

AWAKENING FROM ANTI-INTELLECTUAL SLUMBER:
A CLARION CALL TO DEVELOP THE MIND

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*"The greatest danger confronting American evangelical Christianity is the danger of anti-intellectualism."*⁸⁶

~ Charles Malik

The statement above was expressed nearly thirty-five years ago by the well-known statesman and theologian Charles Malik (1906-1987). Unfortunately, Malik's sentiment has not been heeded by the evangelical world, which has continued in its intellectual malaise at different levels. Today, evangelicals comprise the largest percentage of religious groups in America, while remaining largely uniformed and ignorant of why they believe what they believe and how to convey that belief.⁸⁷ This abandonment of developing the mind follows the current anti-intellectual trajectory of the culture. Several centuries ago, western culture divorced "faith" from knowable "facts," and it also became obsessed with feeding what psychologists call the "empty self." Unfortunately, in each of these cases, the church followed suit.

As a result of evangelical's anti-intellectualism in these matters, the Gospel and Christianity in general have come to be viewed as unintelligent, irrational, delusional, and even immoral, and evangelism has been made more difficult. If the church is to have evangelistic strength and vitality as well as be taken seriously intellectually in twenty-first century America, it is imperative for it to awaken from the anti-intellectual slumber by developing the mind.

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⁸⁶Charles Malik, "The Other Side of Evangelism," *Christianity Today*, November 7, 1980, p. 40.

⁸⁷According to The Pew Forum, evangelical protestants comprise 26% of the religious population in the United States. See The Pew Forum On Religion and Public Life, "U.S. Religious Landscape Survey"; internet, <http://religions.pewforum.org/maps>, accessed 26 July 2012.

Anti-intellectual Slumber: The Problem Stated

The anti-intellectual problem of the church has its roots in American culture, despite the strong emphasis upon and money allocated for education. This is substantiated by many studies completed on the education of American youth.⁸⁸ Evidently, American youth are simply following American adults. Diane West, in her book *The Death of the Grown-up*, relates that readers as old as twenty-five are reading young adult fiction which is written for teens, and that the average age of those who play video games is now thirty. Shockingly, the average age of those who watch Sponge Bob Squarepants is now between the ages of eighteen and forty-nine.⁸⁹ To be sure, West's point is that adults act more like children today than in the past, but another strong implication is that the child-like preoccupation with "playing" has now continued on into the adult years when such matters should have been put aside for much more serious, intellectual matters.

American thinkers and educators have also noticed the anti-intellectual trend of the culture. The economist and social analyst Thomas Sowell comments,

Many studies have shown how ignorant our high school

⁸⁸See, for example, *Pursuing Excellence: A Study of U.S. Twelfth-Grade Mathematics and Science Achievement in International Context* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 1998); *A Nation Still at Risk: An Education Manifesto* (Washington, DC: April 30, 1998); Larry Stedman, "An Assessment of the Contemporary Debate over U.S. Achievement," in *Brookings Papers on Education Policy 1998* (Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution, 1998); Alliance for Excellent Education, "How Does the United States Stack Up? International Comparisons of Academic Achievement," 2008 Fact Sheet; internet, http://www.all4ed.org/files/IntlComp_FactSheet.pdf; accessed, 5 July 2012. For more exhaustive information, see also the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) studies put out by OECD on their website at <http://www.oecd.org/pisa/pisaproducts/>, accessed 16 August 2012.

⁸⁹Diane West, *The Death of the Grown-Up: How America's Arrested Development Is Bringing Down Western Civilization* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2007), p. 2.

and even college graduates are of basic knowledge that was once taken for granted. What is even more alarming is how lacking they are in the ability to think systematically. Such elementary things as defining terms and going step-by-step from evidence to conclusions have given way to emotional rhetoric and automatic responses to buzzwords and visions. As someone who has taught at several colleges, I am all too painfully aware of the erosion of thinking over the years.⁹⁰

Because of this lack of ability to think critically, people no longer attempt to persuade others' of their view based upon argumentation and reason, but upon rhetoric and demagoguery.⁹¹

Unfortunately, the church has followed the culture's lead in anti-intellectualism. The popular researcher on religion and culture, George Barna, has detailed the biblical and theological illiteracy problem among Americans, including the church. He has found that many professing Christians cannot identify more than two or three of the disciples; only 14% of born-again Christians can provide an accurate description of the Great Commission; and only 50% of Christians can recite John 3:16.⁹² The majority of evangelicals believe that Benjamin Franklin's statement that "God helps those who help themselves" is found in the Bible.⁹³ Indeed, Barna has found

⁹⁰Thomas Sowell, "Playing with Fire on Church Burnings," *Orange County Register*, June 21, 1996, Metro Section, 7; quoted in J. P. Moreland, *Love Your God With All Your Mind: The Role of Reason in the Life of the Soul* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 1997), p. 128.

⁹¹See J. P. Moreland, *Love Your God with All Your Mind: The Role of Reason in the Life of the Soul* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 1987), p. 128. Even my own teaching experience in multiple colleges and universities lends support to these observations. Year after year I encounter a number of students incapable of grasping the simplest of arguments and unable to communicate effectively.

⁹²See the Barna Group website at <http://www.barna.org>. See also George Barna, *Think Like Jesus* (Nashville, TN: Integrity, 2003). See also Al Mohler, "The Scandal of Biblical Illiteracy," October 14, 2005; internet, <http://www.albertmohler.com/2005/10/14/the-scandal-of-biblical-illiteracy-its-our-problem>; accessed, 30 July 2012; Collin Hansen, "Why Johnny Can't Read the Bible," *Christianity Today* vol. 54, May 24, 2012; internet, <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2010/may/25.38.html>; accessed 30 July 2012.

that about only half of evangelicals have a biblical worldview.⁹⁴ Barna's conclusion is that "American Christians are biblically illiterate."⁹⁵

Biblical and theological illiteracy is especially pervasive among youth, whether Christian or not. Authors Christian Smith and Melina Denton, in their ground-breaking study on religious views of American teenagers, describe the worldview that the majority of teenagers subscribe to as "moralistic therapeutic deism."⁹⁶ This worldview accepts that God created the world but has nothing to do with it until one needs personal therapy to overcome a conflict. Otherwise, God just wants his creatures to be good, seek happiness, and feel good about one's self. Considering the depths to which biblical and theological literacy have fallen among the youth, it is reasonable to suggest that many adults, too, subscribe to moralistic therapeutic deism. After all, the apple does not fall far from the tree.

When it comes to anti-intellectualism, then, the American church has come to reflect the culture. This lack of thinking and intellectual engagement among Christians, as the Christian historian Mark Knoll noted some time ago, is a scandal.⁹⁷ The church—the very institution which God created to be "salt and light" in a dark, bitter world—has little idea what it believes and why. It appears that in many cases it is completely satisfied with this lack of knowledge.

⁹³George Barna, *The Second Coming of the Church* (Nashville, TN: Word, 1998), p. 7.

⁹⁴To see how Barna defines a biblical worldview, see "Most Adults Feel Accepted by God, But Lack a Biblical Worldview," August 9, 2005; internet, <http://www.barna.org/barna-update/article/5-barna-update/174-most-adults-feel-accepted-by-god-but-lack-a-biblical-worldview?q=preachers>; accessed 5 July 2012.

⁹⁵Quoted in Center for Bible Engagement, "Bible Literacy and Spiritual Growth: Survey Results," November 2006, 1; internet, http://www.centerforbibleengagement.org/images/stories/pdf/cbe_survey_results.pdf; accessed 30 July 2012.

⁹⁶Christian Smith and Melina Lundquist Denton, *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2009).

⁹⁷Mark Knoll, *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1994), p. 3.

How the Church Fell Asleep

A question that is germane to this problem of anti-intellectualism in the church is, how can we account for the church's anti-intellectual slumber?⁹⁸ To find the answer of how anti-intellectual slumber took over the church, we must ask how culture began to lose its way in intellectual endeavors, especially in the area of biblical and theological study, or faith.

⁹⁸It should be noted that the church has not always been this way. For example, see David S. Dockery, *Renewing Minds: Serving Church and Society through Christian Higher Education* (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2007), p. 7.

The Divorce of Faith from Knowledge

For centuries Christianity was the dominant worldview in western culture. Practically speaking, Christianity's rise as the dominant worldview in the west was due to the passage of the Edict of Milan in AD 313. This Edict made by the Roman ruler of the west, Constantine (ca. AD 272- 337), and the Roman ruler of the East, Licinius (ca. AD 263-325), provided toleration of all religions and outlawed the persecution of Christians. In effect, the Edict made Christianity the religion of the Roman Empire and allowed it to remain dominant throughout the Medieval period.

Throughout this period, schools were developed for the instruction of not just theology but philosophy, which included science and math among other subjects. A guiding principle of education at the time was that revelation, i.e., the Bible, gave knowledge concerning God while human reason gave knowledge concerning topics of philosophy.⁹⁹ Faith and philosophy (including science and math) were viewed to be complementary; the two, when understood properly, never contradicted. Faith and "facts" about the world were both knowledge. It was only the *method* by which these objects of knowledge were obtained that was different.

This understanding began to shift radically in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. During this time period, the Enlightenment challenged how knowledge is obtained and what should be considered knowledge. It rejected the belief that faith is knowledge. Knowledge was viewed by many of the time as obtainable only by human reason or observation. These were the only means by which something could be "proven."

The result of this radical epistemological shift was a divorce of faith from knowledge. "Knowledge" as such became equated with "science." Faith, on the other hand, was about religious beliefs; it was mere opinion and could not be shown to be objectively true. The effect of this on developing the mind is obvious: the only things worth pursuing intellectually are those things that are observable or can be demonstrated by human reason. Faith was no longer considered to be a part of the mind,

⁹⁹This type of thought was exemplified by the great medieval theologian and philosopher Thomas Aquinas. See Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, 1a 1, 2, reply, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (New York: Benziger Brothers, Inc., 1947).

but of subjective “feelings” or emotions based upon personal experience. David Dockery summarizes the impact of the Enlightenment that occurred in the western culture upon religious belief and the intellect:

The rise of the Enlightenment thought was a watershed in the history of Western civilization; it was a time when the Christian consensus was broken by a radical secular spirit. The Enlightenment philosophy stressed the primacy of nature, a high view of reason and a low view of sin, and an antsupernatural bias; and it encouraged revolt against a faith-affirming perspective on education.¹⁰⁰

Although many Christians continued to pursue intellectual endeavors in science as well as theology throughout the Enlightenment, the anti-intellectual approach to faith found its way into the mind of the church. The fertile ground to accept the divorce of faith from knowledge was laid early in evangelicalism with the advent of American revivalism of the Second Great Awakening. Revivalism was known for its tent meetings in which preaching was often an appeal to the emotions, frequently to the exclusion of the mind.¹⁰¹ Charles Finney (AD 1792-1875), for example, was known for his sermons that appealed to emotions and called people to the “anxious bench” for conversion.

To be sure, some good came from these meetings. People were evidently converted to Christ. But as Moreland points out, the revivals overemphasized personal conversion to the exclusion of serious study and reflection, along with preaching that tugged at the heart strings rather than exposition of sound doctrinal teaching.¹⁰² American revivalism was fertile ground for the faith/knowledge divorce paradigm to take root.

To be fair, however, the emotional, existential flavor of the early American frontier revivals was not the only significant factor that provided fertile ground for Christians to accept the divorce of faith from knowledge. Another influence was biblical scholarship of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Many

¹⁰⁰Dockery, *Renewing Minds*, pp. 7-8.

¹⁰¹Walter A. Elwell, ed., *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, 2nd ed (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2001), s.v. “Revivalism” by M. E. Dieter: 1028-1031 for a brief overview of revivalism.

¹⁰²Moreland, *Love Your God*, p. 23.

biblical scholars of this time came to accept the Enlightenment mentality that human reason and observation alone determine what is true. When this was applied to Scripture, the effects were disastrous for faith claims and ideas: faith claims became mere statements of personal, subjective experiences.¹⁰³ This paved the way for the church to accept the idea that faith is something entirely different than knowledge.

The acceptance of this principle has resulted in anti-intellectual faith among Christians. Faith is now entirely bereft of the mind. As illustrative of this point, when the divorce of faith from knowledge began to appear, Christians responded by isolating themselves from intellectual endeavors of higher education. Not many Christians arose to defend the reasonableness of Christianity and rebut the claims of critics. Rather, they grew suspicious of scholarship and considered academics as a demon to be exorcised.¹⁰⁴

In like manner, many Christians today continue to hold a similar view, believing that science, philosophy, and the like are inimical to faith. To substantiate their view, they often point to Colossians 2:8: “See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the word, rather than according to Christ.”¹⁰⁵ We also hear phrases like, “Christianity is not a religion; it’s a relationship,” and “the

¹⁰³Two representatives of such scholarship include Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834) and Rudolph Bultmann (1884-1976). Schleiermacher’s work *The Christian Faith* was very influential. It may be found in various translations, e.g., Friedrich Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith*, H. R. MacKintosh and J. S. Stewart, eds. (London and New York: T & T Clark, 1999). See also Stanley Grenz and Roger Olson, *20th Century Theology: God and the World in a Transitional Age* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1992), pp. 44-45 for how Schleiermacher viewed religion and other subjects. Bultmann was known for his “demythologizing” of the New Testament. This method is seen well in Rudolph Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament*, 2 vols. (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1951, 1955). For more information on Bultmann’s method, see Rudolph Bultmann, “New Testament and Mythology,” in Reginald H. Fuller (New York: Harper & Row, 1961).

¹⁰⁴See Moreland, *Love Your God*, p. 24.

¹⁰⁵All Scripture references are taken from the New American Standard Bible, updated edition (1995), unless otherwise noted.

disciples did not have formal education; they were a bunch of ignorant fishermen.” Such phrases are probably uttered from the lips of Christians and even ministers out of a motivation to be pious. Unfortunately, acceptance of these popular clichés shows a belief in the principle that Christianity cannot really be *known*. Why? Because such phrases are identical to saying that faith is not about knowledge. Faith, after all, is nothing that can be “proved,” so it is argued.

Faith is now, therefore, experienced-based, or existential. Christians now have an excuse to be in “intellectual neutral” about their faith.¹⁰⁶ It is all about “loving Jesus” and “having a relationship with him”; it is not about showing how “the faith which was once for all handed down to the saints” (Jude 3) is objectively *true*. Of course, a question that often bubbles to the top of this boiling pot of religious experience is, how can a person have a relationship with someone without *knowing* who he is, without some kind of knowledge? Ultimately, the believer’s faith suffers. As William Craig notes, a result of such faith bereft of knowledge is “an immature, superficial faith. People who simply ride the roller coaster of emotional experience are cheating themselves out of a deeper and richer Christian faith. . . . They know little of the riches of deep understanding of Christian truth, of the confidence inspired by discovery that one’s faith is logical and fits the facts of experience, and of the stability brought to one’s life by the conviction that one’s faith is objectively true.”¹⁰⁷

Moreover, how can a Christian evangelize if the faith is only about experience and has little to no correlation to reality? If Christianity is not objectively true but is merely a subjective experience, then why should anyone believe in it? Why should anyone take it seriously? Christianity might as well be a means to help people overcome their problems, along with their therapist and workout instructor.¹⁰⁸ Unfortunately, with the help of Christians themselves, this is how many have come to view Christianity. “Religion is now viewed by many as a placebo or emotional crutch,” states Moreland, “precisely because that is

¹⁰⁶This phrase is borrowed from William Craig, *Reasonable Faith: Christian Truth and Apologetics*, 3rd edition (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008), p. 20.

¹⁰⁷Craig, *Reasonable Faith*, p. 21.

¹⁰⁸Moreland, *Love Your God*, 132.

how we often pitch the gospel to unbelievers.”¹⁰⁹ As the church continues to accept the culture’s idea of faith, the church’s evangelistic strength and vitality will continue to wane, and Christianity itself will continue to be taken less seriously.

The “Empty Self”

Although the divorce of faith from knowledge is a significant factor that has contributed to the church’s anti-intellectual slumber in America, there is a second which culture has passed on to the church, namely, the “empty self.” The “empty self” is a designation psychologists have given to the current milieu of America.¹¹⁰ The empty self syndrome has seven traits. It is first of all inordinately individualistic. Americans are consumed with self-interest with no interest of others; they are concerned with their own goals, values, and passions. Empty selves are also infantile, always preoccupied with food, entertainment, sex, physical appearance (e.g., hair style, clothes, shoes, tattoos), and feelings. Things such as hard work and delayed gratification are blasphemous to empty selves.

Empty selves are also characterized by narcissism and passivity. They spend an inordinate amount of time with self-fulfillment by manipulating or allowing others to do things for them. They expect teachers to educate their children for them; restaurants, maids, or schools to cook for them or their children; coaches to teach their kids how to play sports.¹¹¹ With such an ego-centric orientation, empty selves are sensate, lack interior lives, and are hurried and busy. They are controlled by images, especially electronic images today. A consequence of this is that people no longer base decisions on logical, rational argumentation, but sound-bytes, rhetoric, and demagoguery. Their interior lives are non-existent; they desire to present themselves as powerful and pleasurable, seeking celebrity status and image. Traits that characterize an interior life, e.g., virtue, morality, honor and integrity, are outmoded. As a result of all these traits, the empty self is hurried and busy, looking for noise and things to drown out the deafening inner voice that is screaming for true fulfillment. But the self only finds that the pursuit of worldly things does not fulfill, hence the self is empty.

The church, unfortunately, has taken on the empty self

¹⁰⁹Ibid., 30.

of the culture. When it comes to individualistic, narcissistic tendencies, evangelical Christians are not to be out-done. Despite the emphasis at times on divine guidance for the Christian life, evangelicals are constantly being told in popular publications to find their purpose and to have their “best life now,” right in line with Burger King’s anthem that you can “have it your way, right away.”¹¹²

Often the message of the preacher is right on target with such themes. “How to” sermons are as prevalent as the self-help books: how to have a better marriage; how to have a better relationship with your children; how to have peace in a life of chaos. The list is endless, and Christians are devouring these publications and hungry for more similar therapeutic messages, and publishing companies are more than willing to provide such sustenance.¹¹³ It is no wonder why many Christians have the worldview of moralistic therapeutic deism: they are constantly focusing on themselves.

Certainly, there is *some* validity to such moralizing sermons and self-help publications. The problem is that the entire emphasis is upon the individual and building his self-esteem rather than upon God and giving him glory. Jesus ultimately becomes merely a personal therapist who gets us out of trouble when tough times come. Could it be that one’s “personal relationship with Jesus” is more about *us* than Jesus? Theologian Michael Horton has some words that may be worth pondering: “As much as we might talk about a *personal relationship* with God through Jesus Christ, there doesn’t actually

¹¹⁰See Moreland, *Love Your God*, 89-92 for information on the empty self discussed here.

¹¹¹Moreland points out that one of the main culprits that feeds the passivity of empty selves is TV. See Moreland, *Love Your God*, 90-91 and Jane M. Healy, *Endangered Minds: Why Children Don’t Think and What We Can Do About It* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1990), pp. 114-116, 195-217.

¹¹²See, for example, the works of Joel Osteen and Joyce Meyer.

¹¹³Barna has observed this trend. See the Barna website, “Most Adults Feel Accepted by God, But Lack a Biblical Worldview” August 9, 2005); internet, <http://www.barna.org/barna-update/article/5-barna-update/174-most-adults-feel-accepted-by-god-but-lack-a-biblical-worldview?q=preachers>; accessed 5 July 2012. See also Barna’s book *Think Like Jesus* (Nashville, TN: Integrity, 2003).

seem to be much of a relationship at all, except with the self. Confession is *good for the soul*—that is to say, a form of therapy. Perhaps the result of all this emphasis on *my personal relationship with Jesus* means, finally, that Jesus really becomes my alter ego.”¹¹⁴

In line with the empty self syndrome, the church has also become infantile. Thomas Bergler, who outlines how youth ministry of the church historically followed culture in this respect, terms this infantilism “juvenilization.” “Juvenilization,” he writes, “tends to create a self-centered, emotionally-driven, and intellectually empty faith.”¹¹⁵ Over time, this emphasis upon emotionally-driven experience bled over into the church as a whole. After all, youth “grow up.” To be sure, too, it appears that this emotionally-driven empty self has brought *some kind* of “new life” to the church; no one is “bored” anymore. But at what cost has this come? Bergler concludes,

Today many Americans of all ages not only accept a Christianized version of adolescent narcissism, they often celebrate it as authentic spirituality. God, faith, and the church all exist to help me with my problems. Religious institutions are bad; only my personal relationship with Jesus matters. If we believe that a mature faith involves more than good feelings, vague beliefs, and living however we want, we must conclude that juvenilization has revitalized American Christianity at the cost of leaving many individuals mired in spiritual immaturity.¹¹⁶

Indeed, not only are Christians spiritually immature, but they are intellectually vacuous. Perhaps the two are identical.

When the church becomes infantile, or “juvenilized,” it also becomes passive along with the other empty self traits.

¹¹⁴Michael Horton, *Christless Christianity: The Alternative Gospel of the American Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2008), p. 43.

¹¹⁵According to Bergler, the juvenilization of the church began in youth ministry as early as the 1950s and ultimately led the church to simplified messages that lacked any spiritual depth. See Thomas E. Bergler, “When Are We Going to Grow Up? The Juvenilization of American Christianity,” *Christianity Today* June 8, 2012; internet, <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2012/june/when-are-we-going-to-grow-up.html>; accessed 5 July 2012.

¹¹⁶Bergler, “When Are We Going to Grow Up?”

Christians do not read the Bible; the preacher does it for them. Parents do not teach their children Scripture; youth ministers teach them. There is no reason for intense Bible study as long as the intellect does not matter; "Bible study" is about asking how each person "feels" about the verse read. When the focus is upon experience and feelings, there is no time to read Scripture and contemplate its meaning and implications for one's life. There is no time for prayer or self reflection on how to develop one's character. Who has the time or desire to read and discuss carefully the topics of theology, philosophy, apologetics, or Christian doctrine? Rather, the empty self must remain busy and noisy, seeking the next sensation, whether it be the next text message or "tweet" from a friend about who made the NFL draft, or the next "interactive lesson" or video in a preacher's sermon or Sunday school lesson.

In short, Christians have lost their minds to the empty self. Many Christians, like the culture, are seeking fulfillment in all the wrong places—in the self rather than the Trinitarian God of the universe—because it has jettisoned the intellectual side of the faith. When the faith is emptied of the mind, all that is left is emotion and mundane passions, thereby rendering self reflection on the important, intellectual things of life irrelevant. The words of the seventeenth century theologian and philosopher Blaise Pascal (1623-1662) are apropos: "The only thing which consoles us for our miseries is diversion, and yet this is the greatest of our miseries. For it is this which principally hinders us from reflecting upon ourselves and which makes us insensibly ruin ourselves. . . . But diversion amuses us, and leads us unconsciously to death."¹¹⁷

A Clarion Call to Develop the Mind

The church's acceptance of the culture's idea of faith as divorced from knowledge and conformity to the culture's empty self has led to grave consequences. For one, it has led many in the American culture to view Christianity as a delusion and, in some cases, immoral.¹¹⁸ For another, it has led to weak

¹¹⁷Blaise Pascal, *Pensees*, #171, trans. W. F. Trotter (Grand Rapids, MI: Christian Classics Ethereal Library, n.d.), p. 36. This edition may be found on the Christian Classics Ethereal Library website at <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/pascal/pensees.html>.

evangelism. If the church is to have more of an impact in the culture today and to be taken more seriously, it is imperative that it develops the mind. It is time for the church to answer a clarion call to develop the mind; it is time for the church to wake up. But how can Christians begin to develop their minds in order to strengthen their faith, re-invigorate evangelism, and have the ability to respond to attacks? In this section, I will lay out several ideas of how to awaken the minds of Christians from anti-intellectual slumber.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁸For example, see Richard Dawkins' caricature of God in *The God Delusion* (Boston & New York: Mariner, 2008), 51; see also what atheist John Hartung says about the Bible in "Love Thy Neighbor: The Evolution of In-group Morality," internet, <http://strugglesforexistence.com/?p=article p&id=13>; accessed 13 August 2012.

¹¹⁹Some of the points made here may be found in Moreland, *Love Your God*, 94ff.

Admittance, Repentance, and Choosing

First, as Moreland points out, the church must *admit* it has an anti-intellectual problem.¹²⁰ The church must admit it has allowed the culture to shape its thinking that faith has nothing to do with knowledge and that fulfillment comes through seeking personal happiness and gratification.

Second, the church needs to *repent* of its anti-intellectualism. Anti-intellectualism is a sin.¹²¹ It breaks the greatest commandment to “love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind” (Matt. 22:37). God desires and commands us to love him with our *whole* being. When the church neglects the mind, it is a failure to love God entirely and worship him appropriately.¹²²

After repenting, the church must then *choose* to be intellectually engaged. Choosing is an act of the will, and thus Christians must be *willing* to resist the cultural empty self and the urge to be distracted, constantly plugged into the gadgets of our technological age. “Distraction and noise are enemies of an intellectual and spiritual life; focus and quiet are its friends.”¹²³ Christians must once again choose to put cognition—*thinking*—back into its understanding of faith. “It is a great misunderstanding of faith to oppose it to reason and knowledge. . . . In actual fact, faith—confidence, trust—is rooted in knowledge.”¹²⁴

Pursue Faith as Knowledge

After taking these first steps, Christians must then *pursue* knowledge. This means, first of all, for Christians to practice faith as knowledge—to know *what* they believe and *why* they believe it. The two primary ways to accomplish this is to study

¹²⁰See Moreland, *Love Your God*, pp. 94-96.

¹²¹Os Guinness, *Fit Bodies Fat Minds: Why Evangelicals Don't Think and What to Do About It* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1994), pp. 10-11.

¹²²Moreland, *Love Your God*, p. 159.

¹²³*Ibid.*, 92.

¹²⁴J. P. Moreland, *The Kingdom Triangle: Recover the Christian Mind, Renovate the Soul, Restore the Spirit's Power* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2007), 131.

theology and apologetics. Theology is the study of God and everything else in its relation to him,¹²⁵ and the foundation for our knowledge of God is Scripture. Therefore, it is imperative for Christians to read and study Scripture, not just in a Sunday school or small group setting, but daily in order to know *what* to believe, i.e., who God is and what he expects from his creatures. The reason why so many Christians today lack a Christian worldview is because they do not read and study Scripture. As a consequence, Christians live just like the culture. Theology is the foundation by which decisions are made. Where there is no sound theology, there is no sound decision-making.

Christians should also study apologetics, or *why* they believe what they believe and how to defend it. 1 Peter 3:15 specifically exhorts Christians to do this: “But sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a *defense* to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence.” The word “defense” is the Greek word *apologia* from which we get the word “apologetics.” In order to make a defense “for the hope that is in” us, we must be acquainted with and be able to articulate the evidence and arguments for things like God’s existence, Jesus’ identity, and the resurrection. Equipped with such evidence and arguments, Christians will have the ability to defend the Christian faith against attacks from atheists and agnostics. It will also enable Christians to remove obstacles that unbelievers may have to accept Christ as the Son of God. Many unbelievers use fallacious reasoning to object to the truthfulness of Christianity. If Christians have not been trained in critical thinking and apologetics, then they will not have the tools necessary to reply to such objections, and evangelism becomes more difficult.

Just as important, apologetics strengthens Christian faith. Sound reasoning and good evidence always tends to strengthen one’s faith; it shows that faith is rational, correlates with the real world, and is objectively true. If, however, a Christian’s faith is entirely built upon an emotional experience or feelings, then that faith will be weak and may be crushed when the waves of criticisms and arguments (which appear to be reasonable) arise against that faith. This is especially true among youth. It is well known that many youth begin to lose their faith in high school, and then when they enter college lose

¹²⁵Jack Cottrell, *The Faith Once for All: Christian Doctrine for Today* (Joplin, MO: College Press, 2002), p. 9.

it entirely. We need to heed the words of Christian philosopher and apologist William Craig when he says,

Frankly, I find it hard to understand how people today can risk parenthood without having studied apologetics. Unfortunately, our churches have largely dropped the ball in this area. It's insufficient for youth groups and Sunday school classes to focus on entertainment and simpering devotional thoughts. We've got to train our kids for war. We dare not send them out to public high school and university armed with rubber swords and plastic armor. The time for playing games is past.¹²⁶

Pursuing faith as knowledge has implications not only for Christians in general, but also for the local church. Preachers of Scripture ought to discontinue "How to," or therapeutic, sermons. Such sermons must be replaced with thoughtful exposition of Scripture. Whether it is the preaching of a text verse by verse that has a complete thought or preaching a theological theme, sermons ought to be directly "tied" to the biblical text. Such preaching conveys the idea that Scripture contains coherent thought that carries with it objective meaning, i.e., *knowledge*, and is therefore applicable to one's life. Sermons which have one verse in the introduction and serve as a spring board for a self-help topic undercuts the truthfulness of Scripture and conveys the idea that Scripture does not reveal knowledge. Such a sermon is equivalent to the classical liberal belief that Scripture is nothing more than the religious experiences of fallible men.

An implication of expositional preaching is that preachers themselves must be committed to seeking the knowledge of Scripture. They must diligently study and put together their own lessons and sermons. The practice of plagiarizing sermons must cease.¹²⁷ Plagiarism in the pulpit, as it has come to be called, entirely undermines that faith is knowledge. It conveys the idea that sermons are more about "hitting a home run," or presenting a "stem-winder" or "tearjerker," as one commentator has put it.¹²⁸ Scripture gives

¹²⁶Craig, *Reasonable Faith*, p. 19.

¹²⁷For a good, concise resource that discusses this issue, see Scott M. Gibson, *Should We Use Someone Else's Sermon? Preaching In A Cut-and-Paste World* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2008).

us a different picture: “But you,” exhorted the Apostle Paul to the young Timothy, “be sober in all things, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.” *Preachers* are to fulfill their own ministry; *they* are to do the work of pursuing knowledge and then teach and preach it to others for the edification of Christ’s church (Eph. 4:12).

Unfortunately, many Christians disparage theology, apologetics, and philosophical thinking in general. Many believe these are detrimental to faith rather than aiding it. The well-known twenty-first century Christian philosopher and theologian Francis Schaeffer once remarked that Christians have been proud in despising philosophy.¹²⁹ We are all too familiar with the idea that “God is beyond logic,” and that “theology is just for scholars” and has nothing to do with “real life.” Oftentimes, there is also an unstated assumption that asking deep theological questions shows a weak faith, that a Christian just needs to trust and believe without knowing “why.” Christians just need to leave the thinking up to the theologians, preachers, or academicians. Besides, some contend, does not Colossians 2:8 warn Christians to stay away from philosophy and deep thinking?

These sentiments are misplaced. God, after all, is a rational being, and humans made in his image are likewise rational beings. The laws of logic are woven into the fabric of God’s creation. Logic, reason, and thinking are not “beyond” God; they are a part of who he is. God, after all, is omniscient—all knowing. When we attempt to evangelize unbelievers or even preach to believers by using poor argumentation or by merely tugging at their “heart strings,” it is not just poor reasoning—it is manipulation and an affront to the character of God.¹³⁰

But does not Colossians 2:8 warn us to stay away from

¹²⁸Mark Taylor, “The Problem With Original Preaching,” *Christian Standard*, September 28, 2005; internet, <http://christianstandard.com/2005/09/the-problems-with-original-preaching-mark-a-taylor/>; accessed 15 August 2012.

¹²⁹Francis Schaeffer, *He Is There and He Is Not Silent* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 1972), p. 4.

¹³⁰Moreland, *Love Your God*, 128. It is manipulation because the words and tone that evoke emotion are used as a means to force decision based merely upon feelings, and feelings are nothing to base decisions on.

philosophy? Those who quote this verse to bar Christians from developing the mind have misunderstood this verse. It should be noted that the philosophy mentioned here is connected with “empty deception,” not philosophy in general. In other words, there is a specific kind of philosophy in view: the kind that makes incorrect judgments in regard to food, drink, and Sabbath festivals which has only *an appearance of godliness* (see Col. 2:16ff, esp. v.23). If philosophical reasoning is to be jettisoned in order to make room for faith, the only kind of faith left is an irrational one, a faith that is not necessarily based in reality but upon mere feeling.¹³¹

To say that Christians ought to pursue faith as knowledge, however, is not the same as saying that all aspects of faith must necessarily be approved by reason before being accepted. It is not necessary for an unbeliever or believer to know all the evidence before converting or continuing to believe in Christ. To pursue faith as knowledge is the idea that faith must once again be viewed as knowledge, not contrary to it. And it is to affirm that the Christian faith is not merely feelings-based, but is objectively knowable and true. Pascal once said, “If we submit everything to reason, our religion will have no mysterious and supernatural element. If we offend the principles of reason, our religion will be absurd and ridiculous.”¹³²

Likewise, pursuing faith as knowledge does not entail Christians becoming scholars with PhDs, or even a call for more formal education as such. The popular theologian John Piper makes this point, saying, “There is no necessary correlation between extensive learning and the right use of the mind. Many PhDs think poorly, and many people with little formal education think with great clarity and depth.”¹³³ The call to pursue faith as knowledge is simply a “[plea] for a hearty

¹³¹In addition, asking questions and getting answers to those questions—*thinking* about one’s faith—will *strengthen* faith, not weaken it. Christians ought not be afraid of asking questions; they should pursue knowledge of their faith, taking comfort in the fact that it is not just for the “professional” theologian or minister. Ironically, if Christians do not think about their faith and ask questions, they actually risk losing their faith.

¹³²*Pensees*, #273.

¹³³John Piper, *Think: The Life of the Mind and the Love of God* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), p. 128.

engagement of the mind in the pursuit of God.”¹³⁴

The church, then, must not follow the culture’s lead to divorce faith from knowledge. As Herbert Schlossberg wrote, “In their uncompromising determination to proclaim truth, Christians must avoid the intellectual flabbiness of the larger society. They must rally against the prevailing distrust of reason and the exaltation of the irrational. Emotional self-indulgence and irrationalities have always been the enemies of the gospel, and the apostles warned their followers against them.”¹³⁵

Pursue the “Fulfilled Self”

Finally, to develop the mind Christians must pursue things of the “fulfilled self,” not the empty self. Humans can find fulfillment only in the Trinitarian God of the universe, not in self gratification. The Gospel is not about how to help us get through our problems, as in therapy. Rather it is about resolving our most deep-seated problem: sin. It is time for the church to grow up and put juvenilization away, as Bergler argues. It is time for Christians to put aside their ipods, ipads, twitter and Facebook accounts for a time (daily), and all other distractions so they can focus on more important, spiritual matters—developing the mind through study of Scripture and reading theological books.

Perhaps at a time not so distant in the past, theological and apologetical resources were not readily available or accessible. But today, there are many resources for Christians to develop the mind, from books and journals to the internet, and so no excuse exists to be disengaged in one’s mind. Many great resources for apologetics are now available as a sort of “Christian renaissance” has emerged in philosophy in the past several decades. The works of Willam Craig, Frank Turek, Alvin Plantinga, and Douglas Groothuis are just several examples among many.¹³⁶

¹³⁴Ibid.

¹³⁵Hebert Schlossberg, *Idols for Destruction* (Nashville, TN: Nelson, 1983), 322; also quoted in Moreland, *Love Your God*, p. 85.

¹³⁶William Craig, *Reasonable Faith: Christian Truth and Apologetics*, 3rd edition (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008); William Craig, *On Guard! Defending Your Faith with Reason and Precision* (Colorado Springs: David C. Cook, 2010); Frank Turek and Norman Geisler, *I Don’t Have*

There are many great works in the area of theology. Several include the works of Millard Erickson, Wayne Grudem, Michael Horton, and Jack Cottrell.¹³⁷ Although systematic theologies are often written from a particular theological viewpoint, e.g., Calvinistic or Arminian, systematic theologies are still good for many subjects of theology, and they help Christians understand opposing viewpoints.

To engage these resources effectively, Christians must train themselves to focus and study. On an individual basis, Moreland gives several helpful tips:¹³⁸ change one's routine, develop patience and endurance, develop a good vocabulary, and set intellectual goals. These disciplines are countercultural, and thus will be difficult to inculcate at first. But if Christians are going to awaken from their anti-intellectual slumber, such disciplines are necessary and must be developed.

At the local church level, Christian ministers and leadership may also need to re-think their practices to avoid appealing to the empty self. As already mentioned, a renewed emphasis upon expositional sermons will be needed. Christian

Enough Faith To Be An Atheist (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2004); Alvin Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief* (Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press, 2000); Douglas Groothuis, *Christian Apologetics: A Comprehensive Case for Biblical Faith* (Grand Rapids, MI: IVP Academic, 2011). What is especially helpful is that Craig's most popular work, *Reasonable Faith*, has been written to accommodate elementary students, see William Craig and Joseph Tang, *The Defense Never Rests: A Workbook for Budding Apologists* (Charleston, SC: CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2011); William Craig and Joseph Tang, *The Defense Never Rests: Teacher's Handbook* (Charleston, SC: CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2011).

¹³⁷Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1994). See also his more compact volumes based upon this work, Wayne Grudem and Jeff Purswell, *Bible Doctrine: Essential Teachings of the Christian Faith* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1999); Wayne Grudem and Elliot Grudem, *Christian Beliefs: Twenty Basics Every Christian Should Know* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005). See Millard Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 1998); Michael Horton, *The Christian Faith: A Systematic Theology for Pilgrims on the Way* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011); Jack Cottrell, *The Faith Once for All: Christian Doctrine for Today* (Joplin, MO: College Press, 2002).

¹³⁸See Moreland, *Love Your God*, pp. 94-96.

ministers may need to be trained or need to re-focus on the study of Scripture in order to preach it aright. Michael Horton states, "If Christianity is about public truth delivered through an external Word, then ministry and evangelism require educated leaders who can expound and apply that truth for the benefit of those under their care. By contrast, if Christianity is reduced to personal experience, then its leadership will consist of the most successful entrepreneurs and managers of extraordinary staged events."¹³⁹

Conclusion

It is time for the church to awaken from its anti-intellectual slumber. It must answer the call to develop the mind. For too long the church has accepted the culture's view that faith is not knowledge and conformed to the culture's way of life that focuses upon the empty self. In order to reinvigorate the life of the mind, it is imperative for the church to engage the study of Scripture, theology, apologetics, and similar topics. This will enable the church to gain a hearing in the larger culture of ideas and to be taken seriously once again. Evangelism will also become more effective; Christians will be able to convey what they believe and why, respond to criticisms, and remove intellectual obstacles that encumber unbelievers to accept Christ. Additionally, unbelievers may realize that Christianity is reasonable and objectively true, no matter how a person feels or what he has experienced. Unbelievers may view Christianity as a real worldview option rather than as a crutch, delusion, or immoral. Christians themselves will also be strengthened in their faith and may help prevent others from losing faith. Christians ought to heed the advice of the late Anglican theologian and minister John R. W. Stott: "Don't neglect your critical faculties. Remember that God is a rational God, who has made us in His own image. God invites and expects us to explore His double revelation, in nature and Scripture, with the minds He has given us, and to go on in the development of a Christian mind to apply His marvelous revealed truth to every aspect of the modern and post-modern world."¹⁴⁰

¹³⁹Horton, *Christless Christianity*, p. 51.

¹⁴⁰Roy McCloughry, "Basic Stott," *Christianity Today*, January 8, 1996, p. 32. Also quoted in Moreland, *Love Your God*, p. 62.

