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GOD
WITH

THE ROLE OF REASON IN
THE LIFE OF THE SOUL

ALL
YOUR
MIND

J . P . M o r e l a n d

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Finally, my precious wife, Hope, and my lovely daughters, Ashley and Allison, are simply what make my life possible. I have never met

anyone with as gracious and tender a spirit as my wife's, and I love her for who she is. My prayer is that this book will contribute to restoration of the church's intellectual life because it is the church that is the pillar and support of the truth.

J. P. Moreland, 1997

PREFACE TO THE REVISED EDITION

Since its publication in 1997, *Love Your God with All Your Mind* has had an impact for the cause of Christ that goes considerably beyond anything I could have imagined. It would be a significant understatement to say that I am grateful to God for this fact. The majority of the first edition's content is as relevant today as when it first appeared in print. But some updating was needed and, in my view, the reader could be better served by changing a few of the chapters.

So you hold in your hands a revised and updated version of the book. In chapter 1, I added a brief section about the current three-way worldview struggle in Western culture, and in chapter 2, I have included a new section on the nature of knowledge and its importance to Christianity. No author likes to remove material from his or her writing, and I am no exception to this rule. But, in my opinion, chapters 7–9 of the original edition, though useful, were not as helpful as the rest of the book. Moreover, I had additional content I wanted in the book. So chapters 7–9 of the original have been removed and replaced with three new chapters providing an outline of how to present a case for God's existence and the historicity of the life, teachings, deeds, death, and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth.

Further, the appendices, which provide further resources for cultivating an integrated Christian mind, have been thoroughly updated and expanded. I am deeply indebted to Joseph Gorra for his work on the appendices. So it is with gratitude and expectation that I offer to you, the reader, this improved and significantly altered edition of *Love Your God with All Your Mind*. May God be pleased to use it as He sees fit.

J. P. Moreland, 2012
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PART ONE

WHY THE MIND MATTERS IN CHRISTIANITY

HOW WE LOST THE CHRISTIAN MIND AND WHY WE MUST RECOVER IT

I had just returned from the mailbox and opened a letter from a woman who had attended a series of lectures I had recently given at her church. One never knows what a letter from a parishioner will say, so it was with a certain ambivalence that I opened the envelope. Here is what I read:

My life has changed drastically during the past few weeks since you have been teaching and encouraging us to think. I used to be deathly afraid of witnessing and terribly fearful that someone might ask me something about my faith. Whenever I got into any kind of discussion, I was rather defensive and nervous. Well, I have been reading, rather, plowing, through some of your lecture notes at church. As I absorb the information and logically understand the foundations for my faith, a calm is resting in my soul. I have been a believer for a long time and the Lord has done marvelous, specific things in my life. But now I understand why I believe, and this has brought me both peace and a non-defensive boldness to witness to others. Please don't stop encouraging people to risk thinking objectively and arriving at conclusions based on logic and fact. My life will never be the same because of this encouragement.

My heart was at once deeply grateful and profoundly saddened. I was grateful to think that God could use someone like me to help one

of His children. I was saddened to be reminded of how unusual it is for Christian people to be taught how to think carefully and deeply about what they believe and why they believe it. Not long ago, the newspaper featured a leading politician's statement about the Christian political right in which he charged that the Christian right was populated by dumb, uninformed people who are easily led by rhetoric. While I would dispute the complete accuracy of this charge, nevertheless, we Christians must ask ourselves why, if there is not a grain of truth in it, someone would think to make this accusation of us in the first place. Judged by the Scriptures, church history, and common sense, it is clear that something has gone desperately wrong with our modern understanding of the value of reason and intellectual development for individual discipleship and corporate church life.

It doesn't take a rocket scientist to recognize that our entire culture is in trouble. We are staring down the barrel of a loaded gun, and we can no longer afford to act like it's loaded with blanks. The guidance counselor at a public high school near my home confessed to a parents' group that the teenagers who have attended the school during the last ten years are the most dysfunctional, illiterate group he has witnessed in close to forty years at the same school. Our society has replaced heroes with celebrities, the quest for a well-informed character with the search for flat abs, substance and depth with image and personality. In the political process, the makeup man is more important than the speech writer, and we approach the voting booth, not on the basis of a well-developed philosophy of what the state should be, but with a heart full of images, emotions, and slogans all packed into thirty-second sound bites. The mind-numbing, irrational tripe that fills TV talk shows is digested by millions of bored, lonely Americans hungry for that sort of stuff. What is going on here? What has happened to us?

There are no simple answers to these questions, and I don't pretend to offer a full analysis as a solution to this quandary. But I do think the place to start looking for an answer is to remind ourselves of something Jesus Christ said long ago. In His inaugural address, He spelled out how

His community of followers were to understand themselves. With characteristic insight, He asserted that “You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again?” (Matthew 5:13).

One job of the church is to be salty to the world in which it finds itself, so if that world grows saltless, we should look first to the church herself to glean what we can about her contribution to the situation. In the rest of this chapter, I will demonstrate that a major cause of our current cultural crisis consists of a worldview shift from a Judeo-Christian understanding of reality to a post-Christian one. Moreover, this shift itself expresses a growing anti-intellectualism in the church, resulting in the marginalization of Christianity in society—its lack of saltiness, if you will—and the emergence of the most secular culture the world has ever seen. That secular culture is now simply playing out the implications of ideas that have come to be widely accepted in a social context in which the church is no longer a major participant in the war of ideas.¹ In the rest of this book, then, I’ll try to demonstrate how the church must overcome the neglect of this critical area of the development of the Christian mind, perhaps the most integral component of the believers’ sanctification. The role of intellectual development is primary in evangelical Christianity, but you might not know that from a cursory look at the church today. In spite of this, if we are to have Christ formed in us (Galatians 4:19), we must realize the work of God in our minds and pay attention to what a Christlike mind might look like. As our Savior has said, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind” (Matthew 22:37). To do this, we cannot neglect the soulful development of a Christian mind.

THE LOSS OF THE CHRISTIAN MIND IN AMERICAN CHRISTIANITY

Two major developments emerged in the late nineteenth century that contributed to the loss of the Christian mind in America. The legacy of the Pilgrims and Puritans waned, and two new movements emerged from which the evangelical church has never fully recovered. Let’s take

a brief look at these two movements, and then we'll examine the deeper problems that have resulted.

Historical Overview

1. *The emergence of anti-intellectualism.* While generalizations can be misleading, it is safe to say that from the arrival of the Pilgrims to the middle of the nineteenth century, American believers prized the intellectual life for its contribution to the Christian journey. The Puritans were highly educated people (the literacy rate for men in early Massachusetts and Connecticut was between 89 and 95 percent)² who founded colleges, taught their children to read and write before the age of six, and studied art, science, philosophy, and other fields as a way of loving God with the mind. Scholars like Jonathan Edwards were activists who sought to be scholarly and well informed in a variety of disciplines. The minister was an intellectual, as well as spiritual, authority in the community.³ As Puritan Cotton Mather proclaimed, “Ignorance is the Mother not of Devotion but of HERESY.”⁴

In the middle 1800s, however, things began to change dramatically, though the seeds for the change had already been planted in the popularized, rhetorically powerful, and emotionally directed preaching of George Whitefield in the First Great Awakening in the United States from the 1730s to the 1750s. During the middle 1800s, three awakenings broke out in the United States: the Second Great Awakening (1800–1820), the revivals of Charles Finney (1824–1837), and the Layman’s Prayer Revival (1856–1858). Much good came from these movements. But their overall effect was to overemphasize immediate personal conversion to Christ instead of a studied period of reflection and conviction; emotional, simple, popular preaching instead of intellectually careful and doctrinally precise sermons; and personal feelings and relationship to Christ instead of a deep grasp of the nature of Christian teaching and ideas. Sadly, as historian George Marsden notes, “anti-intellectualism was a feature of American revivalism.”⁵

Obviously, there is nothing wrong with the emphasis of these

movements on personal conversion. What was a problem, however, was the intellectually shallow, theologically illiterate form of Christianity that came to be part of the populist Christian religion that emerged. One tragic result of this was what happened in the so-called Burned Over District in the state of New York. Thousands of people were “converted” to Christ by revivalist preaching, but they had no real intellectual grasp of Christian teaching. As a result, two of the three major American cults began in the Burned Over District among the unstable, untaught “converts”: Mormonism (1830) and the Jehovah’s Witnesses (1884). Christian Science arose in 1866 but was not connected with this area.

2. *Evangelical withdrawal began.* Sadly, the emerging anti-intellectualism in the church created a lack of readiness for the widespread intellectual assault on Christianity that reached full force in the late 1800s. This attack was part of the war of ideas raging at that time and was launched from three major areas. First, certain *philosophical ideas* from Europe, especially the views of David Hume (1711–1776) and Immanuel Kant (1724–1804), altered people’s understanding of religion. Hume claimed that the traditional arguments for God’s existence (for example, the world is an effect that needs a personal cause) were quite weak. He also said that since we cannot experience God with the five senses, the claim that God exists cannot be taken as an item of knowledge. In a different way, Kant asserted that human knowledge is limited to what can be experienced with the five senses, and since God cannot be so experienced, we cannot know He exists. The ideas of Hume and Kant had a major impact on culture as they spread across Europe and into America.⁶

For one thing, confidence was shaken in arguments for the existence of God and the rationality of the Christian faith. Additionally, fewer and fewer people regarded the Bible as a body of divinely revealed, true propositions about various topics that requires a devoted intellect to grasp and study systematically. Instead, the Bible increasingly was sought solely as a practical guide for ethical guidance and spiritual growth.

Second, *German higher criticism* of the Bible called its historical reliability into question. The Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch was challenged and the search for the historical Jesus was launched. Believers grew suspicious of the importance of historical study in understanding the Bible and in defending its truthfulness. An increased emphasis was placed on the Holy Spirit in understanding the Bible as opposed to serious historical and grammatical study. Third, *Darwinian evolution* emerged and “made the world safe for atheists,” as one contemporary Darwinian atheist has put it. Evolution challenged the early chapters of Genesis for some and the very existence of God for others.⁷

Instead of responding to these attacks with a vigorous intellectual counterpunch, many believers grew suspicious of intellectual issues altogether. To be sure, Christians must rely on the Holy Spirit in their intellectual pursuits, but this does not mean they should expend no mental sweat of their own in defending the faith.

Around the turn of the nineteenth century, fundamentalists withdrew from the broader intellectual culture and from the war with liberals that emerged in most mainline denominations at the time. Fundamentalists started their own Bible institutes and concentrated their efforts on lay-oriented Bible and prophecy conferences. This withdrawal from the broader intellectual culture and public discourse contributed to the isolation of the church, the marginalization of Christian ideas from the public arena, and the shallowness and trivialization of Christian living, thought, and activism. In short, the culture became saltless.⁸

More specifically, we now live in an evangelical community so deeply committed to a certain way of seeing the Christian faith that this perspective is now imbedded within us at a subconscious level.

This conceptualization of the Christian life is seldom brought to conscious awareness for debate and discussion. And our modern understanding of Christian practice underlies everything else we do, from the way we select a minister to the types of books we sell in our bookstores.

It informs the way we raise our children to think about Christianity; it determines how we give money to the cause of Christ; and it shapes our vision, priorities, and goals for both local and parachurch ministry. If our lives and ministries are expressions of what we actually believe, and if what we believe is off center and yet so pervasive that it is seldom even brought to conscious discussion, much less debated, then this explains why our impact on the world is so paltry compared to our numbers. I cannot overemphasize the fact that this modern understanding of Christianity is neither biblical nor consistent with the bulk of church history.

What, exactly, is this modern understanding of Christianity?

Anti-Intellectualism's Impact on the Church

I believe it is critical that the evangelical church overcome these characteristics and move toward a clearer, more biblical understanding of the Christian mind and how Christ Himself wants to shape our thinking. The rest of this book will attempt to provide countermeasures to these unbiblical problems so that our spirituality is informed by an appropriate biblical view of the mind and how Jesus Himself wishes to transform the mind by renewing it (in fact, we'll look at Romans 12:1-2 in some depth later). Five characteristics capture the essence of the impact of anti-intellectualism on today's evangelicalism. Read carefully and see how these may have impacted your own ideas.

1. *A misunderstanding of faith's relationship to reason.* First, while few would actually put it in these terms, faith is now understood as a blind act of will, a decision to believe something that is either independent of reason or that is a simple choice to believe while ignoring the paltry lack of evidence for what is believed. By contrast with this modern misunderstanding, biblically, *faith is a power or skill to act in accordance with the nature of the kingdom of God, a trust in what we have reason to believe is true.* Understood in this way, we see that faith is built on reason. We should have good reasons for thinking that Christianity is true before we dedicate ourselves completely to it. We should have solid

evidence that our understanding of a biblical passage is correct before we go on to apply it. And so on.

If this is correct, then sermons should target people's thinking as much as their wills and feelings. Sunday school should be more effective in training believers how to think carefully about their faith. Training in apologetics should be a regular part of discipleship. Apologetics is a New Testament ministry of helping people overcome intellectual obstacles that block them from coming to or growing in the faith by giving reasons for why one should believe Christianity is true and by responding to objections raised against it. Local church after local church should be raising up and training a group of people who serve as apologists for the entire congregation.

Unfortunately, our contemporary understanding of these important concepts treats faith and reason as polar opposites. Let me give you two illustrations from my own ministry.

Years ago I conducted a series of evangelistic messages for a church in New York. The series was in a high school gym, and both believers and unbelievers attended each night. The first evening I gave arguments for the existence of God from science and philosophy. Before closing in prayer, I entertained several questions from the audience. One woman (who was a Christian) complained about my talk, charging that if I "proved" the existence of God, I would leave no room for faith. I responded by saying that if she were right, then we should pray that currently available evidence for God would evaporate or be refuted so there would be even more room for faith! Obviously, her view of faith utterly detached itself from reason.

The second illustration comes from repeatedly hearing small group Bible studies go straight to the question, What does this passage mean to me? while bypassing the prior question, What does the passage say and why do I think my interpretation is correct? We allow one another to get away with applying an understanding of a passage that is based on vague feelings or first impressions and not on the hard work of reading commentaries and using study tools such as concordances, Bible

dictionaries, and the like. Why? Because a careful exercise of reason is not important in understanding what the Bible says for many of us. Besides, it takes work!

For many, religion is identified with subjective feelings, sincere motives, personal piety, and blind faith. As the song puts it, “You ask me how I know He lives, He lives within my heart.” In other words, we test the truth of our religion not by a careful application of our God-given faculties of thought, or even by biblical mandates (see, for example, 2 Corinthians 10:5), but rather by our private experiences. For the most part, theoretical reason is just not part of our local church life any longer. We often hear it said in church that we don’t want a discussion to get too theological, we want to keep it practical, as though good practice did not require careful thought to direct it. We sing, “In my *heart*, Lord, be glorified,” but when was the last time you heard someone sing, “In my *intellectual life*, Lord, be glorified”? Unfortunately, this misunderstanding of the relationship between faith and reason has led to an even more sinister trend among modern evangelicals.

2. *The separation of the secular and the sacred.* There has emerged a secular/sacred separation in our understanding of the Christian life with the result that Christian teaching and practice are privatized and placed in a separate compartment from the public or so-called secular activities of life. The withdrawal of the corporate body of Christ from the public sphere of ideas is mirrored by our understanding of what is required to produce an individual disciple. Religion has become personal, private, and too often, simply a matter of “how I feel about things.” By contrast, the culture encourages me to invoke my intellect in my secular, public life. By way of example, I’m always encouraged to use my intellect in how I approach my vocation, select a house, or learn to use a computer. But within the sphere of my private, spiritual life of faith, it is my heart, and my heart alone, that operates. The life of the mind is thus separated, broken off, and compartmentalized as a function of the “secular” life instead of more naturally being integrated with the spiritual. As a result, Sunday school classes, discipleship

materials, and sermons too often address the heart and not the head, or focus on personal growth and piety and not on cultivating an intellectual love for God in my vocation.

When was the last time your church had Sunday school classes that were divided up by vocations—classes for thinking Christianly as a lawyer, businessman, health care professional, educator, and so forth? Parachurch ministries have produced excellent tools for training the private, “spiritual” lives of converts. But where are the tools that take ten or fifteen different university majors and spell out issues and resources for integrating ideas in those majors with Christian theology? We have organizations for businessmen that emphasize personal testimonies, devotional reading, and the like. But where do these organizations train businessmen to develop a Christian understanding of economic theory, capitalism, business ethics, or moral issues in the employer/employee relationship?

Our children can attend virtually any university and major in any subject they wish. But in a four-year course of study they will almost never interact with a Christian thinker in their field or with Christian ideas relevant to their course content. Why? No doubt, many reasons could be given. But clearly, one reason is that the cream rises to the top. If there are few Christian intellectuals who write college textbooks from a Christian perspective, it must be because our evangelical culture is simply not producing such people because we do not value the intellectual life. After all, the purpose of college for many is to get a job, and course work is considered secular, not sacred. What is important for our children is that they stay pure in college and, perhaps, witness, have a quiet time, and pray regularly. Obviously, these are important. But for a disciple, the purpose of college is not just to get a job. Rather, it is to discover a vocation, to identify a field of study in and through which I can serve Christ as my Lord. And one way to serve Him in this way is to learn to think in a Christian manner about my major. A person’s Christianity doesn’t begin at a dorm Bible study, when class is over; it permeates all of one’s life, including how one thinks about the ideas in one’s college major.

The church must train high school students for the intellectual life they will encounter at college. As theologian Carl Henry put it, “Training the mind is an essential responsibility of the home, the church, and the school. Unless evangelicals prod young people to disciplined thinking, they waste—even undermine—one of Christianity’s most precious resources.”⁹ But if faith and reason are polar opposites, and if discipleship is private and sacred but college studies are public and secular, then training the intellect will not be valued as a part of teenage mentoring. That is why our discipleship materials often leave Christian young people vulnerable to atheistic college professors with an ax to grind. For such professors, shredding an intellectually unprepared undergraduate’s faith is like shooting fish in a barrel.

We have seen that the church was attacked intellectually in the latter half of the nineteenth century and was not adequately prepared to respond to this attack in kind. Instead, with notable exceptions, the church withdrew from the world of ideas and the intellectual life and was thereby marginalized. As former president of the United Nations General Assembly Charles Malik has said, “I must be frank with you: the greatest danger confronting American evangelical Christianity is the danger of anti-intellectualism. The mind in its greatest and deepest reaches is not cared for enough.”¹⁰ This withdrawal and marginalization of the church has had devastating consequences for our attempt to produce vibrant, confident disciples and to penetrate our culture with a Christian worldview and the gospel of Christ. These consequences are most evident in three more areas.

3. *Weakened world missions.* One critical consequence of our first two anti-intellectual trends is the combined effect of weakening world missions. I once attended a meeting of missionaries from around the world, at which a national Christian leader from Central America stood up and passionately exhorted North American mission agencies to stop sending evangelists to his country because their efforts were producing Marxists bent on overthrowing the government. You could have heard a pin drop in that meeting, and confusion was written on everyone’s face.

This leader went on to explain that the leading “Christian” thinkers in his country held to liberation theology, a form of Marxism draped in religious garb. Evangelical missionaries would lead people to Christ, but the liberals were attracting the thinking leaders among the converts and training them in Marxist ideology, which these liberals identified as the true center of biblical theology. The leader pleaded with North Americans to send more theologians and Bible teachers and to help set up more seminaries and training centers in his country because the need for intellectual leadership was great.

For some time, theological liberals have understood that whoever controls the thinking leadership of the church in a culture will eventually control the church itself. Once, I met a man from Fiji who was won to Christ by an evangelical missionary and who, subsequent to conversion, wanted to come to the United States for seminary training. Unfortunately, there was no money for this sort of “intellectual” development in the evangelical missions strategy there, but theological liberals gave him a scholarship to study at a liberal seminary in Texas. By the time I met him, he had given up his faith and was going back to Fiji with an extremely secular view of Christianity. His mission: to pastor a church! If evangelicals placed more value on the mind, we would give more to developing intellectual leadership around the world. Happily, some good things are now being done in this area, but we need to intensify our efforts in this regard, and this will happen only if we evangelicals come to value more fully Christ’s admonitions to be good stewards of the intellectual life. Unfortunately, there remain two more deadly trends that have infected the church because of anti-intellectualism.

4. *Anti-intellectualism has spawned an irrelevant gospel.* Today, we share the gospel primarily *as a means of addressing felt needs*. We give testimonies of changed lives and say to people that if they want to become better parents or overcome depression or loneliness, then Christ is the answer for them. As true as this may be, such an approach to evangelism is inadequate for two reasons. First, it does not reach people

who may be out of touch with their feelings. Consequently, if men in our culture are, in general, less in touch with their feelings than women, this approach will not reach men effectively. Second, it invites the response, “Sorry, but I don’t have a need.” Have you ever wondered why no one responded to the apostle Paul in this manner? If you look at his evangelistic approach in Acts 17:20, the answer becomes obvious. He based his preaching on the fact that the gospel is true and reasonable to believe. He reasoned with and tried to persuade people intelligently to accept Christ.

Now, if the gospel is true and reasonable to believe, then it is obvious that every person has a need for Christ’s forgiveness and power, whether or not that person “feels” that need. The only response to the Pauline evangelistic approach is either to accept Christ or deny the truth of the gospel. The person approached is not let off the hook simply because he is out of touch with his feelings or doesn’t recognize the “felt need.” The fact that many respond to our evangelistic efforts by denying a need for Christ should tip us off to an important fact. If truth and reasonableness are not uppermost in our presentation of the gospel to a pagan culture already predisposed to regarding religion as a set of private feelings, then we’ll consistently hear this response: “Well, that’s fine for you if having those feelings helps you.” Religion is now viewed by many as a placebo or emotional crutch precisely because that is how we often pitch the gospel to unbelievers.

I wish I could stop here. But again, there’s another trend in evangelicalism that we must place at the feet of anti-intellectualism.

5. A loss of boldness in confronting the idea structures in our culture with effective Christian witness. Now this is a mouthful, but anti-intellectualism has drained the church of its boldness in witnessing and speaking out about important issues in the places where ideas are generated. And for those who do have such courage, anti-intellectualism has created a context in which we Christians often come off as shallow, defensive, and reactionary, instead of thoughtful, confident, and articulate.

One evening a couple came to our home for dinner. During the meal the husband said almost nothing (except “Pass the chicken!”). Despite repeated attempts to engage him, the conversation took place primarily among the two wives and me. However, as dessert was being served, the topic of conversation turned to motorboats, and from that point on we could hardly get a word in edgewise. Why? Boats were the man’s hobby. He owned two of them, knew how to build one from scratch, and truly was an expert on the subject. He had the courage to speak up because he knew what he was talking about; he did not need to be defensive when someone differed with his viewpoint because he was confident about his knowledge.

I have trained people to share their faith for over forty years. I can tell you from experience that when people learn what they believe and why, they become bold in their witness and attractive in the way they engage others in debate or dialogue. While pastoring a church in Baltimore, I once taught a twelve-week class on Christian apologetics. The course cost fifty dollars to take, required two textbooks, and had several homework assignments, including two papers. When the sixth week ended, a man named Bob came up to me after class and, with tears running down his cheeks, expressed his gratitude for the high academic standards and requirements in the class. I asked him why he was grateful about this. I will never forget his response. He told me he had worked at the same place for ten years but had never shared his faith with anyone because he was afraid someone would ask him a question, he would not know the answer, and his inadequate preparation would embarrass him and the Christian faith. But at his workplace the week before this particular class, he had shared his faith with three workers because for the first time he felt he had some answers, and his boldness was strengthened by that conviction. Being a Christian is no different from caring about boats in this regard. There is nothing magic about being confident, articulate, and bold in either area. Knowing what you’re talking about may be hard work, but it clearly pays off.

Anti-intellectualism has not merely impacted the lives of believers within the bosom of Christ. It has had serious repercussions in the culture at large. As anti-intellectualism has softened our impact for Christ, so too has it contributed to the secularization of the culture. If the salt loses its saltiness, the meat will be impacted. In the aftermath of the Scopes trial in 1925, conservative Christianity was largely dismissed as an embarrassment among intellectual and cultural movers and shakers.¹¹ As a result, we now live in one of the most secular cultures in history.

THE EMERGENCE OF A SECULAR CULTURE IN WHICH THE CHURCH IS CALLED TO LIVE AND MINISTER

Culture Is Secular

Modern American culture is largely secular in this sense: Most people have little or no understanding of a Christian way of seeing the world, nor is a Christian worldview an important participant in the way we as a society frame and debate issues in the public square. Three of the major centers of influence in our culture—the university, the media, and the government—are largely devoid of serious religious discussion. In fact, it is not unfair to say that university, media, and governmental leaders are often illiterate about how Christians see the world and why. This is evident, for example, in those rare cases when the major television news media try to feature a Christian perspective on abortion, the state, or anything else. Usually, Christians watching the program feel misrepresented and misunderstood. More often than not, however, Christian perspectives are simply ignored and not covered at all.

If a Martian were watching television before coming to earth, he would get the idea that Americans are irreligious. Secularists tolerate religion as long as it remains a privatized perspective relative to a subgroup in society and as long as Christians don't assert that their views are objectively true and defend them articulately. R. C. Sproul,

John Gerstner, and Arthur Lindsley have accurately captured this secular attitude toward Christianity:

The church is safe from vicious persecution at the hands of the secularist, as educated people have finished with stake-burning circuses and torture racks. No martyr's blood is shed in the secular west. So long as the church knows her place and remains quietly at peace on her modern reservation. Let the babes pray and sing and read their Bibles, continuing steadfastly in their intellectual retardation; the church's extinction will not come by sword or pillory, but by the quiet death of irrelevance. But let the church step off the reservation, let her penetrate once more the culture of the day and the . . . face of secularism will change from a benign smile to a savage snarl.¹²

Secularism Is Primarily a View About Knowledge

The primary characteristic of modern secularism is its view of the nature and limits of knowledge. It is critical to understand this because if knowledge gives one power—we give surgeons and not carpenters the right to cut us open precisely because surgeons have the relevant knowledge not possessed by carpenters—then those with the cultural say-so about who does and doesn't have knowledge will be in a position to marginalize and silence groups judged to have mere belief and private opinion.

For many secularists, knowledge is obtained solely by means of the senses and science. Something is true and reasonable to believe to the degree that it can be tested by the five senses—it can be seen, heard, touched, tasted, or felt. Seeing is believing. Likewise, knowledge is identical to *scientific* knowledge. If you can prove something scientifically, then it is culturally permissible or even obligatory to believe it. Science is the measure of all things, and when a scientist speaks about something, he or she speaks *ex cathedra*. For example, if theological arguments imply homosexuality is in some sense a choice

over which one is responsible, and science makes a “claim” to the contrary, which one will win in public debate? We often hear it said that “if your religious beliefs work for you, that’s great, but don’t impose them on others.” However, no one would say that a scientist is imposing anything on anyone when he says that water is H_2O or that $2 + 2 = 4$. Nor would these claims be viewed as private opinions whose sole value was their usefulness for those who believe them. Why? Because only science supposedly deals with facts, truth, and reason, but religion and ethics allegedly deal with private, subjective opinions.

I have no bone to pick with legitimate science. Indeed, it has been argued repeatedly that science was born in Christian Europe precisely because Christian theology helped provide worldview justification for its assumptions.¹³ *What I do reject is the idea that science and science alone can claim to give us knowledge.* This assertion — known as scientism — is patently false and, in fact, not even a claim of science but rather a philosophical view about science. Nevertheless, once this view of knowledge was widely embraced in the culture, the immediate effect was to marginalize and privatize religion by relegating it to the back of the intellectual bus.¹⁴ To verify this, one need only compare the number of times scientists, as opposed to pastors or theologians, are called upon as experts on the evening news.

If knowledge and reason are identical with what can be tested scientifically or with scientific theories that a majority of scientists believes to be correct, then religion and ethics will no longer be viewed as true, rational domains of discourse because, supposedly, religious or ethical claims are not scientifically testable. This line of thought has led to several trends in society whose combined influence is to hinder ideal human flourishing as God intended it to be. It is similar to the sort of cultural milieu that spawned Stalinism in the Soviet Union and Nazism in pre-World War II Germany, with all of their attendant evils and tragic loss of human life and dignity. As G. K. Chesterton bemoaned, once people stop believing in God, the problem is not that they will believe

nothing; rather, the problem is that they will believe anything. This is just what we are seeing happen in our secular culture bereft of the presence of an engaged, articulate evangelical community.

Secular Views of Knowledge Are Responsible for Unfortunate Social Trends

Scientism is responsible for a number of unfortunate contemporary trends in society.

1. In our scientifically oriented culture, traditional understandings of morality and related notions are considered passé. The primary trend in ethical thinking today is toward *moral* and *religious relativism*. As I have already said, if ethics and religion are not scientifically testable, then many today will think they are mere “expressions of belief” that are true only for those who believe them. Science claims to deal only with fact; religion and ethics supposedly deal with feelings and privatized values. Therefore, religion and ethics are considered merely subjective notions in modern society.

Another modern trend is a change in what we mean by the *good life*. From Old Testament times and ancient Greece until this century, the good life was widely understood to mean a life of intellectual and moral virtue. The good life is the life of ideal human functioning according to the nature that God Himself gave to us. According to this view, prior to Creation God had in mind an ideal blueprint of human nature from which He created each and every human being. Happiness (Greek: *eudaimonia*) was understood as a life of virtue, and the successful person was one who knew how to live life well according to what we are by nature due to the creative design of God. When the Declaration of Independence says we are endowed by our Creator with certain inalienable rights, among them the right to pursue happiness, it is referring to virtue and character.¹⁵ So understood, happiness involves suffering, endurance, and patience because these are important means to becoming a good person who lives the good life.

Freedom was traditionally understood as the power to do what one

ought to do. For example, some people are not free to play the piano or to say no to lust because they have not undergone the training necessary to ingrain the relevant skillful habits. Moreover, since community is possible only if people accept as true a shared vision of the good life, it is easy to see why a sense of community and public virtue could be sustained given this understanding of the good life, happiness, and freedom.

Traditionally, *tolerance* of other viewpoints meant that even though I think those viewpoints are dead wrong and will argue against them fervently, nevertheless, I will defend your right to argue your own case. Just as importantly, I will treat you with respect as an image bearer of God, even though your views are abhorrent to me. Finally, while *individual rights* are important, they do not exhaust the moral life because virtue and duty are more central than rights to the moral life properly conceived.

2. *The traditional view is neither scientifically testable nor easily compatible with evolution.* Unfortunately, this traditional understanding of the good life, freedom, community, and tolerance is not scientifically testable. Moreover, Darwin's theory of evolution caused many to lose their belief in the *existence* of natures, human or otherwise. As Harvard zoologist Ernst Mayr has said:

The concepts of unchanging essences and of complete discontinuities between every eidos (type) and all others make genuine evolutionary thinking impossible. I agree with those who claim that the essentialist philosophies of Aristotle and Plato are incompatible with evolutionary thinking.¹⁶

This belief has, in turn, led evolutionary thinkers like David Hull to make the following observation:

The implications of moving species from the metaphysical category that can appropriately be characterized in terms of "natures" to a

category for which such characterizations are inappropriate are extensive and fundamental. If species evolve in anything like the way that Darwin thought they did, then they cannot possibly have the sort of natures that traditional philosophers claimed they did. If species in general lack natures, then so does *Homo sapiens* as a biological species. If *Homo sapiens* lacks a nature, then no reference to biology can be made to support one's claims about "human nature." Perhaps all people are "persons," share the same "personhood," etc., but such claims must be explicated and defended *with no reference to biology*. Because so many moral, ethical, and political theories depend on some notion or other of human nature, Darwin's theory brought into question all these theories. The implications are not entailments. One can always dissociate "*Homo sapiens*" from "*human being*," but the result is a much less plausible position.¹⁷

Note Hull's comment that if a person or group dissociates the species-specific designation "Homo sapiens" from the designation "human being," with all of its attendant moral and theological implications, then that person or group has a "less plausible position." Why? Why should that which we see, hear, feel, taste, or touch (or observe through scientific method) have sway over any cultural debate, since Hull's entire conclusion rests on the giant "if" — "if species evolve in anything like the way that Darwin thought they did . . ."? Yet, as we'll see in the next section, we have allowed secular thinkers to frame the debate, and the Christian voice has been muffled at best.

3. *Secular ideas have replaced the traditional view.* What Mayr and Hull are saying is that if naturalistic evolution is the story of how we came to be, then there is no human nature answering to a divine blueprint and no good life that expresses that nature. There are only accidentally formed individual human beings who are free to create whatever version of happiness they wish. According to the modern view, the good life is the satisfaction of any pleasure or desire that someone freely and autonomously chooses for himself or herself. The

successful person is the individual who has a life of pleasure and can obtain enough consumer goods to satisfy his or her desires. Freedom is the right to do what I want, not the power to do what I by nature ought to. Community gives way to individualism with the result that narcissism—an inordinate sense of self-love and self-centered involvement—is an accurate description of many people’s lives. If I am free to create my own moral universe and version of the good life, and there is no right or wrong answer to what I should create, then morality—indeed, everything—ultimately exists to make me happy. When a person considers abortion or physician-assisted suicide, the person’s individual rights are all that matter. Questions about virtue or one’s duty to the broader community simply do not arise.

Tolerance has come to mean that no one is right and no one is wrong and, indeed, the very act of stating that someone else’s views are immoral or incorrect is now taken to be intolerant (of course, from this same point of view, it is all right to be intolerant of those who hold to objectively true moral or religious positions). Once the existence of knowable truth in religion and ethics is denied, authority (the right to be believed and obeyed) gives way to power (the ability to force compliance), reason gives way to rhetoric, the speech writer is replaced by the makeup man, and spirited but civil debate in the culture wars is replaced by politically correct special-interest groups who have nothing left but political coercion to enforce their views on others. While the Christian faith clearly teaches that believers are to be involved as good citizens in the state, nevertheless, it is obvious why so many secularists are addicted to politics today because political power is a surrogate for a Higher Power. As Friedrich Nietzsche said, once God died in Western culture—that is, once the concept of God no longer informed the major idea-generating centers of society turned secular—there would be turmoil and horrible secular wars unchecked by traditional morality because the state would come to be a surrogate god for many.

Finally, individual rights have come to dominate our public discussion of moral issues. The public square—those aspects of society where

all citizens must interface regardless of personal views; for example, public schools and government—has become naked: religious, moral, and political debate therein is no longer informed by a clear, robust vision of the moral life shared by most citizens and taken to be true and rational. Once objective duty, goodness, and virtue were abandoned under the guise of scientism and secularism, the only moral map that could replace objective morality is what Daniel Callahan has called minimalistic ethics—anything is morally permissible provided only that you do not harm someone else.¹⁸

Individual rights are important, and, for the Christian, they are grounded in the image of God and not in the state. In other words, the Christian believes that human rights are derived from the image of God in us; they do not ultimately come from the state. But there are more fundamental questions of virtue and duty that are relevant to the overall development of a moral outlook. For example, the abortion debate should not be framed primarily as a debate about the right to life versus the right to choice. Basically, it should be discussed in terms of this question: What does a woman or a community committed to moral virtue and duty do when faced with the question of abortion? The tenor of the debate changes drastically when issues of virtue and duty to others is brought to the foreground and rights are relegated to a secondary position in the moral context.

Until Christians can do a better job of seeing these issues and articulating them in terms of objective duty and virtue, the Jack Kevorkians will continue to win the “debate” (if that is what we should call the media rhetoric that surrounds the framing of moral dilemmas), precisely because the Kevorkians are on the side of individual rights. If the only morally relevant question to ask a patient is whether or not he freely and competently chooses physician-assisted suicide, then we are left with no moral categories in which to introduce more basic questions of duty and virtue. And this is where our secular society is at present, given its commitment to scientism that emerged in no small measure because a marginalized and inarticulate church withdrew into privatized religion

as she welcomed the Trojan horse of anti-intellectualism within her walls.

THE CONTEMPORARY THREEFOLD WORLDVIEW STRUGGLE

On Sunday morning May 9, 2004, I was in the Seattle airport waiting to board my flight home. Having finished a weekend of speaking, I wanted to relax, so I picked up a copy of *The Seattle Times* and made a beeline for the sports page. Before I got there, the lead editorial in the opinion section caught my eye. It was entitled “A Nation Divided” and in it Joel Kitkin argued that America is more divided today than at any time since the Civil War.¹⁹ America is two nations, he claimed, and the fundamental dividing line is not political, economic, or racial. Rather, it is “a struggle between contrasting and utterly incompatible worldviews”—a secular perspective championed by the universities, Hollywood, and the major media, and ethical monotheism, whose center of gravity—are you ready for this?—is evangelical churches.

In my view, Kitkin was painting with too broad a brush, and he overgeneralized to make his point. But his fundamental idea seems to me to be correct. The secularized perspective is constituted by two worldviews—naturalism and postmodernism—that agree with each other against ethical monotheism, of which Christianity is the main version, about one important point: *There is no nonempirical knowledge, especially no theological or ethical knowledge.* I assume you are reasonably familiar with a Christian worldview, so in this section, I shall briefly sketch a picture of the other two and reinforce the main challenge they present to Christianity.

Scientific Naturalism

Just what is scientific naturalism (hereafter, naturalism)? Succinctly put, it is the view that the spatio-temporal universe of physical objects, properties, events, and processes that are well established by scientific forms of investigation is all there is, was, or ever will be.

There are three major components of naturalism. First, naturalism begins with an epistemology, a view about the nature and limits of knowledge, known as scientism. Scientism comes in two forms: strong and weak. Strong scientism is the view that the only thing we can know is what can be tested scientifically. Scientific knowledge exhausts what can be known, and if some belief is not part of a well-established scientific theory, it is not an item of knowledge. Weak scientism allows some minimum, low-grade degree of rational justification for claims in fields outside of science, such as ethics. But scientific knowledge is taken to be so vastly superior to other forms of reasonable belief, that if a good scientific theory implies something that contradicts a belief in some other discipline, then the other field will simply have to adjust itself to be in line with science.

Second, naturalism contains a creation story—a theory, a causal story, about how everything has come-to-be. The central components of this story are the atomic theory of matter and evolution. The details of this story are not of concern here, but two broad features are of critical importance. (1) The explanation of macrochanges in things (a macrochange is a change in some feature of a normal-sized object that can be detected by simple observation, such as the change in a leaf's color) in terms of microchanges (changes in small, unobservable entities at the atomic or subatomic level). Chemical change is explained in terms of rearrangements of atoms; phenotype changes are due to changes in genotypes. Causation is from bottom-up, micro to macro. We explain why heating water causes it to boil in terms of the excitation of water molecules, and so on. (2) All events that happen are due to the occurrence of earlier events plus the laws of nature, regardless of whether the laws of nature are taken to be deterministic or probabilistic.

Third, naturalism has a view about what is real: physical entities are all there are. The mind is really the brain, free actions are merely happenings caused in the right way by inputs to the organism along with its internal “hardware” states, and there is no teleology or purpose in the world. History is just one event following another. The world is

simply one big cluster of physical mechanisms affecting other physical mechanisms.

Postmodernism

Postmodernism is a loose coalition of diverse thinkers from several different academic disciplines, so it is difficult to characterize postmodernism in a way that would be fair to this diversity. Still, it is possible to provide a fairly accurate characterization of postmodernism in general, since its friends and foes understand it well enough to debate its strengths and weaknesses.²⁰

Postmodernism is both an historical, chronological notion and a philosophical ideology. Understood historically, postmodernism refers to a period of thought that follows, and is a reaction to, the period called *modernity*. Modernity is the period of European thought that developed out of the Renaissance (fourteenth–seventeenth centuries) and flourished in the Enlightenment (seventeenth–nineteenth centuries) in the ideas of people like Descartes, Locke, Berkeley, Hume, Leibniz, and Kant. In the chronological sense, postmodernism is sometimes called “post modernism.” So understood, it is fair to say that postmodernism is often guilty of a simplistic characterization of modernity, because the thinkers in that time period were far from monolithic. Indeed, Descartes, Hume, and Kant have elements in their thought that are more at home in postmodernism than they are in the so-called modern era. Nevertheless, setting historical accuracy aside, the chronological notion of postmodernism depicts it as an era that began and, in some sense, replaces modernity.

As a philosophical standpoint, postmodernism is primarily a reinterpretation of what knowledge is and what counts as knowledge. More broadly, it represents a form of cultural relativism about such things as reality, truth, reason, value, linguistic meaning, the self, and other notions. On a postmodernist view, there is no such thing as objective reality, truth, knowledge, value, reason, and so forth. All these are social constructions, creations of linguistic practices and, as such, are relative not to individuals but to social groups that share a narrative. Roughly, a

narrative is a perspective such as Marxism, atheism, or Christianity that is embedded in the group's social and linguistic practices. Important postmodern thinkers are Friedrich Nietzsche, Ludwig Wittgenstein, Jacques Derrida, Thomas Kuhn, Michel Foucault, Martin Heidegger, and Jean-Francois Lyotard. Some postmodernists are thorough-going relativists, though most allow that the hard sciences provide reliable knowledge of reality.

Focusing on the Main Lesson

Given these two worldviews, we see again that the central defining feature of our secular culture is this: *There is no nonempirical knowledge, especially no theological or ethical knowledge.* Science and science alone carries authority in culture because the alleged possession of knowledge gives people authority, and science and science alone is perceived to have knowledge. Outside science—especially in theological, ethical, or political discussions—the makeup man is more important than the speech-writer (feeling and image are more important than reason, knowledge, and truth).

Let me illustrate how this view of knowledge carries authority today. A few years ago, *Time* magazine did a cover story on how the universe is going to end.²¹ It said, basically, that scientists now know that the universe will eventually reach a point where it's going to wind down, and it will run out of heat, light, and motion. So there won't be any heat; there won't be any light; and there won't be any motion. Now it never occurred to any of these scientists that if things are winding down, they had to be wound up. And if things have to be wound up, there must be a winder-upper, but that's a line of thought for another occasion. For present purposes, the importance of the article was this claim: For centuries, millennia, it said, we've wanted to know how all this would end. Unfortunately, the only place we could turn was religion and philosophy, which amount to idle speculation. Now, for the first time in the human race, science has moved into this area of inquiry, and for the first time, we now have knowledge in answer to our questions.

This claim conveyed that science gives answers but that religion, ethics, politics, and things like that merely provide faith or mere belief of some kind.

Here's another example from The California Framework of this view of knowledge. This is the State of California's guidelines for teaching evolution in the public schools. You can pick this up in any elementary, junior high, or high school principal's office anywhere in the state of California. Here is what it says:

At times, some students may insist that certain conclusions of science cannot be true because of certain religious or philosophical beliefs they hold. It is appropriate, if that happens, for the teacher to express the following: "I understand you may have personal reservations about accepting the scientific evidence, but it is scientific knowledge about which there is no reasonable doubt amongst scientists in their field, and it is my responsibility to teach it because it is part of our common intellectual heritage."²²

When the average Christian reads this, he or she walks away thinking that the primary matter of concern is the Framework's statement about creation and evolution. However, the key issue is not about creation/evolution. It is about the Framework's view of knowledge, specifically, the limitation of knowledge to the hard sciences. Observe the descriptors used of science: "scientific evidence," "scientific knowledge," "no reasonable doubt," "common intellectual heritage." Contrast these descriptors with the descriptors used for a religious claim: "personal reservation," "beliefs they hold." It is easy to see the difference between the way science is being conveyed here as a source of knowledge, and Christianity and religious claims, which are a source of "personal reservation," personal feeling.

The current worldview struggle raises a question: Do we, the disciples of Jesus, possess through Scripture and other means a reliable source of knowledge of reality, or do we not? To answer this question, we will

need to get clear on what knowledge is and is not. And that will be part of the task of the next chapter.

WHAT SHOULD I DO TO LIVE FOR CHRIST IN THIS HOUR OF CRISIS?

If you are like I am, your heart may be saddened by what you have read in this chapter. As disciples of Jesus Christ, we must ask how we can become the kind of people we need to be to bring honor to Christ, to help turn the culture toward Him, and to be lights in the midst of darkness for our families, friends, churches, and communities. There is no simple answer to this question, but one thing is crystal clear: We must rededicate ourselves to being deeply spiritual people of whom it can truly be said that “Christ is formed in you” (Galatians 4:19). And, given the times in which we live, we must also obey Jesus’ admonition to be as “wise as serpents, and harmless as doves” (Matthew 10:16, KJV). Surrounded by a fragmented culture, how do we become deeply spiritual people who are wise and savvy, yet innocent and pure? How do we raise children, develop good marriages, serve as role models at work, and make an attractive impact on our communities?

More than ever before, we need what the Old Testament calls wisdom. In later chapters we’ll talk more about the biblical view of wisdom, but for now I want to make something very clear: The spiritually mature person is a wise person. And a wise person has the savvy and skill necessary to lead an exemplary life and to address the issues of the day in a responsible, attractive way that brings honor to God. As we will see throughout this book, wisdom is the fruit of a life of study and a developed mind. Wisdom is the application of knowledge gained from studying both God’s written Word and His revealed truth in creation. *If we are going to be wise, spiritual people prepared to meet the crises of our age, we must be a studying, learning community that values the life of the mind.* The rest of this book develops the case for why this is so and presents resources for making it a reality in your own sojourn and in the life of your church. Clearly, to become spiritually formed in Christ, a person

of wisdom, requires that we follow Christ's teaching in this critical area—and it was He who taught us to love the Lord our God with all our minds.

SUMMARY

In closing, I want to repeat that I am neither adequate for, nor do I have space to conduct, a full analysis of what has happened to the culture and the church. Obviously, more is going on here than a changed perspective of the intellectual life. But we as Christians must face the main fact of this chapter, to wit: Due to certain forces in the 1800s, conservative American Christianity responded to intellectual attack by withdrawing from public discourse and developing an anti-intellectual view of the Christian faith. This response created both a marginalized church with a softened impact for Christ and a secular culture.

English professor Carolyn Kane wrote an article in *Newsweek* about the loss of thinking in American culture generally. After putting her finger squarely on the problem, Kane identified her solution in front of both God and the *Newsweek* readership: “But how can we revive interest in the art of thinking? The best place to start would be in homes and churches of our land.”²³ It is striking that she did not appeal to government, or for more money for public schools or better college facilities. Instead, she identified the church as the key factor. Perhaps Kane has a better grasp of the importance of the intellectual life in the Christian faith than many of us do. Perhaps she has read enough Scripture to know that the church was meant to be and has often been the instrument of reason in society. In the next chapter, we will see what Scripture tells us about the role of reason in the Christian life.