice, forgiveness and engaging the culture.

This development brings heightened stakes. With 80 full-time faculty and 4,300 graduate-level students studying to be pastors, missionaries and psychologists, Fuller has the numbers. Under the guidance of president David Hubbard, between 1963 and 1993, the school went from 300 students to 3,500, thriving to the consternation of theology's old-liners. But those forces have been fighting to be history's authors, too, as well as waiting for this new Goliath to self-destruct. When Hubbard retired, the search for a successor became a quest for someone to "stabilize the enterprise and answer the critics," according to John Huffman, board vice president of Christianity Today.

Alone at the tip of the selection pyramid stood former provost Richard Mouw, the then-53-year-old theologian with a common touch. He talked to gardeners. He fasted with Muslims. Steering a course between liberal slippage and conservative isolation, Mouw had been picked to answer Fuller's doubters with the magic of his personality — Christianity's magic, as the search committee saw it. "Search me, O Lord, and try my thoughts," is a strand of Mouw's beloved Psalm 139, with its surrender to uncertainty, its willingness to be proved wrong about everything.

It also made him a colorful president. Defending Harry Potter against the Bible Belt, palling around with film director Paul Schrader — all the while waxing nostalgic for the revival tents of

his boyhood—Mouw wore his oxymorons like a big fuzzy sweater ("Called to Holy Worldliness" is a typical Mouw book title). Above all, he aimed to restore confidence in the idea that Fuller's intellectual adventure, wherever it led, would not be the death of conservative Christian theology. Everywhere he presented himself as proof. Speaking to NPR in 1999, Mouw recited some of the fundamentals he'd been taught as a child: "That Jesus loves me, that there's a God in charge of history, that there's a book I can turn to for guidance," he said. "Now, I've nuanced those. But they're still the things I hold on to for dear life."

On a pretty day at Fuller, Richard Mouw's office feels airy and comfortably Craftsman, a crow's nest atop a flight of stairs that settle like knuckles, with a round table in the middle of the room and a private stock of Diet Cokes. There he sits in three-quarter profile with his arms folded high above his chest, imperially humble. Mouw has a great sheepdog face: kindly, with a lopsided chumminess. The room is understatedly arty—no Jesus coffee mugs—an office befitting a man chosen by God to think a lot and mingle with others. It's the office of a liberal Protestant, really—a suggestion that makes Mouw laugh too loudly.

Then he recovers with a story. "Hal Lindsey was the author of 'The Late Great Planet Earth,' a book that used to have the same kind of lowbrow following as a Tim LaHaye novel. Well, I recently met a very bright postdoctoral student, a really important thinker in philosophy, and I asked him, as I often ask people, how he became a Christian. What he told me, with some embarrassment, was that it was by reading that book by Lindsey. So, I may not read those books myself, even though there are good spiritual lessons in them. But the point is that God's in charge of history. And it's God who reaches people."

Outside, the campus dims and glows: a Kinkade painting with palm trees. The buildings are prairie and shingle-style with Snow White rooftops. On a walkway, the student body accomplishes that evangelical feat of looking both impressively diverse and mysteriously white bread. Women in bright shell tops seem as happy as women anywhere aside from the revelatory absence of navel rings and tiny T-shirts. Fuller looks like any Southern California college campus except that you could possibly study here.

A prayer garden at the western end is half outdoors and half in, beside a little brook and under skylights clad with dark vines. If the campus is a sort of shire within the city, the prayer garden is a

shire within the shire—a Land Before Tears, the place where scriptures go to be chiseled on golden plaques:

"Look to Him and be radiant, so your faces shall never be ashamed."

"Conform ye not to the world."

Of the three graduate programs at Fuller—Theology, Psychology and Intercultural Studies (formerly called World Mission)—Psychology is the most conformed to beer-drinking. Its students quaff Newcastle ales and debate theology, or they hike in the hills above Foothill Boulevard. And although all three schools hew to the same code of conduct (acceptable sex is married or none, and divorced faculty have to explain their marital breakdowns to a committee), alumni say that Psych students like to push the envelope.

The theologians are the eggheads. The world missionaries are the zealots. A few years back, a mentally ill man wandered on campus from the streets of Pasadena, touching off an interdisciplinary turf war that sounds like legend but is fact. The School of Psychology wanted to arrange for professional counseling; two faculty in the School of World Mission attempted an exorcism; and the School of Theology, mortified, tried to debrief him. Exorcism, they declared, really wasn't scriptural. The World Missionaries stood firm. In fact, they were moving to produce, in the manner of Caltech's map of earthquake faults, a district census of L.A.'s demonic strongholds, identifying mid-level demons reporting to a Demon Prince who reigned above them.

The fact that Mouw can hold such cultural strains together, while others cast stones, has set him apart throughout his political journey as an uneasy member of various mobs. He was a teenager during Fuller's founding years—the only child of a fundamentalist minister in New Jersey—but you could imagine him dreaming of this alternate universe, holding out for intellectual liberation the way Huck Finn waited for Tom. At age 14, having been taught that movies were sinful, he cracked under the strain of curiosity, hitchhiking to a theater in a neighboring town. The film was "Moby Dick" and harmless enough that Mouw concluded Satan's efforts to corrupt him were "fairly modest."

Later he thrived in robes, picking up degrees from Houghton, in western New York, the University of Alberta in Edmonton and the University of Chicago, before heading to Houghton again for a

doctorate of letters, and to Northwestern for a doctorate of laws. He taught philosophy and ethics for 17 years at Calvin College, never having quite escaped the Calvinist's central awareness of man's depravity. Mouw's regular guy-ness has a penitent's first cause.

Between intellectuals, civil rights activists (his boyhood hero was Jackie Robinson) and loyalists to the literal Bible, Mouw began searching for a form of cold fusion. He joined Students for a Democratic Society in the 1960s, lulled by the familiar atmosphere of radical hymn ("Is your all on the altar of sacrifice laid?"), but was repelled by strains of sexism and dogma. In 1972 he helped form "Evangelicals for McGovern," a disclosure he offers with a gleam—but this peters out to a fidgety de-emphasis: "I hope you report the nuances—I don't want to be portrayed as some kind of left-wing anti-American."

Toward progressives he's more happily contrarian (while keeping progressive enough that progressives don't dismiss him): He defends Fuller's Statement of Faith (not an oath, "oath sounds so . . . McCarthyist"), and seems to relish opportunities to put on afresh the amazement of childhood belief—the guilty pleasure of innocence. Paraphrasing C.S. Lewis and calling out common ground with the storytellers of Hollywood, Mouw remarks that the world loves a fairy story. "And here's the thing. The Gospel is a fairy story that's true. There really is a curse. There really is a dragon. But the amazing thing is: God sent His son. And those who trust Him will live happily ever after."

Put that on a wallet-sized card and go out to the corners of the city, and you have the traditional mission of worldly evangelism—the seminary at full hum. But Fuller's involvements have been taking on an increasingly post-evangelical look. In the wake of a terrorist strike, say, or a study on marital conflicts, Fuller theologians are performing credibly in the mainstream and moving beyond conventional proselytizing.

In a field normally the province of academic heavyweights, the seminary received a \$2-million federal grant to study youth violence. A recent Los Angeles Times feature on infidelity quotes Fuller researcher David Atkins for sheer science, sans preaching. A New York Times primer on George Bush's religious malapropisms has Mouw do some genial translations. The Wall Street Journal includes among its recommended books on the workplace a volume by Fuller professor Robert Johnston about the perils of overwork. Past and present Fuller faculty and graduates

have founded popular outfits such as the mega-dating service Eharmony and headed institutions ranging from the Salvation Army to L.A.'s Union Rescue Mission to the General Assembly of Presbyterians.

Fuller's potential impact upon the world of mental health can also be mapped. In 2000, the California Psychological Assn. elected Fuller alumnus Dean Given as its head, following a veritable trend (Alaska, Colorado, Maine) of Fuller scholars heading state psychological associations—a development that promises to erode religion's shibboleths about pop psychology and vice versa.

Fuller graduates like to see themselves as mavericks, and when they infiltrate the culture, a certain air of self-invention goes with them. Alumnus Bill Doulos, who helped found Pasadena's Union Rescue Mission, changed his name to "Dulos" because it was Greek for servant. Craig Detweiler, who co-wrote the sneakily religious teen movie "Extreme Days" and has been interviewed on NPR discussing the role of evangelicals in the movie business, named his newborn son "Theo," short for Theology.

With about equal parts missionary zeal and fatal attraction, Fuller has been especially interested in popular culture—both exasperating fundamentalists and unnerving the heathen. Take the visual arts, a realm stigmatized by generations of Protestant taboo. Fuller's designs in this area are personified by professor William Dyrness, who teaches in the Brehm Center for Worship, Theology and the Arts. "You can tell someone's religious beliefs by what they're afraid of," Dyrness says.

A Mouw recruit by way of New College Berkeley, Dyrness is gaunt and bearded, like Van Gogh, and wrote his dissertation on the Catholic Expressionist painter Georges Rouault, whose carnival-of-the-damned subject matter (the clowns and prostitutes, rouge and half-proud shame) would break the heart of an Old Testament prophet. Since then, in various publications, Dyrness has been stating and restating a manifesto for artistic vision: "to see the neighbor in terms of the child of God they may become . . . see the anomie of suburbia and recognize in it the excitement of the biblical story . . . see prostitutes in the tragic light of God's purposes for Eve." The occasional evangelistic grudge overtakes Dyrness ("Why is it nobody prints the fact that Andy Warhol went to Mass every day?"), but like a street-corner preacher, he counts even animosity as backhanded praise. If modern art slings dung on the Virgin Mary, it shows they care.

Likewise Hollywood, which the seminary has courted through the annual City of the Angels Film Festival at the Director's Guild, a four-day event in the fall attended by such panelists as directors Wes Craven and Tom Shadyac and Hollywood Presbyterian pastor Lloyd Ogilvie, who became chaplain to the U.S. Senate in 1995. The event—part mating dance, part marketing op for the studios—and its 2,500 or so attendees explore topics such as the quintessentially Christian heart of "Fight Club" (Jesus: You have to give your life to find it) to the theology of evil in slasher films ("Horror stands bravely alone in pop culture in seeing evil as an objective, irrational force," Mouw says).

Just as idiosyncratically, Fuller's antiwar endeavors—a series of letters challenging President Bush from within his own evangelical base—have been exploding stereotypes. Harvard fellow Jim Wallis, who edits the evangelical-for-justice magazine *Sojourners*, says, "What Fuller is opening up to the future is a Christian social conscience that won't be bound by categories of liberal or conservative. And I think they're just going to get more and more supporters."

Wallis and Mouw met in Vietnam-protest circles—Mouw the suddenly politicized evangelical from the University of Chicago, Wallis the suddenly returning Christian academic—and took parallel paths to outsider influence. *Sojourners* has 80,000 readers, which is either amazingly few given its stature, or amazingly high given its independence: Exposé of right-wing hypocrisy ("Where Do Enron Executives Go to Church?") stand next to attacks on left-wing smugness ("as irritatingly knee-jerk as the radical right").

"Let Falwell and Robertson stand in a room with Rich and me," Wallis says. "Falwell knows very well I'm not a liberal—and that's why he has trouble agreeing to talk to me in person. He would love it if all the people who disagreed with him were liberals. Well, Rich Mouw is in the same position. He's a conservative, but he's concerned about peace and poverty and justice. Which means he rankles partisans on both sides, because living as Christians is what will ultimately make us different from both Republicans and Democrats. And Fuller is the exemplary theological seminary in the country trying to stake out this new territory."

One of the biggest public relations problems that Fuller has is with the Internet watchdogs of the Christian right. They are only a little more meticulous than the watchdogs of Christian radio.

On some Web sites, donors to Fuller are deconstructed. One, Eli Lilly & Co., is outed anew for its "checkered past" as an alleged supplier of LSD. Fuller trustee Anne Huffman, a Newport Beach psychotherapist, is outed as a steering committee member of Renovaré, a Christian movement that strays apparently into pop-psych and Eastern-Zen wickedness. (Huffman says she didn't know she was on Renovaré's letterhead, and that you can wind up on such an honorary list for practically nothing.)

"Avoid schools like Fuller seminary, which have foundered on the shoals of liberalism," Dr. Robert Morey advises a caller on KFSG-AM (Faith Defenders, his ministry is named). So reliant upon biblical absolutes that his deference resembles arrogance, or vice versa, Morey complicates matters with a despairing chuckle that can repel or draw listeners according to their hearts. Like many critics, he is fixated with Nancey Murphy, and interviewed by phone he nearly takes you by the hand to move your pen. "Fuller Seminary. Is a Post. Christian. Graduate. School of Religion. Just the fact that they employ Nancey Murphy is sufficient to make this charge." By reducing man's soul to a mortal and bodily entity, Murphy is guilty of heresy, he says. "We all kiss babies and love dogs. I take none of it personally. But if I were questioning Dr. Murphy what she believes God is, I bet you dinner at Denny's it isn't the God of the Bible. Jesus said you cannot kill the soul. And if you don't believe Him on that, then how can you believe the Bible on His two natures?"

There also have been broadsides from within. Last fall, when Mouw passed through Minnesota for a Fuller fund-raising event, Tony Jones, the youth-movement Post-Evangelical, popped up his hand with questions. How did Mouw feel about this new epistemology? Why didn't Fuller require some courses in poetry along with theology? Mouw groaned (Jones' version)—he had conservative donors to woo. Mouw went on to tell the crowd what a hard time conservatives were having at Glendale Presbyterian Church battling a variety of liberal influences—adding, as Mouw would, that Fuller was still committed to dialogue with everyone. Up leapt an older pastor: Just the fact that Fuller had hosted a conference with Barbara G. Wheeler (the New York-based Auburn Theological Seminary director who declared that homosexual acts are "sometimes to the glory of God") showed conservatives that Mouw had betrayed the cause. Jones' take: Mouw is stretching at the seams. "Here he was standing in a room in the Midwest with a bunch of pastors with really bad ties. And they're ripping him just for talking to liberals."

At a faculty retreat on the eve of the 2002-'03 school year, Mouw tried to offer reassurances: Fuller indeed could stay both truly conservative and truly strong. Liberal seminaries, Mouw told his audience, were by nature splintered into Balkans of special interest. Whereas Fuller shared a conservative core commitment at the end of the day, and that was a good thing, so long as it held. But will it?

"I don't side with those who see Fuller's conservatism deteriorating, but I won't say it couldn't happen," says John Huffman of Christianity Today. "That's the risk of theology. Any institution is only one generation away from going in the wrong direction by trying to accommodate to the culture."

To others, the risk is calculated and worthwhile. Fuller professor Glen Stassen says other seminaries have been consciously attempting to clone both the Fuller charter and its mystique. He names them, like electoral states: Northern Baptist Theological Seminary in Chicago, The International Seminary in Prague, Asbury Theological Seminary in Kentucky. To the extent that such seminaries train new Christian academics—training the trainers, in essence—Fuller's influence, as Nancey Murphy points out, might be expected to "grow geometrically, not arithmetically."

Even the seminary's donors (the biggest nowadays tend to be foundations such as Lilly, Sequoia, Irvine, and Lowenstein) may feel that Fuller's sheer iconoclasm means they're investing in the real thing: Jesus with a genius grant.

As for Murphy herself, glimpsed between episodes of inciting the young, to whom should one liken her? Socrates? Jesus? Hillary? Back in Pasadena, she sits in her academic cubby of an office, bookshelves stuffed with the conversational saltpeter of philosophical treatises, along with one guilty pleasure: a mystery by Sue Grafton.

Here Murphy converses with the usual herky, cheerful control. She talks about Fuller's goal of preempting its critics on the Christian right. (She tried to rush to print her last book of essays on the soul, "before the subject became known as an area of conflict.") She talks about Fuller's goal of reaching out to the secular Left ("probably the best I can hope for is to get scientists to drop the more off-the-cuff religious remarks"). She talks about her concern for the homeless, and how grateful she is to belong to a school "on the side of the angels." Lastly she talks about her

new book in progress, which will concern morality. She has a working title: "Did My Neurons Make Me Do It?"

Catchy yet timeless. Godly yet edgy. And still—in the sense of exporting her gospel to what Richard Mouw has called "the mosh pits and malls of civilization"—*evangelical*. Murphy beams. She is hoping for a crossover hit.

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