



**Study guide for  
ANTI-INTELLECTUALISM**

## Definition

Christianity has a great intellectual heritage, from Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, and to Anselm, Christian thinkers helped to laid the ground work that would become the Western philosophical Tradition. In short the church has never considered thinking as bad. Yet in modern times the church has been ambivalent about “the life of the mind.” America, from at least reconstruction onward, has fostered a long history of evangelical suspicion of education and intellectual endeavors. As Mark Noll’s has succinctly stated in *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind*, “The scandal of the evangelical mind is that there is not much of an evangelical mind.”<sup>1</sup>

Os Guinness, gives a concise assessment of the problem of Anti-intellectualism

“At root, evangelical anti-intellectualism is both a scandal and a sin. It is a scandal in the sense of being an offense and a stumbling block that needlessly hinders serious people from considering the Christian faith and coming to Christ. It is a sin because it is a refusal, contrary to the first of Jesus’ two great commandments, to love the Lord our God with our minds”<sup>2</sup>

### What is Anti-intellectualism?

When speaking of this subject, it is important to clarify terms. Merriam Webster defines anti-intellectualism as “the state of opposing or [being] hostile to intellectuals or to an intellectual view or approach” (Merriam-Webster Dictionary).

It is a cultural assumption about the value of knowledge, about the importance of thinking and the relations of those things to personal faith as well as the church’s belief. So in general, anti-intellectualism appears to be the suspicion or opposition toward any intentional cultivation of the intellect. In practice, it is tribal, and thus not open to dialogue. This can refer to the larger American culture and as well as to the church.

Yet behind this negative attitude toward intellectual effort lay very genuine and legitimate concerns. The concerns came from certain perceived polar forces like the positive and negative poles of a magnet, most people consider these concepts as fundamentally in opposition. Whether we believe these concepts in opposition are real or fictional will shape much of our intellectual life. Richard Hofstadter expresses the antagonisms as follows:

Intellect is pitted against feeling, on the ground that it is some- how inconsistent with warm emotion. It is pitted against character, because it is widely believed that intellect stands for mere cleverness, which transmutes easily into the sly or the diabolical. It is pitted against practicality, since the theory is held to be opposed to practice, and the

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<sup>1</sup> Mark Noll, *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 3.

<sup>2</sup> Os Guinness, *Fit Bodies Fat Minds: Why Evangelicals Don’t Think and What to Do About It* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994). 10–11

“purely” theoretical mind is so much disesteemed. It is pitted against democracy, since intellect is felt to be a form of distinction that defies egalitarianism.<sup>3</sup>

### **Historical Assessment**

There are a few ways to assess the origins and influence of Anti-intellectualism on modern Christianity. Two works have or highly influential in the modern assessment of anti-intellectualism. Mark Noll, *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind* and Os Guinness, *Fit Bodies Fat Minds*. The former writer by a historian with a more history of ideas approach. Whereas Guinness (Yes, he is related to the famous Brewer) was trained in the Sociology of Knowledge under Peter Berger. He charts a more popular level analysis following a more socio-cultural approach.

#### **Danger of attacking anti-intellectualism**

There are unquestionable dangers in this call to reform the Christian mind. First is the age-old pitfall concerning the principle of the matter. Mounting an attack on evangelical anti-intellectualism almost automatically releases a cloud of darkly unhelpful attitudes toward thinking. Anyone who makes such a call must be guilty of superiority, it is feared. Any who heed the call surely suffer from snobbery. All who resist the call are clearly victims of reverse-snobbery. Any who stand back detached because they have seen it all before are obviously guilty of cynicism.<sup>4</sup>

### **How we lost our Mind**

Guinness aims toward the mind of the individual believer in the pew and covers the influences of popular culture which Noll does not really address. Starting just before the Civil War, Guinness traces how a variety of influences have developed and decimated that heritage, leaving the world of Christian thought abandoned like a ghost town. Guinness gives eight influences affecting evangelicals— influences leading to an evangelical “ghost mind.”

He lists eight influences,

1. Polarization
2. Pietism,
3. Primitivism
4. Populism,
5. Pluralism,
6. Pragmatism,
7. Premillennialism
8. Philistinism,

Guinness makes it clear that many of these trends have not been wholly bad. Guinness sir answer does not suggest we repudiate all these influences, but rather that we recognize and overcome the bad aspects while keeping the good.

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<sup>3</sup> Richard Hofstadter, *Anti-Intellectualism in American Life* (New York: Vintage, 1962), 45-46

<sup>4</sup> Os Guinness, *Fit Bodies Fat Minds: Why Evangelicals Don't Think and What to Do About It* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994). 19

We will look at each in turn. Each of these can be shown to slowly develop within Christianity over the 20th century. These are the historical roots that in various ways lead to the fruit of anti-intellectualism in the distinctly 'American' form of Christianity.

Guinness lists eight historical and intellectual trends that has dumbed down modern evangelicalism. The following list is my summary (if an are unclear more is devoted to each in the appendix at the end).

- 1) **Polarization:** The assumption of dichotomy between relationship between reason and Faith (a false dichotomy between heart and head, rooted in the idea of an antagonism between the two).
- 2) **Pietism:** *the emphasis on devotion over all other forms of religious life thus elevating the sentimental, the experiential and the individual to a place primacy.*
- 3) **Primitivism:** *the romantic notion of going back to a simplistic innocent age of the past.*
- 4) **Populism:** *the idea of a religion of the people, for the people, and by the people.*
- 5) **Pluralism:** *the practice of affirming the lowest common doctrinal denominator, which leads to "deeds, not creeds."*
- 6) **Pragmatism:** *the theory where "does it work?" is more important than "is it true?"*
- 7) **Philistinism:** *the blatant mistrust of anything intellectual or scholarly and a dislike of most all cultural product (Art, Music, Movies, etc.).*
- 8) **Premillennialism** *[of the dispensational variety]: a theory of eschatology that nurtured anti-intellectualism by a fixation on the future and a disregard for the present.*

Some books to consider reading:

- J. P. Moreland, Love Your God with All Your Mind:
- J. P. Moreland, Kingdom Triangle
- John Piper, Think: The Life of the Mind and the Love of God
- James W. Sire, Habits of the Mind: Intellectual Life as a Christian Calling
- Mark Noll, Jesus Christ and the Life of the Mind
- Gene Edward Veith Jr., Loving God with All Your Mind: Thinking as a Christian in the Postmodern World
- John Stott, Your Mind Matters: The Place of the Mind in the Christian Life
- Harry Blamires, The Christian Mind: How Should a Christian Think?

### **Seeds of anti-intellectualism: Problematic doctrines and misinterpretations**

If we want to uproot anti-intellectualism in the church. First Our view of the Spirit's role as we read the Bible is an important issue to get right. If we get it wrong it will drive us to anti-intellectualism. Second, We need to also deal with many bad interpretations that also moves us towards a mindless faith.

### **Problematic understanding of a doctrine**

A key doctrine that leads to anti-intellectualism is the doctrine of illumination. The doctrine of illumination attempts to answer the question, "What is the Holy Spirit's role in biblical interpretation?"

A commonly taught version of the doctrine has laid the ground work for much of the anti-intellectualism in the church today. This Common articulation states that it is the Holy Spirit's role to function for the believer as their Bible Commentary. In the academic world, it is called the cognitive illumination view. The key text in the debate is 1 Corinthians 2:14.

"the natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God for they are foolishness to him and he's not able to know them because they are spiritually appraised"

The cognitive illumination view holds that a person can't even intellectually comprehend the meaning of a Biblical text without being indwelt by the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is necessary to supply this true and saving comprehension. This may surprise most people but the majority of conservative seminary textbook authors reject this interpretation and for excellent reasons

Greek scholar, Rob H Stein points out that there are several Greek words that Paul could have used in 1 corinthians 2:14. When he says "the natural man doesn't accept the things of God". Paul doesn't use the common Greek term for accept which broadly and generically means "to take". Instead he uses the verb which is more nuanced and in its 56 occurrences in the New Testament always refers to the acceptance of a requested offering. In other words the natural man doesn't just fail to receive the things of the Spirit of God because he can't intellectually comprehend the message. The connotation of the Greek term is that he intellectually does receive the message but he then chooses to reject its request. Stein additionally points out the verb translated foolishness in this verse is also used repeatedly by Paul in the opening chapters of 1 Corinthians.

"Thus in the first three chapters of 1 corinthians we have the following parallel. The unbelieving world can understand the things of the spirit, what the Bible text means but it rejects what it understands as foolishness. Similarly God understands the wisdom of this world, but rejects it as foolishness" <sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Rob H. Stein "A Basic guide to interring the Bible" 2 ed. (Baker Academic: Grand Rapids 2011) 66

1 Corinthians 2:14 assumes non-believers are indeed capable of mentally comprehending the Bible and that it is actually this very capacity that causes them to dislike what it says and to consciously reject its message.<sup>6</sup>

Roy Zuck, comments:

"the verse does not mean that an unsaved person who is devoid of the holy spirit cannot understand mentally what the Bible is saying instead it means that he does not welcome its message of redemption into his own heart"<sup>7</sup>

Brent Osbourne clearly states:

"The Bible does not state that an unbeliever cannot intellectually interpret it quite accurately."<sup>8</sup>

Lastly Bavinck summarizes a proper view in contrast:

"The illumination of the Holy Spirit is not the cognitive source of Christian truth. It does not disclose to us any material truths that are hidden from the 'natural' person. It only gives us a spiritual understanding of these same things, one that is different and deeper."<sup>9</sup>

As we see the cognitive illumination view is insufficient if not just wrong. Paul is claiming that the Holy Spirit's illumination resides in the significants of the text not in the meaning.

<b>Significances</b>	<b>Meaning</b>
<i>Personal</i> <i>Application</i> <i>Conviction</i>	<i>Cultural</i> <i>Historical</i> <i>Linguistic</i>

A proper view of Illumination is about value and authority

The Spirit enables us to perceive Scripture's inherent brightness and to taste its inherent sweetness. The light of the sun does not illumine the eyes of a blind man. Nevertheless, the Spirit's work of "illumination," the work whereby he enables us to see and to receive Scripture as God's word (cf. 1 Cor. 2.12, 14), does not add light to Holy

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<sup>6</sup> William J Larkin Junior culture and Biblical hermeneutics: interpreting in applying the authoritative word in a relativistic age (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1988), 289.

<sup>7</sup> Roy Zuck "the role of the Holy Spirit in hermeneutics" Bibliotheca Sacra 141 919840 123-4

<sup>8</sup> Brent Osbourne, The hermeneutical spiral a comprehensive introduction to biblical interpretation 2 ed. (Downers grove: inter-varsity Press, 2006) 341

<sup>9</sup> Henry Bavinck, Reformed Dogmatics, 1:594

Scripture any more than the healing of a blind man adds radiance to the sun. The Spirit, by his illuminating work, enables us to see the light and to savor the sweetness that belong to Scripture in and of itself as God's divine Word. We value what it has to objectively say for its value is in what its teachings.

The Holy Spirit enables us through illumination to acknowledge scriptures authority and respond to that authoritative Word (Jn 3.3, 5; 2 Cor. 3.14–18; 4.3–6; 1 Thess. 1.5; 2.13). Seeing God's word as authoritative enables us to approach it properly. As one who is under its authority. In this way, we gain a new frame of reference. The Spirit combats the noetic effects of sin (sin's effect on our mind and reason) by revealing the reality of God's authoritative word, the word takes on a gravity it did not have before. We gain a seriousness about the word equal to the greatness of the God it reveals.

Surely Paul believes God could supernaturally show you a verses meaning, just like he could supernaturally help you pass a pop quiz you haven't studied for. Such illumination would literally be a miracle and greatest life hack ever.

It would also be a miraculous exception that you shouldn't count on it, as if doing so makes you spiritual, it only makes you lazy.

To be clear, I believe God speaks, but this is not that. The doctrine of illumination is not an excuse not to study, does not give you the right to read into the text whatever you want. Further, it certainly is not a justification for dismissing scholarly aids (Study Bibles and commentaries).

One reason, I think, for the proliferation of this doctrine comes from misunderstanding a common experience of many young Christians. When a Christian is still young in his faith, God will do a special work of grace and help the young believer to understand a text. We all have likely had an aha moment when we immediately grasp a complex passage. Without much work we gained an intuitive understanding of a text that often was a spring word to growth. The problem comes when we reflect on this experience. Many confuse this moment as normative not extraordinary. They do not take it to be the exception that proves the rule but assume it to be the normal operations of the Spirit.

The cognitive illumination view has stagnated the church's maturity and promoted anti-intellectualism. While the cognitive illumination view is very common it is also very dangerous. The widespread popularity of this belief logically forces a great deal of churches to promote intellectual illiteracy as a mark of spiritual maturity.

Here is a syllogism to explain the logic behind this dismissal of knowledge.

Premise one

*it is spiritually mature to prioritize the best aids for Bible interpretation over inferior ones.*

Premise two

*the Holy Spirit is a superior aid for Bible interpretation and intellectual aids are inferior sources for Bible interpretation.*

Conclusion

*it is spiritually mature to prioritize the Holy Spirit for Bible interpretation over scholarly work.*

In other words people who believe the Holy Spirit is a superior source for Bible interpretation are logically forced to view the prioritization of intellectual publications as immoral. as an act of spiritual and maturity if you want to

Many do not believe academic literature is a priority for understanding the Bible for him the Holy Spirit takes eclipsing priority. Put plainly, It is often taught that Study Bibles, technical commentaries are ok but all you really need to understand the Bible is the Ghost. Just read the Word of God and let the Holy Spirit illuminate the text, that is let the Holy Spirit comment on it. Slowing a culture of light devotional reading develops and no one is doing serious in-depth study. Consider the result if Christians disagree on the interpretation of a text both sure the Holy Spirit gave them the interpretation, both locked in an emotional stalemate, what do they do? Likely they throw their hands up in the air defaulting to an evangelical subjectivism, a view that borders on relativism.

## Particular texts

### Knowledge in Genesis

The serpent said to the woman, "You will not die; for God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil" (Gen. 3:4-5).

#### Bad reading

The innocent couple placed in a garden containing a special tree at its center, a tree that would "open their eyes" and "make them wise." They were expressly forbidden from eating of that tree because it would make them like God and his angels, "knowing good and evil" (Gen 3:22). Evidently a knowledge that brings a raised moral consciousness that results in a healthy self-awareness was a big no-no. The "bad guy" in this story is the one who encouraged them to gain such knowledge becoming the prototype of the rebellious enemy of God for the remainder of the book. The story teaches humans seeking knowledge is bad and trusting God is good.

#### Good reading

The Bible does reject the acquisition of knowledge for the sake of personal superiority and power. In fact, in one respectable understanding, Adam and Eve's disastrous sin in Genesis 3 is their desire to know "good and evil," which is synecdoche for "all things." (With synecdoche one invokes a whole by expressing a representative part of the whole, as in "he's a good breadwinner," which means he's a good provider, and of much more than just bread.) So in this reading Adam and Eve want to know all things: They want omniscience, challenging God's prerogative. They wanted to be "like God" but not in a good way. Like does not mean imitation of virtues but like in the sense of ontological equal. Be just as much god as God. in what and how he knows. Become a being with god-like knowledge and thus attaining a superiority and power they did not have before.

## JESUS

### Bad Reading

Jesus was no fan of intellectualism, He boasted that his message could only be received by the simple-minded because God chose to hide the most important things from the wise and understanding (Matt. 11:25, Luke 10:17-24). He would often point to a child and say that you must become like one of them in order to really “get” what he was offering. Children are trusting and uncritical thinkers who automatically believe what they’re caregivers tell them about virtually anything and everything.

The key is Jesus’ contrast between the terms “wise and understanding” and “little children”. He praises the little children and looks down on the wise. It is clear from his use that the “wise and understanding” correspond to the “educated critical thinking” and the little children to the “uneducated, quick to trust God”

little children = Just believe Jesus  
Wise = the educated will have a hard time believing Jesus.

### Good Reading

The terms “wise and understanding” and “little children” in Luke 10:21 do not correspond simply to “educated” and “uneducated.” Jesus is not saying that the uneducated get the grace of revelation and the educated don’t. To put it another way, there are “little children” among the educated and there are boastful among the uneducated.

The contrast pointed [out] by the Savior is not that between “educated” and “uneducated” but between those who imagine themselves to be wise and sensible and want to test the Gospel truths by their own intellects and to pronounce judgment according to their self-formed ideas and those who live under the profound impression that by their own insight and their own reasonings they are utterly powerless to understand the truths of God and to accept them. Often “unlearned” persons are in the highest degree self-opinionated as regards spiritual matters, and on the other hand some of the most learned are humble and child-like and accept the truths of the Gospel unreservedly. Jesus makes the contrast not between educated and uneducated but between people with the wrong and self-sufficient attitude and those with the right and childlike attitude

Norval Geldenhuys, *The Gospel of Luke* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), 306–7.

## JESUS

### Bad Reading

Jesus also discouraged planning for the future—a characteristic trait of intelligent beings - calming it is as a sign of weak devotion to the faith (Matt. 6:19-34). He was teaching a carefree attitude resulting from real faith. The True believer will trust and not have to plan for God will supply all their needs according to his riches in glory. The assumption at the heart of this teaching is that God will provide for those that supporting Jesus' religion. Believers need only passively trust and let God actively give what is needed.

### Good Reading

On Matt 6:25

The KJV translation "take no thought" is inaccurate and misleading. As the example of the birds (v 26) will highlight, Jesus is not precluding planning or working to provide for oneself. The basic meaning of 'merimna'[worry] is "to have an anxious concern, based on apprehension about possible danger or misfortune."<sup>31</sup> If we really trust God, we will not worry. The most we can lose is our physical lives, but our eternal lives, which make all the suffering or deprivation of this present age pale into insignificance (Rom 8:18), will remain secure.

Craig Blomberg, "On Wealth and Worry: Matthew 6:19-34 -- Meaning and Significance" *Criswell Theological Review* 6.1 (1992) 80

Jesus is not enjoining a lackadaisical, lazy or carefree attitude toward provisions. Still, wild fowl depend considerably on the vagaries of nature, over which God rules, reminding Christians that they dare not try to secure their lives against every conceivable calamity. Such foolproof security does not exist in this life; those who nevertheless pursue it will be consumed in the process and unable to serve God.

Craig Blomberg, "On Wealth and Worry: Matthew 6:19-34 -- Meaning and Significance" *Criswell Theological Review* 6.1 (1992) 81

"Seeking the kingdom' is the way of life in which the compulsion to 'manage' the future for oneself and others has been replaced by a self-sacrificial trust in the saving plan of God, of which we can know only that it is advanced by any and all faithful following of Christ."

R J. Dillon, "Ravens, Lilies and the Kingdom of God (Matthew 6:25-33/Luke 12:22-31)," *CBQ* 53 (1991) 625-26

## JESUS John 20:29

### Bad Reading

Mark Twain famously defined “faith” as “believing something you know ain’t so.” Christians sometimes say they believe something because they “take it by faith.” This common phrase, is used by Christians, to mean the holding of a belief even without specific evidence for that particular belief.

Does Jesus teach we should hold religious beliefs without evidence to support them? It seems so! In John 20:29, Jesus’ appears to Thomas and says, “Blessed are those who did not see and yet believed” (John 20:29). In this verse, Jesus gives a simply prescription for “blind faith” that is belief even without observable evidence. More commonly modern Christian teachers define Faith is blindly trusting Christ and simply hold to God’s word, never acknowledge or believe any evidence to the contrary which is doubt.

Further is not John showing Thomas to be rational and wise for refusing to believe without direct observation, and this shows that we have no more grounds to believe than Thomas did, and until granted the same evidence as he, we are as right as he was to call the bluff until more evidence is given? From this perspective, a persons beliefs should be based on rational empirical observation not blind religious faith.

In conclusion: John 20:29 promotes a "blind faith".

### Good Reading

Two clearer reading...

1. Jesus was stating a simple fact (they would be blessed), not critiquing Thomas. this is plausible insofar as it is easy to read Jesus as saying, as paraphrased by Adam Clark, “thou art now happy - fully convinced of my resurrection; yet no less blessed shall all those be who believe in my resurrection, without the evidence thou hast had” Adam Clark commentary vol. 5 (B. Waugh and MT. Mason, 1833), 627.]

2. Jesus was critiquing the stubborn/irrational nature of Thomas's disbelief.

This is plausible insofar (a) as Jesus repeatedly told his followers he would rise after repeatedly substantiating his claims with divine miracles, and (b) the apostles were straightforwardly testifying to Thomas that Jesus had appeared to them alive from the dead (testimony which was likely amplified by Thomas's knowing of the empty tomb). He was just being stubborn. As noted by Marcus Bockmuehl: “What is ‘doubting’ (apistos) about? The Fourth Gospel’s Thomas is not his desire for facts but his emphatic refusal to trust the apostolic testimony: ‘unless [I see and touch him], I will not believe’ (John 20.25, 27, 29).” [The Cambridge Companion to Jesus (Cambridge, 2001), 11.]

## Paul first letter to the Corinthians

### Bad Reading

Paul reveled in the knowledge that the overwhelming majority of his followers were not well-educated or highly intelligent (1 Cor. 1:26).

But no one denigrated intelligence and education more blatantly than the apostle Paul.... He boasted that his ministry deliberately avoided “wise and persuasive words” because faith, according to him, must not be founded on “words of human wisdom” (1 Cor. 2:1-4).

He bluntly declared that the message he preached was “foolishness” to those not enlightened by supernatural revelation (v.18), nor could it be otherwise because the human mind cannot properly grasp spiritual things (1 Cor. 2:13-14).

Paul clearly worked within a thoroughly dualistic framework which drew a sharp line between rationality and spiritual profundity.

### Good Reading

In 1 Corinthian Paul speaks of two types of wisdom and people with wisdom | understanding this makes sense of the text in question. Paul’s point is the pride behind and source of the wisdom the Corinthians trusted.

The idea of “wisdom” for Paul was loaded with negative and positive freight in 1 Corinthians. All these uses of the word “wisdom” are positive: 1 Cor 1:24, 1:30, 2:6, 2:7. Also in Paul’s thinking, there is a wisdom he regards as negative. All these uses of the word “wisdom” are negative: 1:17, 1:20, 1:22–23, 1:25, 1:26, 2:1, 2:4, 2:5, 2:13, 3:18–20. (summary from p. 145)

Paul labeled the two kinds in wisdom in ways that are helpful for determine what is behind them.

“One kind is described as the “wisdom of the world” (1:20; 3:19), the “wisdom of men” (2:5), the wisdom “according to worldly standards” (1:26), and “human wisdom” (2:13). The other kind of wisdom is described three times as the “wisdom of God” (1:24; 2:7) and once as “not a wisdom of this age” (2:6). So the ultimate difference between these two kinds of wisdom is that one is God’s and one is man’s...” (p. 146)

#### Difference of wisdoms

“Therefore, we may conclude that the ultimate difference between God’s wisdom and man’s wisdom is how they relate to the glory of God’s grace in Christ crucified. *God’s wisdom* makes the glory of God’s grace our supreme treasure. But *man’s wisdom* delights in seeing himself as resourceful, self-sufficient, self-determining, and not utterly dependent on God’s free grace. Divine wisdom begins consciously with God (“The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom,” Ps. 111:10), and is consciously sustained by God and has the glory of God as it’s conscious goal. Divine wisdom reached its climactic demonstration in the cross of Christ—because the cross was a way of salvation that humbles man and exalts the grace of God. When divine wisdom is revealed to humans in the death of Christ, its effect is to save us and humble us by doing for us what we could not do for ourselves.” (p. 149)

#### Conclusion

“the warnings that Jesus and Paul have sounded in Luke 10:21 and 1 Corinthians 1:21 are not warnings against careful, faithful, rigorous, coherent thinking in the pursuit of God. In fact, the way Jesus and Paul spoke these very warnings compels us to engage in serious thinking even to understand them. And what we find is that pride is no respecter of persons—the serious thinkers may be humble. And the careless mystics may be arrogant..” (p. 154)

John Piper, *Think: The Life of the Mind and the Love of God* (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway, 2010)

Viewed in isolation, some passages of Scripture seem to convey that there is a special danger in the human intellect—danger that is greater than the hazards of, for example, “the heart.” Sadly, these passages are often viewed “in isolation” in churches used as slogans, passages like the following seem solidly anti-intellectual:

- Knowledge puffeth up, but charity edifieth. (1 Cor. 8:1).
- God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise. (1 Cor. 1:27)
- Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit. (Col. 2:8)
- Ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth. (2 Tim. 3:7)
- Trust in the Lord with all your heart and do not lean on your own understanding. (Prov. 3:5-6).

Based on passages like these, anti-intellectualism produces principles like

1. Christians ought to focus more energy on “matters of the heart” in contrast to the intellect.
2. Study and analysis should be viewed with greater suspicion than impression and intuition. It is this way because impression and intuition are the special and only domain of the Holy Spirit.
3. The quality of worship should be gauged by what’s felt more than by what’s confessed or learned.

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1. The intellect and the “heart” aren’t really alternatives to each other.

There’s a kernel of truth in the old “head belief vs. heart belief” contrast. It’s possible to acknowledge that a conclusion makes sense but not actually embrace it as truth. It’s possible to acknowledge that an idea is true, yet attach no personal importance to it. It’s easy to accept something as true but fail to accept how that truth relates to who we are and how we live, then accept those implications, and act.

But none of these problems are actually failures of elevating intellect over “heart.” They really aren’t “head vs. heart” problems. They can’t be, because Scripture shows us that our emotions, affections, and values (“heart”) are so intertwined with our reasoning, analysis, and gaining of knowledge (“head”) that a good bit of the time we can’t really tell where one ends and the other begins.

The most common word for “heart” in the Old Testament is the Hebrew *lev*. In Proverbs, the *lev* feels the whole range of emotions (15:13, 15; 13:12; 14:10) and makes choices (3:1, 5; 5:12). But it also understands (2:2), devises plans (6:18; 16:9), studies (15:28), teaches (16:23), and ponders (23:7). So when Proverbs 4:23 warns us

to diligently keep our hearts (lev), it's calling us to guard (natsar) our entire inner man—including both the intellectual and the nonintellectual. The most common word for “heart” in the NT (kardia) shows a similar pattern. Along with its connection to a range of emotions and attitudes, the kardia thinks (Matt. 9:4) understands (Matt. 13:15) questions (Mark 2:8, Luke 3:15), ponders (Luke 2:19)—even reasons (dialogismos, Luke 9:47). Since the Bible reveals that our intellectual and non-intellectual capacities are complementary, trying to pit them against each other to produce a winner is foolish.

## 2. Not all knowledge “puffs up.”

Pride of knowledge is a real problem, but so is the pride of any other possession. Whether we're proud to have more knowledge than others or more land, money, friends, experience, or good looks—it's all the same. And some knowledge clearly isn't pride-inducing at all. Consider knowledge of the gospel, for example (1 Tim. 2:4): knowing that we've grievously wronged the God who made us, that all the good we could do in a thousand lifetimes wouldn't even begin to merit God's forgiveness, and that only His own righteousness graciously credited to us can make us acceptable to Him is humbling knowledge!

So it's not surprising that the New Testament often speaks of the importance of knowledge and, therefore, of intellect.

- Jesus said to them, “Is this not the reason you are wrong, because you know neither the Scriptures nor the power of God?” (Mark 12:24)
- For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge. (Rom. 10:2)
- Woe to you lawyers! For you have taken away the key of knowledge. You did not enter yourselves, and you hindered those who were entering. (Lk 11:52)
- [W]e have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, (Col. 1:9)
- Yet among the mature we do impart wisdom, although it is not a wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are doomed to pass away. (1 Cor. 2:6)

The Bible is anything but anti-intellectual. In the beginning, God created us as thinking beings in His image and gave us work for our minds (Gen. 2:19). Jesus commanded His followers to be mentally sharp (Matt. 10:16), and the apostle Paul urged us to “take every thought captive” to the obedience of Christ (2 Cor. 10:5). Drawing our conclusions about truth, error, right and wrong based on intuition and feelings—without disciplined attention to knowledge and clear thinking—isn't Christian; it's a worldly capitulation to the lazy sentimentality of our times.

## **'Miscellaneous' POINTS TO PONDER**

**The Bible nowhere praises ignorance.** It praises healthy, God-fearing knowledge, the first ingredient of wisdom. It praises wisdom itself, which requires, besides knowledge, a practical ability to fit oneself inside God's world and God's purposes. On the other hand, ignorance is not only a disadvantage for navigating in God's world, but sometimes also a folly, the result of being unwilling to learn.

**The Bible does reject "the wisdom of this world,"** proudly acquired and employed without reference to God. Because worldly wisdom is unanchored in ultimate reality, it is fleeting and finally doomed.

**Myriad forms of illegitimate knowledge:** If the Bible rejects the acquisition of knowledge for the sake of prestige or dominance instead of for the sake of service to God and the world, the list of illegitimate forms of knowledge then grows embarrassingly long. Myriad examples come to mind: People acquire knowledge of the weaknesses of others whom they want to cheat, bully, corrupt, or seduce. People master a field of knowledge hoping to incite envy and awe. Terrorists acquire a pilot's knowledge in order to crash airliners into buildings full of workers.

So in our definition, anti-intellectualism is opposition to or dismissal of the healthy life of the mind. Meanwhile, opposition to unhealthy intellectualism is just what faithfulness calls for.

**Education for discernment:** Faced with wrong kinds of knowledge, Christians should want education to help discern the differences between good and evil, which are often twined around each other, and to "discern the spirits," which may be of God or of the evil one.

**Knowledge for celebration:** But faithful Christians should want reasoning, learning, and understanding also to appreciate the grandeur of God's creation, to delight in its richness and complexity, and to have cause for celebrating God's ingenuity within it.

**Contribution to the kingdom of God:** And because Christians have been called to "seek the kingdom first," their calling is to become productive citizens of the kingdom of God. Knowledge of how to contribute to it often requires discernment, thought, and study.

**With all your mind:** Christians who want good learning, good thinking, and good understanding may be said simply to be following our Lord, who taught his followers to "love God with all your mind." This command exposes anti-intellectualism as anti-Christian, a form of disobedience to Jesus. And it exposes the healthy hunger for learning as a form of faithfulness to Jesus.

**The establishment of universities:** Medieval Christians established universities in Paris, Oxford, Cambridge, and elsewhere, centering their study in liberal arts. Before and alongside the universities, Christian monks preserved and extended knowledge to such a significant degree that many historians, Christian and non-Christian alike, credit the monks with saving Western civilization.

**To know and love God's work:** As suggested above, thoughtful Christians know that if we obey the Bible's great commandment to love God with our whole mind, as well as with everything else, then we will study the splendor of God's creation, hope to grasp part of the ingenuity and grace that forms it. One way to love God is to know and love God's work. Learning is therefore a spiritual calling: Properly done, it attaches us to God. In addition, the learned person has, so to speak, more to be Christian with. Education "develops, disciplines, and matures our humanity" and thus enables us to make a Christian profession that is "humanly significant." The person who studies chemistry, for example, can enter into God's enthusiasm for the dynamic possibilities of material reality. The student who examines one of the great movements of history has moved into position to praise the goodness of God, to lament the mystery of evil, or to explore the places where these things intertwine. Further, from persistent study of history a student may develop good judgment, a feature of wisdom that helps us lead a faithful human life in the midst of a confusing world. Chemistry and history are of course only two samples from the wide menu of good things to learn.

**Gaining wisdom from many sources:** Certainly, if you hope to reform a church, a government, or an academy, you will need a standard to go by, and the highest and best standard for reforming all of life, Calvin and others believed, is the written Word of God. Educated Christians therefore need to know their Bible to lead a life that fits with the purposes of God. But to reform a complex institution — or to write a law, treat a patient, or perform any number of other human undertakings — you will need to gain wisdom from many sources in addition to Scripture. You will need to look for truth wherever it may be found.

**Shalom as the ultimate goal:** The point of all this learning is to prepare to add one's own contribution to the supreme reformation project, which is God's restoration of all things that have been corrupted by evil. The Old Testament word for this restoration of peace, justice, and harmony is shalom; the New Testament phrase for it is "the coming of the kingdom." You can find the Old Testament's teaching about shalom especially in the prophets, and you can find the New Testament's teaching about the kingdom especially in the gospels and in some passages of Paul's epistles. According to Scripture, God plans to accomplish this project through Jesus Christ, who started to make all things new, and who will come again to finish what he started. In the meantime, God's Spirit calls a worldwide body of people to join this mission of God. So when Christians strive to make God's purposes their own, they tilt forward toward God's restoration of all things, the final coming of the kingdom. They think about it, pray for it, and study and work in ways that accord with it. Thinking personally as well as globally, they want the kingdom to come in their own hearts as well as in the whole

world. Seen in this light, the healthy life of the mind is a Christian's adventure, an entrée into full appreciation of God's creative ingenuity and full participation in God's kingdom project in the world. Anti-intellectualism, then, is, sheer disobedience — a dismissal of the adventure and therefore a shameful rejection of God's daily call to Christians in the world

# Appendix

## Polarization

Between the intellectual focus and other activities. Thus Wilberforce (English reformer) preferred virtue over knowledge. Ashbury (Great Methodist minister) in the US allowed a rejection of studies if it prevents soul saving – a choice that to earlier generations would have been unthinkable. As the Wizard of Oz puts it: ‘I shall take a heart, for brains do not make one happy, and happiness is the best thing in the world.’

Christians have come to believe a false dichotomy between heart and mind, (other s may use the terms, theory and practice, intellect and emotion, faith and learning) The dichotomy is rooted in the idea of an antagonism between the two. This antagonism must be put to an end to embrace a vision of truth that displays wholeness and integration. The heart and the head are not at odds when it comes to matters of faith.

The false dichotomy comes from the idea that faith and reason are at odds. Defined in the late 1800’s, reason was defined as an empirical facility thus conflating it with the empirical method of obtaining knowledge (scientific method).<sup>10</sup> Reason is properly defined as the human capacity for logical coherence and consistence. Luther reminded us that the Christian view of reason is balanced. Reason is a God given ability in man but due to the fallen nature needs to be qualified in three ways, its limitation (reason and nature cannot bring us to a saving knowledge of God, only a knowledge of our moral responsibility before God), it’s pride, (reversing the object and subject placing the

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<sup>10</sup> This is often assumed by many atheist apologist to consider Christianity as an irrational belief system.

self in Judgement of God) and it's unfaithfulness ().<sup>11</sup> Without going deep suffice it to say faith and reason are not at odds. Ultimately, they are at harmony.

Second, humanity was meant to live not from head alone nor heart alone but a union of the whole self. We are not a dichotomy but an integrated self, all parts affect the other. Said another way, the three marks to a whole person are thinker, lover, doer! To be human is to be a thinker, and a lover, and a doer at the same time (this is a trinitarian formula for Orthopraxy.<sup>12</sup>).

Today in most university fellowships there is a conflict between those who are 'spiritual', 'practical' 'evangelistic', or focused on 'social justice' and others worthy concerns, and those who desire to learn theology and think Christianly, the later are often seen as unspiritual, impractical, not concerned for evangelism etc. The fallacy is assuming that there is a divorce between the head and the heart. So we are conditioned to prefer empty brains and happy hearts. The problem with winning souls without discipling the mind is that it leads to losing everything. The church needs to learn how to make thinkers and not just learners. People who think we'll integrating heart and head, to the glory of God.

#### Quotes

More often we evangelicals choose a good thing but in a bad way because we choose at the expense of another good thing. In terms of a Christian mind, we evangelicals

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<sup>11</sup> The three points explained 1.) Reason can't discern everything. Observation is limited to physical properties not open to metaphysical ones. Some truths must be revealed by special revelation (bible). For example, Human reason is incapable of deducing the Trinity from nature, even if it can reason about Some aspects of God's self-revelation. 2.) It's pride often leads it to take the place of the Word of God, creating and insisting on something other works or doctrine. In a displacement of authority in the arrogance that it knows better than God. 3.) It's unfaithfulness. Luther used the deeply theological word for this unfaithfulness. He said fallen reason was a "whore". He described reason this way due to its "whorish" ways. That his left unattended Human reason could create lines of argument in service of anything a person cherished as an ultimate concern (basically, an idol). In this way, reason would be unfaithful in seeking the truth. For Luther the problem was more than reason's inability to grasp heavenly things because it was viewing life through the self (ie. It's pride). It becomes a whore when it betrays its essential obligation, which is to gain real and true knowledge, specifically moral and theological knowledge. Reason's problem was more than getting too big for its britches (it's pride); it betrays truth for personal gain. It is here that Luther's anthropology, with its understanding of fallen humanity, oddly finds itself in agreement with some of postmodernism's critique of philosophy, albeit in theological language. Moreover, for Luther the working of the human mind is not simply limited by culture, context, power, and language. It is morally corrupted so that it will sell itself for personal gain. Reason will invariably compromise its integrity, and betray its pursuit of the truth, when doing so brings benefit to the individual. This is why Luther speaks of reason as a whore.

<sup>12</sup> Orthopraxy literally meaning 'right practice' yet includes both ethical and liturgical aspects. What is true of a worshiper is true of all humanity.

characteristically pit "heart" versus "head" and opt for heart as the more spiritual choice.<sup>13</sup>

“The first influence that helped to undermine what was left of the Puritan mind and leave its mark on evangelicalism is the polarization of truth, in the sense of a false antagonism between heart and mind. To be sure, no one in the fallen world-believer or unbeliever-has the capacity to hold God's truth in its entirety. As the Apostle Paul wrote to the Romans, the unbeliever "holds the truth in unrighteousness." If no unbeliever is totally wrong or completely evil-because the truth is inextinguishable-no believer has the full truth by the scruff of the neck. Holding the truth in a sinful manner, our grasp is always incomplete, however conscientious or hardworking we may be. In Martin Luther's picture, we are like a drunken peasant clambering onto his donkey from one side only to tumble off the other.”<sup>14</sup>

... when the First Great Awakening occurred, many people emphasized one of the two poles at the expense of the other-faith, with its warm heart, experience, and fervor usually being favored at the expense of learning and a sharp mind.

There were, of course, magnificent exceptions even then. Jonathan Edwards, for example, ranks as one of America's finest thinkers in his or any age. And his was a style of thinking rooted in worship and suffused with deep devotion, combining the old Puritan's regard for doctrine with the new revivalists' passion for deep experience.<sup>15</sup>

## 2. Pietism,

While polarization is always wrong, piety is always right. Piety is heart religion in which personal devotion to Christ and the things of God are at the heart of the faith. Piety is a man on fire for the gospel giving spiritual heat and intellectual light to those around him. It has always stood against the abuses of sacramentalism, doctrinalism, ritualism, legalism, and intellectualism. However, when piety becomes pietism, things break down, for it is the reductionism of Christian faith to personal spiritual disciplines and practices most often in a sentimental, anti-intellectual context.

Pietism can be seen in two streams Lutheranism and American reformed theology. Among the Lutherans in the late 17th century with the work of Philipp Spener, a Lutheran theologian whose emphasis on personal transformation through spiritual rebirth and renewal, individual devotion, with a primary focus on the individual's

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<sup>13</sup> Os Guinness, *Fit Bodies, Fat Minds: Why Evangelicals Don't Think and What to Do about It* by, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1994) p. 30

<sup>14</sup> Os Guinness, *Fit Bodies, Fat Minds: Why Evangelicals Don't Think and What to Do about It* by, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1994) p. 28

<sup>15</sup> Os Guinness, *Fit Bodies, Fat Minds: Why Evangelicals Don't Think and What to Do about It* by, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1994) p. 29

relationship with God. Guinness regards this as overall positive, but by the 1920's in Germany it became pathological under the the Nazis, allowing the acceptance of 'German Christianity' as a myth of a 'dear god' who spread his cloak of sentimental love over everything. Specifically, Lutheran priests emphasized inward personal bliss and private salvation. Bonhoeffer was a strong opponent, condemning an escapist church in a spiritual niche that was no longer salt and light. 'Socially irrelevant if privately engaging'.<sup>16</sup> The more pietistic the church the more it's removed from public life. Around the same time in America (1920-30) Pietism was fully under the influenced of American individualism fostering adherence to the two headed dragon of the Personalization of religion and Privatization of religion.<sup>17</sup>

As for the American stream, Piety was a central idea in Calvins theology. This idea of a Spirit born piety (devotion), nurtured in community, restored a sense of personal relationship with God to churches that had gone cold with impersonal ritualistic doctrine, but over time it was misunderstood and missused. In the 1800's revivalistic pietism lead to much excesses that's truly navigated by Edwards and others. In the wake of Edwards, and thought the social and religious changes that happened during the second great awakening, pietism influenced a shift from:

Objective to subjective

Biblical and communal to individualist (as one's source of authority)

Election to voluntarism (in theological focus)

Liturgical to informal

'How do I know I am saved' moved from theological to experiential.

The success of the evangelical revival came with its focus on these things. Thus Moody denies having any theology, and Jones, a revivalist in the South, said 'If I had a creed I would sell it to a museum'. Evangelist Billy Sunday, spoke for many Christians when he said, "If I had a million dollars I'd give \$999,999 to the church and \$1 to education."<sup>18</sup> So we see, piety (true devotion) deforms into pietism (subjective sentimentality) when it shifts from the objective to the subjective, from a focus on

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<sup>16</sup> We show similar signs, Guinness writes. Guinness wrote in 1995 – I suspect we've gone too far the other way!

<sup>17</sup> In Bonhoeffer critique of the German church we see him taking aim at this two headed dragon. Rooted in religious sentimentality and the two concepts make up must of what he meant by the term "religion", a term he used negatively, in contrast to biblical faith. Generally speaking, Personalization was the assumption that the whole sum of religion was about me and my personal relationship with God. (vertical orientation high on sentimentality) Privatization was the assumption that religious faith was a private matter of personal opinion. A person's faith (belief system) is thus wholly private matter and improper for public discourse especially in political and socio-ethical context (Horizontal orientation, downplay of ethical norms and role of public practice)

<sup>18</sup> Richard Hofstadter, *Anti-Intellectualism in American Life* (New York: Vintage, 1962), 122

others to a focus on self-improvement, from theology to experience<sup>19</sup> Such, pietism is spiritual heat without intellectual light, devotion without doctrine.

### Faith Without Theology

The trouble was that after the movement of revivalistic pietism swept by, evangelicalism had also become anti-intellectual and anti-theological to a fault. Examples of this anti-theological anti-intellectualism abound. "My theology!" Dwight L. Moody said later, "I didn't know I had any." "If I had a creed," Sam Jones, the Moody of the South, added, "I would sell it to a museum." Billy Sunday did not "know any more about theology," he used to boast, "than a jack-rabbit knew about ping pong."<sup>8</sup> Faith without theology? Creeds fit only for a museum? Theology at a jack-rabbit level something to brag about? The statements themselves are flamboyantly brash; the assumptions behind them appalling. But they reveal our evangelical anti-intellectualism beyond any contradiction.<sup>20</sup>

### No Longer a People of Truth

Thus our evangelical experience has become our strength and our weakness. We are people with a true, sometimes a deep experience of God. But we are no longer people of truth. Only rarely are we serious about theology at a popular level. We are still suspicious of thinking and scholarship. We are still attracted to movements that replace thinking and theology by other emphases-relational, therapeutic... and managerial (as in church growth). Some of our ministries and organizations that operate at the highest levels of national life are still deeply, explicitly, and persistently anti-intellectual.<sup>21</sup>

### 3. Primitivism in its bias toward the simplistic and against learning from the past

Primitivism is the impulse to restore or return to a simpler and better times, as if it was some golden age. Again this could be positive at time. It was a seeking to restore the order of life as revealed in the scriptures that lead tot he reformation. By the 20th Century, the evangelical focus on the individual and the free will choice to respond to God was consciously Arminian.

The defense of primitivism left the movement blind to its shortcomings:

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<sup>19</sup> Both in its disciplined and ritualistic form of experience thought spiritual disciplines and spontaneous and exuberant form of supernatural encounter. This is not to discount the means of both encounter and spiritual disciplines as having a place in the Christian life.

<sup>20</sup> Os Guinness, *Fit Bodies, Fat Minds: Why Evangelicals Don't Think and What to Do about It* by, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1994) p. 38 Moody quoted in Hofstadter, *anti-intellectualism in American life*, p. 108. Jones quoted in Ahlstrom, *A religious history of the American people*, vol. II, p. 204. Sunday, quoted in William G. McLoughlin, 'Billy Sunday was His real name' (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1955), p. 123.

<sup>21</sup> Os Guinness, *Fit Bodies, Fat Minds: Why Evangelicals Don't Think and What to Do about It* by, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1994) p. 38

Primitivism as embraced by evangelicals, has entailed most notably

- (1) a bias toward the simplistic and a rejection of the developed, institutionalized, and the settled;
- (2) a bias against history as a matter of corruption and decline.

In spite of this bias against historical development, there is an intrinsic human need for some sophistication in a complex day, as well as a sense of history in a rootless era. So many leaders seek to build anew, by reinterpreting the primal church, as a way to escape history and historical forces. This is rooted in the rejecting the already developed ideas, often leading the leaders, every few generations, to reinvent the wheel, theologically and doctrinally speaking. No longer slow cooking theology but cranking it out a book a year resulting in shallow near heretical work. We need to resist this attitude otherwise we cannot be effective.

#### 4. Populism

Populism is committed to the rights, wisdom, virtues, and experiences of the common person, again this a strength and a weakness.

Populism did two things Christianized American and democratized Christians.

Early and developing Methodism in America served the common people, promoting a healthy form of populist religion. Yet over time anti-intellectualism grows from the characteristics of populist religion:

Unpretentious leaders

Self evidence doctrines

Lively music

Vernacular communication

Locally run churches

Depreciation of education;<sup>22</sup>

A suspicion of theology.

Three things resulted from populism: (1) it contributed to naiveté, especially in causing people and leaders to think they were free of all bias and pre-theoretical frameworks; (2) it led to an excessive leveling of the churches, democracy run riot; (3) it contributed to an evangelical lack of respect for theology and a disengagement from serious discussion of truth as too elitist.

Populism can take all ideas and experiences at face value, opening the gate to heresy and new religions. There is a tendency to disdain educated leadership. It can also lead

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<sup>22</sup> This was even from in the seminary variety. Among more established institutions it became less and less stringent theological training and more practical skills. Among more independent congregations a belief in instantaneous impartation of ministry gifts so no need for training. It was also evident among secessionist congregations, for example the idea of “boy preachers” just google it on YouTube.

to shallow naivety, that confuses knowledge for wisdom like a teenager, ultimately show ones ignorance in their arrogance.<sup>23</sup>

The fruit of populism was the fragmentation of evangelicalism in the 19th century, as if you disagree about anything, you start a new church, seeing no issue in doing so. There is also a lack of respect for theology, and a disengagement from serious discussion of the truth. Alexander Campbell – founder of the Churches of Christ – sought to read the bible as though no-one had read it before him, rejecting even his previous views, let alone any foreign name, authority or system.

#### Yale President Attacks Populism

.... in his inaugural sermon Timothy Dwight, president of Yale College and grandson of Jonathan Edwards, did not attack deism but populism. Dwight's assault was on those "who declare, both in their language and conduct, that the desk ought to be yielded up to the occupancy of Ignorance. While they demand a seven-year apprenticeship, for the purpose of learning to make a shoe, or an axe, they suppose the system of Providence, together with the numerous, and frequently abstruse, doctrines and precepts, contained in the Scriptures, may all be comprehended without learning, labor, or time."<sup>24</sup>

#### No Great Native Protestant Thinkers

But this nation has had almost no great native Protestant thinkers and theologians since Jonathan Edwards. Populism is the principal reason why. As the Pentecostal leader A. J. Tomlinson claimed, "We have the Bible for everything, and we have no creeds, rituals, or articles of faith." In the face of such nonsense in our heritage, our task is plain. We evangelicals must assess our populist heritage realistically and take a more discerning stand against its liabilities. Otherwise we will perpetuate its limitations, fatally handicap ourselves in a world of experts and elites that is not congenial to populism, and never enter into the profundity of the simple faith that is ours.<sup>25</sup>

#### Pluralism,

Pluralism in view here is civil Pluralism. Civil Pluralism is a social condition in which numerous different religious, ethnic, and cultural groups live together in one nation under one government (liberty and justice for all). Four points need be made about the concept. First, pluralism is not in itself relativism and need not even entail it (as used today, pluralism is a social reality, not a philosophical doctrine. Two, in historical terms,

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<sup>23</sup> A claim to be free of all philosophical frameworks actually show one's ignorance.

<sup>24</sup> Os Guinness, *Fit Bodies, Fat Minds: Why Evangelicals Don't Think and What to Do about It* by, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1994) p. 47. Dwight Quoted in Hatch, *the democratization of American Christianity*, p.19.

<sup>25</sup> Os Guinness, *Fit Bodies, Fat Minds: Why Evangelicals Don't Think and What to Do about It* by, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1994) p. 48 Tomlinson Quoted in Hatch, *the democratization of American Christianity*, p. 215.

recognize that religious liberty makes pluralism more likely, and pluralism makes religious liberty more necessary. Three, pluralism reinforces particularism, a belief in the importance and distinctiveness of particular faiths and their particular doctrines, just as much as relativism (many groups in a pluralistic society are far from relativists--Christians, Jews, Muslims, etc.). Four, capitalism, pluralism, and freedom go together and may be the last best hope for tradition rather than its destroyer (because capitalism esp. leaves room for the development of ideas, institutions, and ways of life).

Specifically in the church doctrine became unimportant at the end of the 18th century; the focus was to inculcate the moral and practical precepts of Christianity. Thus 'deeds not creeds' became the test. Not least because in an open market of religion putting your most attractive aspect forward was the solution. It was from this pluralistic and capitalistic context especially among Protestant congregation seeking new members that marketing methodologies moved into the church and consumerism began its long and destructive influence on ministry philosophy in many churches.

Pluralism as a cultural condition contributions to Christian anti-intellectualism in two ways:

(1) Civil Pluralism has promoted a religion of indifference where truth does not really count and where excessive tolerance is prized. In the church this cultural assumption led to an unwillingness to challenge anything and therefore not offend anyone, leading to an intolerant tolerance with a belief of its own. The logic of such tolerance leads to relativism, being hostile to any serious differences. Chesterton comments: "tolerance is the virtue of those who don't believe anything."

(2) It reinforced Protestant indifference to truth, and shifted the accent from belief to behavior 'deeds not creeds' - a nation of behaviors, religiously speaking. Theological belief even gospel truths are relegated to a level of option. It is only what one does that matters. Because our society has a variety of beliefs which has led Christians to think more about different viewpoints, but at times it has led to relativism and a sacrifice of truth in the name of getting along. In this way, Pluralism can make a thinking faith docile. An Indifferent to the truth can reveal a kind of latent relativism. Such relativism is active in the background of modern evangelicalism promoting behavior that is socially conditioned and proper for promotion within the group while reinforcing that such actions are more valuable than sound thinking about doctrine.

## 6. Pragmatism,

Pragmatism is the distinctively American philosophy that is bound up with hard work, common sense, ingenuity, know-how, and achievement. It holds that beliefs are true if they work and have cash value, and can be successfully applied to daily life. As a formal philosophy pragmatism was the creation of William James of Harvard at the end of the 19th century, who argued that truth (which included religious beliefs) were only true because of their impact on human behavior, not because of their philosophical claims.

However Evangelicals had already begun to deal with this way of thinking before James formalized the philosophy. In England, Wesley's focus on what worked rather than resolve his incoherent attitude to the Church of England leads to an adoption of pragmatism, disdaining theological sophistication. Early puritans (early 17th century) were not interested in prosperity, but later, in the mid 18th century, saw prosperity as a good thing and that Christianity was the route to that.<sup>26</sup> In America, Pragmatism entered evangelicalism via the Second Great Awakening and via the explosion of Jacksonian populism that has been a vital part of evangelicalism ever since.

Today most would reject the formal philosophy, yet the same have accepted informal pragmatism as ways to help churches grow. While being practical and thinking with a measure of pragmatism is necessary one should be on guard lest we begin to think that the fruitfulness of a thing is the verification of a thing's truthfulness. For the question is not: "Is it true? but will it work?"

Such pragmatic "Business as usual" methods slowly causes, "Will it work?" to be the more evident, substitute, validating and important question than "Is it true?" Several historical factors are noticed about the informal form of pragmatism

One, the influence of Benjamin Franklin on the American psyche and his theme of doing well by doing good. Franklin is a great example of the wisdom of informal pragmatism. He promoted a be good (moral) and you will get ahead (be blessed) kind of philosophy of life.<sup>27</sup>

Two, pragmatism produced a long stream of self-help and positive thinking tradition, optimistic thinking carries beneficial results (N. V. Peale; R. Schuller). Ultimately this leads to books like Norman Vincent Peale's 'The Power of Positive Thinking'. In Christianity, this man centered way of thinking is rooted in a 'Finney flavored' Arminian thinking that changed the gospel from a revelation of sin and grace, to a powerful means by which we are saved for our own good.

By the 20th century pragmatism had made the gospel a means to an end, offering power, health, wealth, popularity and peace of mind from a relationship with God. The result was that theology gave way to technique, and evangelicalism ends up rich in technique, ingenuity and organization and superficial or banal in doctrine. The gospel looked appealing but had little substance.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Yes, it can be shown how the prosperity gospel has its roots in some Puritan teachers.

<sup>27</sup> While true in part due to the created moral order it is also true that the fall has fractured that order so that it works inconsistently.

<sup>28</sup> While I still believe the four spiritual laws is enough of the gospel that it is orthodox. It can must be called orthodox lite for it is anthropocentric and minimalistic to say the least.

Three, the expression of pragmatism in mission, evangelism, and revivalism (Finney, Moody, Sunday, Graham, church growth movement, focus on techniques). Finney brought to a new level the engineers of revivals by creating pressure to achieve results. Finney argued: "Revivalism is not a miracle, or dependent on a miracle in any sense. It is a purely philosophical [scientific in our language] result of the constituted means – as much as any other effects produced by the application of means".<sup>29</sup> His techniques have been a defining feature of evangelicalism ever since. The result of focusing on results (a metric of pragmatism) has led to manipulative altar calls, servicing the self theology, engineered revivalism seeking results, as well as trends such as prosperity piety and its later incarnation the health and wealth gospel.

America, a Nation of Behavers, not Believers.

.... in historian Martin E. Marty's description, America is religiously speaking a "nation of behavers" rather than believers. Truth is commonly regarded as divisive, clarity of distinctions is not prized, and serious thinking is reckoned unnecessary. One irony is often pointed out: "heresy," which is clearly defined and arguably a matter of eternal consequence, has become less important to the average American Protestant than "un-American," a concept defined nowhere and unarguably of lesser importance to the believer.<sup>30</sup>

"Will it work? Overshadows "Is it True?"

The overall result of such different trends as prosperity piety, positive thinking, engineered revivalism, and the church-growth movement has been to stamp pragmatism indelibly on the evangelical soul. The concern "Will it work?" has long overshadowed "Is it true?" Theology has given way to technique. Know-whom has faded before know-how. Serving God has subtly been deformed into servicing the self. At its worst, the result is a shift from faith to the "faith in faith," which-along with faith in religion-is a perniciously distinctive American heresy. But even at its best, pragmatism results in an evangelicalism rich in ingenuity and organization but poor in spirituality and superficial, if not banal, in doctrine. We have become the worldliest Christians in America.<sup>31</sup>

### Premillennialism

Premillennialism (in its Dispensationalist form). The problem has not been premillennial doctrine<sup>32</sup> *per se* but rather the extremes of dispensationalism where preoccupation

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<sup>29</sup> Charles Finney, *Lectures on Revivals of Religion*, (Boston, Jewett & Co. 1858) 12

<sup>30</sup> Os Guinness, *Fit Bodies, Fat Minds: Why Evangelicals Don't Think and What to Do about It* by, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1994) p. 53-54

<sup>31</sup> Os Guinness, *Fit Bodies, Fat Minds: Why Evangelicals Don't Think and What to Do about It* by, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1994) p. 59

<sup>32</sup> Premillennialism is the belief that at the return of Christ, He will reign upon the earth for a 1000 years (Rev. 20).

with end times keeps Christians from thinking about the present times. One could exchange 'eschatology' with 'spiritual experiences' or 'political engagement' or activism and find the same process occurring. A morose preoccupation with any of these good things can lead us to devalue intellectual activity.<sup>33</sup>

It is not so much their theology that is in question but the old school dispensationalists' attitudes toward culture and learning. The issue is the product; it encourages detachment and lack of thought, not the belief itself.

Premillennial dispensationalism has had an adverse impact on evangelical thinking for several reasons.

First, dispensational premillennialism reinforces the previous seven trends (esp. populism, pragmatism).

Second, a shallow hermeneutic lead to anti-intellectualism. The careless crossover from the Bible to the historical events of the day, esp. when it comes to eschatological matters ("this is that" mentality).

Third, the dispensational movement reinforces anti-intellectual tendencies by its general indifference to serious engagement with the culture due to its apocalypticism and escapist pietism. Given the modern age was an age of scientific discourses in fleeing the world, dispensationalists embraced aspects of anti-intellectualism almost unconsciously. In doing so they handed the education of America over to men who traded older bodies of knowledge for the newer one's as well as shifting the epistemological perspective to a naturalistic materialistic worldview.

## 8. Philistinism

Philistinism, the disregard and disdain of high culture and anything associated with it, art, academics, aesthetics, education, or literary acumen etc. It is rooted in the idea that spiritual growth can't come through high minded pursuits but must be through more earthy, activist and/or spiritual means.

Named after the biblical Philistines of which Goliath was the most notable, the term refers to those who are deliberately ignorant and who are openly disdainful of intellectual, cultural, or artistic values. While the charge of philistinism can be elitist, it may be justified even if a snob levels it. At the same time, philistines often practice a "reverse snobbery" in their own pride over being uninformed and anti-cultural.

Evangelical philistinism is rooted in a Christ against Culture attitude. Philistinism reinforces the prejudice against the so-called media elite, and blocks evangelicals from truly appreciating culture from a Christian perspective.

Chesterton claims that one Puritan tradition sees worship in a barn as preferable to worship in a cathedral because a cathedral is beautiful and this distracting from focus

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<sup>33</sup> In case you're having a slow day the main thing is the gospel and keeping the main thing the main thing is intentionally keeping Christ at the center of our Christianity.

on God. Sundays are not just a day of rest, but a day for no fun so that we can worship God.

Two motives underlie this attitude:

1.) Art is a source of views unacceptable to Evangelical moralism

2.) Art is an alternative to the gospel and real Christianity; thus Finney: 'No Christian should relish a secular novel.' By contrast J. C. Ryle condemns the attitude that fails to engage with the science, art literature and politics of the world.

We get paranoid about the media elite; we fail to appreciate culture and the arts and isolate the artists in our churches. We therefore fail to offer a reply to the anti Christian assault of much of our culture. Then when philistines want to be artistic what is produced is little more than a poorly executed parody of prevailing cultural trends.

#### No Literary Aristocracy

Many common people in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries had a knowledge of Shakespeare and the Bible that people today would view as the preserve of the literary scholar or theologian. There simply was no literary aristocracy. By 1772, Jacob Duche<sup>1</sup> could write, "The poorest laborer upon the shores of the Delaware thinks himself entitled to deliver his sentiment on matters of religion or politics with as much freedom as the gentleman or scholar ... Such is the prevailing taste for books of every kind, that almost every man is a reader."<sup>34</sup>

#### Literacy, the Level of 12-yr-olds

George Steiner describes the result of modern mass education as "semi-literacy."<sup>5</sup> The ability to read is widespread, but the inability to read any but the shallowest texts is equally widespread. He cites recent estimates that put the literacy of more than half the population of the United States at the level of twelve-year-olds. Steiner concludes: "Such semi- or sub-literacy is not being eradicated by mass-schooling: it is being made politically and psychologically acceptable."<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Os Guinness, *Fit Bodies Fat Minds: Why Evangelicals Don't Think and What to Do About It* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994). 72, Quote from Neal Postman, *Amusing ourselves of Death* p. 34

<sup>35</sup> Os Guinness, *Fit Bodies Fat Minds: Why Evangelicals Don't Think and What to Do About It* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994). 72, Quote from George Steiner, *Extraterritorial* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968), p. 168.