

**HARD
QUESTIONS,
REAL
ANSWERS**

William Lane Craig

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Hard Questions, Real Answers

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PREFACE

This book is a revised and expanded version of my earlier book *No Easy Answers*. The original book flowed out of a series of sermons I delivered on “Unpopular Themes,” that is, topics frequently shunned because of the hard questions they raise. As a Christian philosopher and theologian, I have been impressed at how much easier it is to raise hard questions than to answer them. Students and laymen who have little philosophical or theological training sometimes pose difficult questions which are even knottier than they themselves realize. They deserve better than pat answers. They deserve real answers, which is what I try to give in this book.

I’ve tried to preserve in this book something of the informal, oral style of the sermons that inspired it. I offered the original as a book more devotional in orientation than academic, but I fear that most folks found it hopelessly cerebral. I guess that for those of us for whom the life of the mind is important, our devotional lives are inextricably intertwined with our intellectual lives. But that’s okay. We’re commanded to love the Lord with all our hearts and with all our minds. I hope that readers who have been struggling with some of the hard questions will find this multifaceted love of the Lord kindled afresh within them.

—William Lane Craig
Atlanta, Georgia
August 2003

INTRODUCTION

IN INTELLECTUAL NEUTRAL

A number of years ago, two books appeared that sent shock waves through the American educational community. The first of these, *Cultural Literacy: What Every American Needs to Know*, by E. D. Hirsch, documented the fact that large numbers of American college students do not have the basic background knowledge to understand the front page of a newspaper or to act responsibly as citizens. For example, a quarter of the students in a recent survey thought Franklin D. Roosevelt was president during the Vietnam War. Two-thirds did not know when the Civil War occurred. One-third thought Columbus discovered the New World sometime after 1750. In a recent survey at California State University at Fullerton, over half of the students could not identify Chaucer or Dante. Ninety percent did not know who Alexander Hamilton was, despite the fact that his picture is on every ten dollar bill.

These statistics would be funny if they weren't so alarming. What has happened to our schools that they should be producing such dreadfully ignorant people? Allan Bloom, who was an eminent educator at the University of Chicago and the author of the second book I referred to above, argued in *The Closing of the American Mind* that behind the current educational malaise lies the universal conviction of students that all truth is relative and, therefore, that truth is not worth pursuing. Bloom writes,

There is one thing a professor can be absolutely certain of: almost every student entering the university believes, or says he believes,

that truth is relative. If this belief is put to the test, one can count on the students' reaction: they will be uncomprehending. That anyone should regard the proposition as not self-evident astonishes them, as though he were calling into question $2 + 2 = 4$. These are things you don't think about. . . . That it is a moral issue for students is revealed by the character of their response when challenged—a combination of disbelief and indignation: "Are you an absolutist?," the only alternative they know, uttered in the same tone as . . . "Do you really believe in witches?" This latter leads into the indignation, for someone who believes in witches might well be a witch-hunter or a Salem judge. The danger they have been taught to fear from absolutism is not error but intolerance. Relativism is necessary to openness; and this is the virtue, the only virtue, which all primary education for more than fifty years has dedicated itself to inculcating. Openness—and the relativism that makes it the only plausible stance in the face of various claims to truth and various ways of life and kinds of human beings—is the great insight of our times. . . . The study of history and of culture teaches that all the world was mad in the past; men always thought they were right, and that led to wars, persecutions, slavery, xenophobia, racism, and chauvinism. The point is not to correct the mistakes and really be right; rather it is not to think you are right at all.¹

Since there is no absolute truth, since everything is relative, the purpose of an education is not to learn truth or master facts—rather it is merely to acquire a skill so that one can go out and obtain wealth, power, and fame. Truth has become irrelevant.

Now, of course, this sort of relativistic attitude toward truth is antithetical to the Christian worldview. For as Christians we believe that all truth is God's truth, that God has revealed to us the truth, both in His Word and in Him who said, "I am the Truth." The Christian, therefore, can never look on the truth with apathy or disdain. Rather, he cherishes and treasures the truth as a reflection of God Himself. Nor does his commitment to truth make the Christian intolerant, as Bloom's students erroneously inferred; on the contrary, the very

¹ Allan Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1987), 25-26.

concept of tolerance entails that one does not agree with that which one tolerates. The Christian is committed to both truth and tolerance, for he believes in Him who said not only, “I am the Truth,” but also, “Love your enemies.”

At the time that these books were released, I was teaching in the Religious Studies department at a Christian liberal arts college. So I began to wonder: how much have Christian students been infected with the attitude that Bloom describes? How would my own students fare on one of E. D. Hirsch’s tests? *Well, how would they?* I thought. *Why not give them a quiz?* So I did.

I drew up a brief, general knowledge quiz about famous people, places, and things and administered it to two classes of about fifty sophomores. What I found was that although they did better than the general student population, still there were sizable portions of the group who could not identify—even with a phrase—some important names and events. For example, 49 percent could not identify Leo Tolstoy, the author of perhaps the world’s greatest novel, *War and Peace*. To my surprise, 16 percent did not know who Winston Churchill was. One student thought he was one of the founding fathers of our nation! Another identified him as a great revival preacher of a few hundred years ago! Twenty-two percent did not know what Afghanistan is, and 22 percent could not identify Nicaragua. Twenty percent did not know where the Amazon River is. Imagine!

They fared even worse with things and events. I was amazed that a whopping 67 percent could not identify the Battle of the Bulge. Several identified it as a dieter’s problem. Twenty-four percent did not know what the Special Theory of Relativity is (mind you, just to identify it—even as, say, “a theory of Einstein”—not to explain it). Forty-five percent couldn’t identify Custer’s Last Stand—it was variously classed as a battle in the Revolutionary War or as a battle in the Civil War. And I wasn’t really surprised that 73 percent did not know what the expression “manifest destiny” referred to.

So it became clear to me that Christian students have not been able to rise above the dark undertow in our educational system at the

primary and secondary levels. This level of ignorance presents a real crisis for Christian colleges and seminaries.

But then an even more terrible fear began to dawn on me as I contemplated these statistics. *If Christian students are this ignorant of the general facts of history and geography, I thought, then the chances are that they, and Christians in general, are equally or even more ignorant of the facts of our own Christian heritage and doctrine.* Our culture in general has sunk to the level of biblical and theological illiteracy. A great many, if not most, people cannot even name the four Gospels—in a recent survey one person identified them as Matthew, Mark, and Luther! In another survey, Joan of Arc was identified by some as Noah’s wife! The suspicion arose in my mind that the evangelical church is probably also caught somewhere higher up in this same downward spiral.

But if we do not preserve the truth of our own Christian heritage and doctrine, who will learn it for us? Non-Christians? That hardly seems likely. If the Church does not treasure her own Christian truth, then it will be lost to her forever. So how, I wondered, would Christians fare on a quiz over general facts of Christian history and doctrine?

Well, how would they? I now invite you to get out a pen and paper and take the following quiz yourself. (Go on, it’ll only take a minute!) The following are items I think any mature Christian in our society ought to be able to identify. Simply provide some identifying phrase that indicates that you know what the item is. For example, if I say, “John Wesley,” you might write: “the founder of Methodism” or “an eighteenth-century English revivalist.”

Quiz

1. Augustine
2. Council of Nicea
3. Trinity
4. Two natures united in one person
5. Pantheism
6. Thomas Aquinas
7. Reformation
8. Martin Luther

9. Substitutionary atonement
10. Enlightenment

How did you do? If you're typical of the audiences to whom I've given this quiz, probably not too well. If that is the case, you might be tempted to react to this quiz defensively: "Who needs to know all this stuff anyway? I'm not on 'Who Wants to be a Millionaire?!' This junk isn't important. All that really counts is my walk with Christ and my sharing Him with others. Who cares about all this other trivia?"

I truly hope that will not be your reaction, for that will close you off to self-improvement, and this little exercise will have been of no profit to you. You will have learned nothing from it.

But there's a second, more positive reaction. You may see, perhaps for the first time in your life, that here is a need in your life for you to become intellectually engaged as a Christian, and you may resolve to do something about it. This is a momentous decision. You will be taking a step that millions of Christians in the United States need to take. No one has issued a more forceful challenge to Christians to become intellectually engaged than did Charles Malik, former Lebanese ambassador to the United States, in his address at the dedication of the Billy Graham Center in Wheaton, Illinois. Malik emphasized that as Christians we face two tasks in our evangelism: saving the soul and saving the mind, that is to say, not only converting people spiritually, but converting them intellectually as well. And the Church is lagging dangerously behind with regard to this second task. Our churches are filled with people who are spiritually born again, but who still think like non-Christians. Mark his words well:

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. But intellectual nurture cannot take place apart from profound immersion for a period of years in the history of thought and the spirit. People who are in a hurry to get out of the university and start earn-

ing money or serving the church or preaching the gospel have no idea of the infinite value of spending years of leisure conversing with the greatest minds and souls of the past, ripening and sharpening and enlarging their powers of thinking. The result is that the arena of creative thinking is vacated and abdicated to the enemy.²

Malik went on to say:

It will take a different spirit altogether to overcome this great danger of anti-intellectualism. For example, I say this different spirit, so far as philosophy alone—the most important domain for thought and intellect—is concerned, must see the tremendous value of spending an entire year doing nothing but poring intensely over the *Republic* or the *Sophist* of Plato, or two years over the *Metaphysics* or the *Ethics* of Aristotle, or three years over the *City of God* of Augustine. But if a start is made now on a crash program in this and other domains, it will take at least a century to catch up with the Harvards and Tübingens and the Sorbonnes—and by then where will these universities be?³

What Malik clearly saw is the strategic position occupied by the university in shaping Western thought and culture. Indeed, the single most important institution shaping Western society is the university. It is at the university that our future political leaders, our journalists, our lawyers, our teachers, our scientists, our business executives, our artists, will be trained. It is at the university that they will formulate or, more likely, simply absorb the worldview that will shape their lives. And since these are the opinion-makers and leaders who shape our culture, the worldview that they imbibe at the university will be the one that shapes our culture.

Why is this important? Simply because the gospel is never heard in isolation. It is always heard against the background of the cultural milieu in which one lives. A person raised in a cultural milieu in which Christianity is still seen as an intellectually viable option will

² Charles Malik, "The Other Side of Evangelism," *Christianity Today*, November 7, 1980, 40.

³ *Ibid.*

display an openness to the gospel which a person who is secularized will not display. For the secular person you may as well tell him to believe in fairies or leprechauns as in Jesus Christ! Or, to give a more realistic illustration, it is like a devotee of the Hare Krishna movement approaching you on the street and inviting you to believe in Krishna. Such an invitation strikes us as bizarre, freakish, even amusing. But to a person on the streets of Bombay, such an invitation would, I assume, appear quite reasonable and cause for reflection. I fear that evangelicals appear almost as weird to persons on the streets of Bonn, Stockholm, or Toronto as do the devotees of Krishna.

It is part of the broader task of Christian scholarship to help create and sustain a cultural milieu in which the gospel can be heard as an intellectually viable option for thinking men and women. Therefore, the Church has a vital stake in raising up Christian scholars who will help to create a place at the university for Christian ideas. The average Christian does not realize that there is an intellectual war going on in the universities and in the professional journals and scholarly societies. Christianity is being attacked as irrational or obsolete, and millions of students, our future generation of leaders, have absorbed that viewpoint.

This is a war we cannot afford to lose. The great Princeton theologian J. Gresham Machen warned on the eve of the Fundamentalist Controversy that if the church loses the intellectual battle in one generation, then evangelism would become immeasurably more difficult in the next:

False ideas are the greatest obstacles to the reception of the gospel. We may preach with all the fervor of a reformer and yet succeed only in winning a straggler here and there, if we permit the whole collective thought of the nation or of the world to be controlled by ideas which, by the resistless force of logic, prevent Christianity from being regarded as anything more than a harmless delusion. Under such circumstances, what God desires us to do is to destroy the obstacle at its root.⁴

⁴J. Gresham Machen, "Christianity and Culture," *Princeton Theological Review* 11 (1913): 7.

The root of the obstacle is to be found in the university, and it is there that it must be attacked. Unfortunately, Machen's warning went unheeded, and biblical Christianity retreated into the intellectual closets of fundamentalism, from which it has only recently begun to reemerge. The war is not yet lost, and it is one which we must not lose: souls of men and women hang in the balance.

So what are evangelicals doing to win this war? Until recently, very little indeed. Malik asked pointedly,

Who among evangelicals can stand up to the great secular or naturalistic or atheistic scholars on their own terms of scholarship? Who among evangelical scholars is quoted as a normative source by the greatest secular authorities on history or philosophy or psychology or sociology or politics? Does the evangelical mode of thinking have the slightest chance of becoming the dominant mode in the great universities of Europe and America that stamp our entire civilization with their spirit and ideas?

. . . For the sake of greater effectiveness in witnessing to Jesus Christ Himself, as well as for their own sakes, evangelicals cannot afford to keep on living on the periphery of responsible intellectual existence.⁵

These words hit like a hammer. Evangelicals really have been living on the periphery of responsible intellectual existence. Most prominent evangelical scholars tend to be very big fish in a very small pond. Our influence extends little beyond the evangelical subculture. We tend to publish exclusively with evangelical presses, and therefore our books are likely to go unread by non-evangelical scholars; and instead of participating in the standard professional societies, we are active instead in the evangelical professional societies. As a result, we effectively put our light under a bushel and have little leavening effect for the gospel in our professional fields. In turn, the intellectual drift of the culture at large continues unchecked, deeper into secularism.

⁵ Malik, "Other Side of Evangelism," 40.

We desperately need Christian scholars who can, as Malik said, compete with non-Christian thinkers in their fields of expertise on their own terms of scholarship. It can be done. There is, for example, a revolution going on right now in the field of philosophy, which, as Malik noted, is the most important domain for thought and intellect, since it is foundational to every other discipline at the university. Christian philosophers have been coming out of the closet and defending the truth of the Christian worldview with philosophically sophisticated arguments in the finest secular journals and professional societies. The face of American philosophy has been changed as a result.

Fifty years ago philosophers widely regarded talk about God as literally meaningless, as mere gibberish, but today no informed philosopher could take such a viewpoint. In fact, many of America's finest philosophers today are outspoken Christians. To give you some feel for the impact of this revolution, I want to quote at some length from an article that appeared in the fall of 2001 in the journal *Philo* lamenting what the author called "the desecularization of academia that evolved in philosophy departments since the late 1960s." The author, himself a prominent atheist philosopher, writes,

By the second half of the twentieth century, universities . . . had been become [*sic*] in the main secularized. The standard . . . position in each field . . . assumed or involved arguments for a naturalist world-view. . . . Analytic philosophers . . . treated theism as an anti-realist or non-cognitivist world-view, requiring the reality, not of a deity, but merely of emotive expressions or certain "forms of life". . . .

This is not to say that none of the scholars in the various academic fields were realist theists in their "private lives"; but realist theists, for the most part, excluded their theism from their publications and teaching, in large part because theism . . . was mainly considered to have such a low epistemic status that it did not meet the standards of an "academically respectable" position to hold. The secularization of mainstream academia began to quickly unravel upon the publication of Plantinga's influential book, *God and Other*

Minds, in 1967. . . . This book, followed seven years later by Plantinga's even more impressive book, *The Nature of Necessity*, made it manifest that a realist theist was writing at the highest qualitative level of analytic philosophy, on the same playing field as Carnap, Russell, Moore, Grünbaum, and other naturalists. . . .

Naturalists passively watched as realist versions of theism, most influenced by Plantinga's writings, began to sweep through the philosophical community, until today perhaps one-quarter or one-third of philosophy professors are theists, with most being orthodox Christians.

. . . in philosophy, it became, almost overnight, "academically respectable" to argue for theism, making philosophy a favored field of entry for the most intelligent and talented theists entering academia today. . . .

God is not "dead" in academia; he returned to life in the late 1960s and is now alive and well in his last academic stronghold, philosophy departments.⁶

This is the testimony of a prominent atheist philosopher to the change that has taken place before his eyes in American philosophy. I think that he is probably exaggerating when he estimates that one-quarter to one-third of American philosophers are theists, but what his estimates do reveal is the *perceived impact* of Christian philosophers upon this field. Like Gideon's army, a committed minority of activists can have an impact far out of proportion to their numbers. The principal error that he makes is calling philosophy departments God's "last stronghold" at the university. On the contrary, philosophy departments are a *beachhead*, from which operations can be launched to impact other disciplines at the university for Christ.

The point is that the task of desecularization is not hopeless or impossible, nor need significant changes take as long to achieve as one might think. It is this sort of Christian scholarship that represents the best hope for the transformation of culture that Malik and Machen

⁶ Quentin Smith, "The Metaphilosophy of Naturalism" *Philo* 4/2 (2001).

envisioned, and its true impact for the cause of Christ will only be felt in the next generation, as it filters down into popular culture.

So it can be done! What is sad, however, is how little support the evangelical church gives its thinkers, whom she so desperately needs. It is ironic that it is only after an evangelical student has earned his doctorate that the Christian community pays any attention to him. Once he has his Ph.D., he receives all sorts of invitations to fill speaking engagements, and people ask him to autograph his books for them—but when he was struggling to earn his doctorate he was virtually ignored by the evangelical community or even derided as a “perpetual student.” Many of the young men and women who will be needed if the evangelical community is to regain intellectual respectability live on shoestring budgets or go deeply into debt during their years of academic training, alone and forgotten, working under tremendous stress and anxiety and facing an uncertain future.

I consider it a tremendous privilege to set aside a portion of our family’s giving to the Lord’s work for certain of these young scholars whom we know personally and who will be our Christian leaders of tomorrow. I strongly urge churches to allocate a portion of their yearly budgets for the support of graduate school students from their congregations, especially those attending seminary or completing doctorates. Candidates for such support should be interviewed just like missionary candidates and assessed in terms of their personal spiritual lives, academic abilities, and promise for the future—for the work that they do is just as much a part of the overall evangelistic enterprise as is the work of the missionary. The church cannot in good conscience go on ignoring such people.

What is shocking, too, is how the anti-intellectualism of which Malik spoke has become ensconced even in our evangelical institutions of higher learning. Serious scholarship is often depreciated and impeded, as professors are overburdened with large teaching loads, time-consuming committee assignments, and other administrative chores.

Scholarship seems to be almost last on the list of priorities. My own experience as a full-time seminary professor made clear to me

that though there was a strong commitment on the part of the administration to producing pastors, there was very little burden for producing first-rate scholars. Evangelical thought and theology will never assume a leading position in the world so long as this sort of Bible-school mentality reigns.

My personal impressions were confirmed by a sobering report entitled “The State of Scholarship at Evangelical Institutions,” a study carried out by University of Notre Dame professor Nathan Hatch and funded by the Pew Charitable Trusts.⁷ Hatch discovered that whereas evangelical colleges and seminaries give lip service to scholarship, what they are usually talking about is a broad concept that equates “scholarship” with *any* form of publishing, even on the most popular level. But scholarship narrowly defined as “intensive, time-consuming study and writing on subjects directed at others in one’s field” is seriously lacking.

These two concepts of “scholarship” lead to conflicting data: thus the dean of one school reports that 90 percent of the faculty are “actively engaged” in scholarly work, whereas a faculty member *at the same institution* estimates that only 10-15 percent are engaged in scholarship, commenting that the other “75-80 percent *think* they are writing for scholarly audiences. . . . But they don’t understand what it is.”

Hatch’s survey of fifty-eight Christian colleges and seminaries led him to conclude, “For all their dynamism and success in popular communication, evangelicals as a group are failing to sustain a serious intellectual life, conceding intellectual inquiry and discourse to those with secular presuppositions.”

This conclusion would be bad enough; but Hatch’s survey revealed two more deeply disturbing facts. First, *Christian college and seminary administrators generally do not appreciate serious scholarship and sometimes even impede it*. “The survey shows that college and seminary leadership generally do not make scholarship a priority,” writes Hatch. Serious scholarship is “more likely to be seen as superfluous or even opposed to the institution’s primary goal,” which is either

⁷ All quotations are from an unpublished copy of the report.

teaching (colleges) or else training pastors (seminaries). With regard to evangelical seminaries, scholarship is valued only “when it contributes to the central goal of training pastors, but not when it takes time away from the classroom.” Second, *serious scholarship is seen as irrelevant to one’s spiritual life and the life of the church*. Hatch states, “Administrators at evangelical institutions may value scholarship because it enhances teaching or because it enhances the reputation of their schools, but generally scholarship is not regarded as important to the Church’s mission or to the spiritual growth of the individual.”

He concludes, “Despite the rhetorical emphasis on integration of faith and learning which is commonplace at evangelical institutions, responses to this survey demonstrate that the evangelical academic world as a whole does not connect scholarship with Christian spirituality and the long-term vitality of the Church.”

How tragically short-sighted such attitudes are! Machen observed that in his day “many would have the seminaries combat error by attacking it as it is taught by its popular exponents” instead of confusing students “with a lot of German names unknown outside the walls of the university.” But to the contrary, Machen insisted, it is essential that Christian scholars be alert to the power of an idea before it has reached popular formulation. Scholarly procedure, he said,

is based simply upon a profound belief in the pervasiveness of ideas. What is today a matter of academic speculation begins tomorrow to move armies and pull down empires. In that second stage, it has gone too far to be combated; the time to stop it was when it was still a matter of impassionate debate. So as Christians we should try to mold the thought of the world in such a way as to make the acceptance of Christianity something more than a logical absurdity.⁸

Like Malik, Machen also believed that “the chief obstacle to the Christian religion today lies in the sphere of the intellect”⁹ and that objections to Christianity must be attacked in that sphere. “The

⁸ Machen, “Christianity and Culture,” 6.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 10.

church is perishing to-day through the lack of thinking, not through an excess of it.”¹⁰

What is ironic about the mentality that says our seminaries should produce pastors, not scholars, is that it is precisely our future pastors, not just our future scholars, who need to be intellectually engaged and to receive this scholarly training. Machen’s article was originally given as a speech entitled, “The Scientific Preparation of the Minister.” A model for us here ought to be a man like John Wesley, a Spirit-filled revivalist and at the same time an Oxford-educated scholar.

In 1756 Wesley delivered “An Address to the Clergy,” which future pastors today ought to read as a part of their training. In discussing what sort of abilities a minister ought to have, Wesley distinguished between “natural gifts” and “acquired abilities.” It is extremely instructive to look at the abilities Wesley thought a minister ought to acquire:

(1.) Have I such a knowledge of Scripture, as becomes him who undertakes so to explain it to others, that it may be a light in all their paths? . . . Am I acquainted with the several parts of Scripture; with all parts of the Old Testament and the New? Upon the mention of any text, do I know the context, and the parallel places? . . . Do I know the grammatical construction of the four Gospels; of the Acts; of the Epistles; and am I a master of the spiritual sense (as well as the literal) of what I read? . . . Do I know the objections to them or from them by Jews, Deists, Papists, Socinians, and all other sectaries . . . ? Am I ready to give a satisfactory answer to each of these objections?

(2.) Do I understand Greek and Hebrew? Otherwise, how can I undertake (as every minister does), not only to explain books which are written therein, but to defend them against all opponents? Am I not at the mercy of every one who does understand, or even pretends to understand, the original? . . . Do I understand the language of the New Testament? Am I a critical master of it? . . . If not, how many years did I spend at school? How many at the university? And what was I doing all those years? Ought not shame to cover my face?

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 13.

(3.) Do I understand my own office? Have I deeply considered before God the character which I bear? What is it to be an ambassador of Christ, an envoy from the King of heaven?

(4.) Do I understand so much of profane history as tends to confirm and illustrate the sacred? Am I acquainted with the ancient customs of the Jews and other nations mentioned in Scripture? . . . And am I so far (if no farther) skilled in geography, as to know the situation, and give some account, of all the considerable places mentioned therein?

(5.) Am I a tolerable master of the sciences? Have I gone through the very gate of them, logic? If not, I am not likely to go much farther when I stumble at the threshold. . . . Rather, have not my stupid indolence and laziness made me very ready to believe, what the little wits and pretty gentlemen affirm, “that logic is good for nothing”? It is good for this at least . . . , to make people talk less; by showing them both what is, and what is not, to the point; and how extremely hard it is to prove anything. Do I understand metaphysics; if not the depth of the Schoolmen, the subtleties of Scotus or Aquinas, yet the first rudiments, the general principles, of that useful science? Have I conquered so much of it, as to clear my apprehension and range my ideas under proper heads; so much as enables me to read with ease and pleasure, as well as profit, Dr. Henry Moore’s Works, Malebranche’s “Search After Truth,” and Dr. Clark’s “Demonstration of the Being and Attributes of God”? Do I understand natural philosophy? If I have not gone deep therein, have I digested the general ground of it? Have I mastered Gravesande, Keill, Sir Isaac Newton’s *Principia*, with his “Theory of Light and Colours”? In order thereto, have I laid in some stock of mathematical knowledge? . . . If I have not gone thus far, if I am such a novice still, what have I been about ever since I came from school?

(6.) Am I acquainted with the Fathers; at least with those venerable men who lived in the earliest ages of the Church? Have I read over and over the golden remains of Clemens Romanus, of Ignatius and Polycarp; and have I given one reading, at least, to the works of Justin Martyr, Tertullian, Origen, Clemens Alexandrinus, and Cyprian?

(7.) Have I any knowledge of the world? Have I studied men (as well as books), and observed their tempers, maxims, and manners? . . . Do I labour never to be rude or ill mannered; . . . am I . . . affable and courteous to all men?

If I am wanting even in these lowest endowments, shall I not frequently regret the want? How often shall I . . . be far less useful than I might have been!¹¹

Wesley's vision of a pastor is remarkable: a gentleman, skilled in the Scriptures and conversant with history, philosophy, and the science of his day. How do the pastors graduating from our seminaries compare to this model? Church historian and theologian David Wells has called our contemporary generation of pastors "the new disablers" because they have abandoned the traditional role of the pastor as a broker of truth to his congregation and replaced it with a new managerial model drawn from the professional world which emphasizes leadership abilities, marketing, and administration. As a result the Church produces a generation of Christians for whom theology is irrelevant and whose lives outside the church do not differ practically from those of atheists. These new managerial pastors, complains Wells, "are failing the Church and even disabling it. They are leaving it vulnerable to all the seductions of modernity precisely because they have not provided the alternative, which is a view of life centered in God and his truth."¹² We need to recover the traditional model which men like Wesley exemplified.

But finally, it is not just Christian scholars and pastors who need to be intellectually engaged if the Church is to make an impact in our culture. Christian laymen, too, must become intellectually engaged. Our churches are filled with Christians who are idling in intellectual neutral. As Christians, their minds are going to waste. J. P. Moreland in his challenging book *Love Your God with All Your Mind* has called them "empty selves." An empty self is inordinately individualistic, infantile, and narcissistic. It is passive, sensate, busy and hurried, inca-

¹¹ John Wesley, *Works* 6:217-231.

¹² David F. Wells, *No Place for Truth* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1993), 253.

pable of developing an interior life. In what is perhaps the most devastating passage in his book, Moreland asks us to envision a church filled with such people. He asks,

What would be the theological understanding, . . . the evangelistic courage, the . . . cultural penetration of such a church? . . . If the interior life does not really matter all that much, why spend the time . . . trying to develop an . . . intellectual, spiritually mature life? If someone is basically passive, he or she will just not make the effort to read, preferring instead to be entertained. If a person is sensate in orientation, music, magazines filled with pictures, and visual media in general will be more important than mere words on a page or abstract thoughts. If one is hurried and distracted, one will have little patience for theoretical knowledge and too short . . . an attention span to stay with an idea while it is being carefully developed. . . .

And if someone is overly individualistic, infantile, and narcissistic, what *will* that person read, if he or she reads at all? . . . Christian self-help books that are filled with self-serving content, . . . slogans, simplistic moralizing, a lot of stories and pictures, and inadequate diagnosis of issues that place no demand on the reader. Books about Christian celebrities. . . . what will not be read are books that equip people to . . . develop a well-reasoned, theological understanding of the Christian religion, and fill their role in the broader kingdom of God . . . [Such] a church . . . will become . . . impotent to stand against the powerful forces of secularism that threaten to bury Christian ideas under a veneer of soulless pluralism and misguided scientism. In such a context, the church will be tempted to measure her success largely in terms of numbers—numbers achieved by cultural accommodation to empty selves. In this way, . . . the church will become her own grave digger; her means of short-term “success” will turn out to be the very thing that marginalizes her in the long run.¹³

What makes this description so devastating is that we don't have to imagine such a church; rather this *is* an apt description of far too many American evangelical churches today.

¹³J. P. Moreland, *Love Your God with All Your Mind* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1997), 93-94.

It is no wonder, then, that despite its resurgence, evangelical Christianity has been so limited in its cultural impact. David Wells reflects,

The vast growth in evangelically minded people . . . should by now have revolutionized American culture. With a third of American adults now claiming to have experienced spiritual rebirth, a powerful countercurrent of morality growing out of a powerful and alternative worldview should have been unleashed in factories, offices, and board rooms, in the media, universities, and professions, from one end of the country to the other. The results should by now be unmistakable. Secular values should be reeling, and those who are their proponents should be very troubled. But as it turns out, all of this swelling of the evangelical ranks has passed unnoticed in the culture. . . . The presence of evangelicals in American culture has barely caused a ripple.¹⁴

Sometimes people would justify their lack of intellectual engagement by asserting that they prefer having a “simple faith.” But here I think we must distinguish between a childlike faith and a childish faith. A childlike faith is a whole-souled trust in God as one’s loving Heavenly Father, and Jesus commends such a faith to us. But a childish faith is an immature, unreflective faith, and such a faith is not commended to us. On the contrary, Paul says, “Do not be children in your thinking; be babes in evil, but in thinking be mature” (1 Cor. 14:20, RSV). If a “simple” faith means an unreflective, ignorant faith, then we should want none of it. In my own life, I can testify that, after many years of study, my worship of God is deeper precisely because of, and not in spite of, my philosophical and theological studies. In every area I have intensely researched—creation, the resurrection, divine omniscience, divine eternity—my appreciation of God’s truth and my awe of His person have become more profound. I am excited about future study because of the deeper appreciation I am sure it will bring me of God’s person and work. Christian faith is not an apathetic

¹⁴Wells, *No Place for Truth*, 293.

faith, a brain-dead faith, but a living, inquiring faith. As Anselm put it, ours is a faith that seeks understanding.

Furthermore, the results of being in intellectual neutral extend far beyond one's own self. If Christian laymen do not become intellectually engaged, then we are in serious danger of losing our youth. In high school and college, Christian teenagers are intellectually assaulted by every manner of non-Christian philosophy conjoined with an overwhelming relativism. As I speak in churches around the country, I constantly meet parents whose children have lost their faith because there was no one in the church to answer their questions.

Some years ago I had the privilege of getting to know Dr. Blanchard Demerchant, now a philosophy professor. Raised in a Christian home, Blanchard began as a teenager to ask questions concerning doubts about the Christian faith that were troubling him. He went away to Bible college, but to his dismay, found that none of the teachers could address his questions. Yet there was in the administration one well-educated man. Blanchard made an appointment with him, hoping to find some answers to his questions. But when Blanchard had laid out his questions, the administrator, instead of dealing with them, merely commanded Blanchard to get down on his knees and repent before God for entertaining such doubts.

Needless to say, that travesty only convinced Blanchard even more that there was nothing intellectually to the Christian faith. He began to study philosophy at a secular university, became an atheist, convinced the Christian girl whom he had married to likewise abandon her faith, was drafted and sent to Vietnam, where he became a drug addict and alcoholic, and later returned to find his marriage, his job, and his world generally falling apart. He nearly committed suicide. But instead, he began to study and ponder the teaching of the man Jesus, and slowly, painfully, he began to return to the Christian faith. To make a long story short, he is now a transformed person, is reunited with his wife, Phyllis, and has a remarkable ministry with secular university students in philosophy by subtly introducing Christian perspective on philosophical problems in the classroom.

He told me with a smile that his students are simply dumbfounded that he can be both a philosopher and a Christian. Blanchard's story had a happy ending. But for many other children from Christian families the outcome is more tragic.

There can be no question that the church has dropped the ball in this area. But the structures are in place in the church for remedying this problem, if only we will make use of them. I am speaking, of course, of adult Sunday school programs. Why not begin to utilize Sunday school classes to offer laymen serious instruction in such subjects as Christian doctrine, church history, New Testament Greek, apologetics, and so forth? Think of the potential for change! Why not?

I believe that our culture can be changed. I am excited about the renaissance in Christian philosophy in my generation, which bodes well for the next. Whether God is calling you to become a Christian scholar on the front lines of intellectual battle, a Christian pastor to serve as a broker of truth to your congregation, or a Christian layman or parent who is always ready to give a reason for the hope that is in you, we have the awesome opportunity of being agents of cultural change in Christ's name.¹⁵ For the church's sake, for your own sakes, for your future children's sake, do not squander this opportunity! So if, up until now, you've just been coasting, idling in intellectual neutral, now is the time to get it in gear! In the following chapters, we shall, with minds fully engaged, explore some of the difficult questions confronting Christians in contemporary Western culture.

Answers to the Quiz

1. Church father (354–430) and the author of *The City of God* who emphasized God's unmerited grace.
2. The church council that in 325 officially ratified the doctrine of the equal deity of the Father and the Son as opposed to the view held by the Arian heretics.
3. The doctrine that in God there are three persons in one being.

¹⁵ Having heard the call, we face the next step of equipping ourselves for battle. By reading this book, you have already begun. A good second step is to read Moreland's *Love Your God with All Your Mind* and pursue the relevant references in his bibliographies sorted by field of specialization.

4. The doctrine enunciated at the Council of Chalcedon (451) affirming the true deity and true humanity of Christ.
5. The view that the world and God are identical.
6. A medieval Catholic theologian (1225–1274) and the author of *Summa Theologiae*, whose views have been determinative for traditional Roman Catholic theology.
7. The origin of Protestantism in the sixteenth century in the efforts of men such as Luther, Calvin, and Zwingli to reform the doctrine and practice of the Roman Catholic church; it emphasized justification by grace through faith alone and the exclusive authority of the Bible.
8. The Roman Catholic monk (1483–1546) who started the Protestant Reformation and was the founder of Lutheranism.
9. The doctrine that by His death on our behalf and in our place Christ reconciled us to God.
10. The intellectual revolt in Europe during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries against the authority of church and monarchy in the name of human autonomy; also called the Age of Reason.