

Introduction

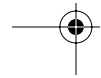
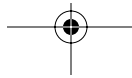
A Mind for God

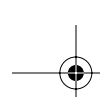
"I've preached too much, and studied too little."

BILLY GRAHAM



As I write, my oldest daughter is a freshman at one of the leading universities in the United States. In her first history course, her professor announced to the class that the entire historical record that Christianity is based on is untrue: Jesus never claimed to be the Messiah; none of his followers saw him as divine until centuries after his death; the Gospels are not first-hand accounts; Jesus was not a religious figure as much as he was a political one; there was never an intent to form any kind of "church"; there were dozens of "gospels," all of which were thought to be sacred by followers of the Jesus movement; and the four Gospels in the Bible today





are riddled with discrepancies and errors.

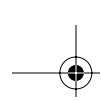
In order to pass her first exam, she had to write that Jesus was born in Nazareth, not Bethlehem, deny Pauline authorship of 1 Timothy, and maintain that the four canonical Gospels are in complete disagreement on the major facts surrounding the death of Jesus—including when he was crucified, whether it was after the Passover or before, and whether Judas committed suicide.

In many ways, this was tame. A study of faculty members at U.S. colleges and universities found that 67 percent of faculty members either “strongly” or “somewhat” agree that homosexuality is as acceptable as heterosexuality. Eighty-four percent support abortion rights, and 75 percent support extramarital cohabitation. Fewer than a third described themselves as regular churchgoers.* When the Kansas Board of Education approved new science standards for teachers in public schools that questioned Charles Darwin’s teachings on evolution (merely allowing the *idea* of “intelligent design” to be discussed), the director of the National Center for Science Education responded, “Those kids are in for a big shock when they go to college, because they’re going to learn that what they had been taught by their teachers in high schools is a lot of rubbish.”

Little wonder that cultural observers from Christian perspectives, such as Charles Colson, offer the following concern: “With the ever-increasing number of college professors who use their

*Notes can be found at the back of the book, beginning on page 115.



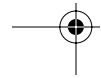
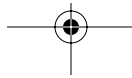


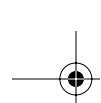
classrooms to indoctrinate students, rather than educate them, the views expressed and the lack of viewpoint diversity is deeply disturbing.”

I will never forget my daughter calling me almost in tears over the statements made by the professor about her faith. Even with a firm worldview coupled with years of reading and instruction that enabled her to know how spurious the professor’s claims were, she was emotionally shaken that her most deeply held values and convictions had been defamed and assaulted so vigorously. Even more, her heart was breaking over the three hundred other students in the class who sat passively, taking notes, accepting the professor’s statements uncritically as fact.

Such volleys against faith come at us from every quarter and at every age: *The Da Vinci Code*, the bestselling novel to date for the twenty-first century, suggesting that Jesus was far from divine, sexually involved with Mary and bore a child; the most influential and popular film series in contemporary cultural ethos, *Star Wars*, propagating Eastern pantheistic thought; culture wars erupting over homosexuality and gay marriage, electoral politics, and the law; the debate surrounding evolution, intelligent design, and public education.

Far more often than not, our minds are not keeping up. It is a moment of both peril and promise; the peril is that when the public square is uniquely open to spirituality and hungry for visionary ideas, the mind of the Christian is often found empty, passive, and





more reflective of the world at hand than the world to come. But the promise is that Christians can stride forward and engage the world at the point of its great need.

If the promise is fulfilled, it would not be the first time that the Christian mind has seized its moment.

In 1995 Thomas Cahill came out with the provocatively titled book *How the Irish Saved Civilization*. “Ireland,” contended Cahill,

had one moment of unblemished glory . . . as the Roman Empire fell, as all through Europe matted, unwashed barbarians descended on the Roman cities, looting artifacts and burning books, the Irish, who were just learning to read and write, took up the great labor of copying all of Western literature.

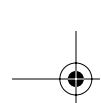
Then missionary-minded Irish monks brought what had been preserved on their isolated island back to the continent, refounding European civilization. And that, Cahill concludes, is how the Irish saved civilization.

But there is more at hand in Cahill’s study than meets the eye. Beyond the loss of Latin literature and the development of the great national European literatures that an illiterate Europe would not have established, Cahill notes that something else would have perished in the West: “the habits of the mind that encourage thought.”

Why would this matter?

Cahill continues his assessment: “And when Islam began its medieval expansion, it would have encountered scant resistance to its





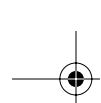
plans—just scattered tribes of animists, ready for a new identity.” Without a robust mind to engage the onslaught—and a Christian one at that—the West would have been under the crescent instead of the cross.

Never before have the “habits of the mind” mattered more. As Winston Churchill presciently stated in his address to Harvard University in 1943: “The empires of the future will be empires of the mind.” Oxford theologian Alister McGrath, reflecting on Churchill’s address, notes that Churchill’s point was that a great transition was taking place in Western culture, with immense implications for all who live in it. The powers of the new world would not be nation-states, as with empires past, but ideologies. It would now be ideas, not nations, that would captivate and conquer in the future. The starting point for the conquest of the world would now be the human mind.

But this time we may need more than the Irish to save us.

“We may talk of ‘conquering’ the world for Christ. But what sort of ‘conquest’ do we mean?” writes John Stott. “Not a victory by force of arms. . . . This is a battle of ideas.” Yet there are surprisingly few warriors. Those who follow Christ have too often retreated into personal piety and good works, or as one BBC commentator I heard over the radio while jogging one morning in Oxford said, Christians have too often offered mere “feelings” and “philanthropy.” Speaking specifically to the challenge from Islam, he added that what is needed was more “hard thinking” applied to the issues of the day.



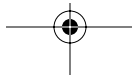
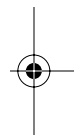
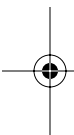


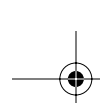
What remains to be seen is whether there will be any hard thinkers to do it. The peril of our day is that when a Christian mind is most needed, Christians express little need for the mind, and as a result, even less resolve to develop it. There is even a sense that an undeveloped mind is more virtuous than one prepared for battle. Richard Hofstadter, in his Pulitzer Prize-winning book *Anti-Intellectualism in American Life*, identified “the evangelical spirit” as one of the prime sources of American anti-intellectualism. Hofstadter points out that for many Christians, humble ignorance is a far more noble human quality than a cultivated mind.

Such devaluation of the intellect is a recent development within the annals of Christian history. While Christians have long struggled with the role and place of reason, that the mind *itself* mattered has been without question.

Even the early church father Tertullian (c. A.D. 160- c. 220), who had little use for philosophy and was famed for his statement “What indeed has Athens to do with Jerusalem?” never questioned the importance of the mind. Tertullian’s conviction was that Greek philosophy had little to offer in terms of informing the contours of Christian thought, akin to the apostle Paul’s quip to the Corinthian church that the foolishness of God is wiser than the wisdom of men (1 Corinthians 1:25). But Tertullian, as well as Paul, would have held any anti-intellectualism that celebrated an undeveloped mind in complete disdain.

Deep within the worldview of the biblical authors and equally



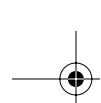


within the minds of the earliest church fathers was the understanding that to be fully human is to *think*. To this day we call ourselves a race of *Homo sapiens*, which means “thinking beings.” This is not simply a scientific classification; it is a *spiritual* one. We were made in God’s image, and one of the most precious and noble dynamics within that image is the ability to think. It is simply one of the most sacred reflections of the divine image we were created in. It is also foundational to our interaction with God. As God himself implored through the prophet Isaiah: “Come now, let us reason together” (Isaiah 1:18).

This was certainly the conviction of Jesus, who made it clear that our minds are integral to life lived in relationship with God. When summarizing human devotion to God as involving heart, soul and strength, Jesus added “*and mind*” to the original wording of Deuteronomy, as if he wanted there to be no doubt that when contemplating the comprehensive nature of commitment and relationship with God our intellect would not be overlooked. The apostle Paul contended that our very *transformation* as Christians is dependent on whether our minds were engaged in an ongoing process of renewal in light of Christ (Romans 12:2-3).

All the more reason to be stunned by the words of Harry Blamires, a student of C. S. Lewis’s at Oxford, who claimed that “there is no longer a Christian mind.” A Christian ethic, a Christian practice, a Christian spirituality, yes—but not a Christian *mind*. More recently, historian Mark Noll concurred, suggesting that the





scandal of the evangelical mind is that there is not much of an evangelical mind. “If evangelicals do not take seriously the larger world of the intellect, we say, in effect, that we want our minds to be shaped by the conventions of our modern universities and the assumptions of Madison Avenue, instead of by God and the servants of God.”

And even if we do not lose our *own* minds, we will certainly lose the minds of others. This is the double-edged threat of our day; apart from a Christian mind we will either be taken captive by the myriad of worldviews contending for our attention, or we will fail to make the Christian voice heard and considered above the din. Either way, we either begin to think or lose the fight.

That is the purpose of this small book: *thinking Christianly*. While short in length, it sketches out a very large challenge and investment: to develop our minds in light of a biblical worldview that is then used to think Christianly about the world. From this we will be able as Christians to respond to the culture we live in and help the culture respond to the Christ we follow. This was the clarion call of the apostle Paul, who reminded the Corinthian church that “we do not wage war as the world does. . . . We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ” (2 Corinthians 10:3, 5).

