Jacobsen and Jacobsen's "No Longer Invisible: Religion in University Education" - Book Review

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In *No Longer Invisible*, the Jacobsens add to their growing corpus of work related to Christian faith and scholarship. In addition to many articles, they have offered *Scholarship and Christian Faith: Enlarging the Conversation* (Oxford, 2004) and *The American University in a Postsecular Age* (Oxford, 2008). This latest contribution is of a piece with their earlier work, but the word *new* in the title tells something important: in this book, the Jacobsens demonstrate that we are moving further into the postsecular territory they charted in their 2008 volume. We are shifting further away from the secularized academy that so many authors have identified and lamented in the last several decades.

The Jacobsens begin by noting that anyone exploring the academy's new awareness of religion ought to clarify the key term, *religion*. Many secularists tend to favor a narrow definition, limiting the term to recognized world religions and excluding other worldviews and visions of the good life. In their opening chapter, the Jacobsens give a few, rather persuasive pages over to their own inclusive understanding of religion. In chapter 3, they return to the question of what the key term actually means, this time in the context of reporting on interviews they conducted with professors and students. Those interviews reveal that people attach a vast range of meanings to the term. Some equate religion and spirituality, while others differentiate the two, attaching negative aspects—such as rules—to religion and assigning positive aspects—such as personal meaning—to spirituality. Tied to this starkly differentiated assigning of what we might call baggage, the students and professors the Jacobsens interviewed also confirm that
there is a vast variety of opinion as to whether, overall, religion has been a good or bad force in society.

As they make their way through _No Longer Invisible_, the Jacobsens' readers will come to understand that clarifying these key terms early in the book was not just some necessary clearing of underbrush to simplify the real work of the book. Rather, as it turns out, understanding what people mean by religion and grasping the perceived overlaps with and differences from spirituality are both central to understanding what the Jacobsens heard from those they interviewed. Late in the first part of the book they offer a three-part distinction to help their readers grasp their conclusions: historic religion, public religion, and personal religion. The historic category includes traditional understandings of religion. By public religion they mean that each society has a language for telling its own idealized story, a much broader understanding of religion than the historic one. Personal religion, on their account, overlaps most with spirituality, often strikes the leaders of historic religions as anathema to their program, and tends toward the idiosyncratic. Much later in the book, they point to Steve Jobs's 2005 commencement address at Stanford as a great illustration of personal religion; in essence he told his listeners to be true to themselves.

In the second half of _No Longer Invisible_, the Jacobsens explore what they call six sites of engagement, points at which religion will or must encounter its context at this time. These include religions literacy, treated in chapter 5, which contains survey data about general religious knowledge that will leave many readers feeling either good about their own literacy levels or afraid for a world that doesn't connect the Koran with Islam or the Dalai Lama with Buddhism. Chapter 6 deals with the need for interfaith etiquette; in fact its final paragraph claims that the future of the world depends on our developing ways to get along with people of other faiths.

Chapter 7 raises a number of questions related to knowledge. How do believers understand the world? More pointedly, how do nonbelievers view claims to religious knowledge? A troubling question emerges from this chapter: how pluralistic—one might say generous—are we willing to be with the one who views the world differently from the way we do? In chapter 8, the Jacobsens challenge their readers to rethink civic engagement, and they encourage colleges to see the educational potential of such engagement.

Chapter 9, on convictions, underlines again the need for a nuanced
understanding of religion. How do students and professors deal with their own deepest convictions and those of the people around them? The Jacobsens offer a handy schema of answers to that question: anonymity (keeping one’s convictions secret), transparency, and advocacy. In their treatment of the sixth site, character and vocation, the Jacobsens call for institutions to attend to these important questions, which universities for some decades have tended to say were not their business.

During the earlier stages of this volume’s development the Jacobsens had worked with a different title: *The New Soul of American Higher Education: Six Questions Every University Should Ask*. With the inclusion of the word *soul*, that title would have situated this new book in the running conversation that has already included books by Marsden (whom they mention), Bears, Benne, and Henry and Beatty, as well as a two-decade-long tradition of articles. Alas, the title lacks *soul*. But the book does not, and readers will be rewarded for their effort if they read this well-written and inviting volume.

Ken Badley