

The Wasted Mind

If we believe ... the Bible gives truthful answers to every human question, then we ought to give the greatest intellectual effort possible to explain and understand the issues of our culture.

A *mind is a terrible thing to waste.* What a thought-provoking statement. I sometimes wonder if we evangelical Christians are wasting our minds, if we are giving as much attention to the development of the mind as we should be.

We come from a long line of spiritual ancestors who were distinguished by having probing, creative and fruitful minds. Think of Martin Luther, Ulrich Zwingli, John Calvin, and our own Anabaptist forebears. All of them believed that stimulating the mind, expanding its potential, was one way to glorify God. Jonathan Edwards, perhaps the foremost American evangelical, was known for his brilliant thinking. All these people believed God had given our minds as a gift and that deliberate mental activity was an important aspect of Christian living.

Things have changed. Modern evangelical Christians, in general, do not think comprehensively, do not attempt to stretch their minds to new limits, while still holding to Christian, biblical values. Why is it that there seem to be so few Christian political thinkers, or economists, or historians? Are any leading authors in America today totally committed to Christ? Are there Christians doing imaginative writing, studying science, social theory, linguistics, philosophy, and so on?

The Lebanese diplomat and Christian Charles Malik wrote in 1980 that the greatest danger facing American evangelicalism was anti-intellectualism. He said, "People are in a hurry to get out of the university and start earning money or serving the church or preaching the gospel. They have no idea of the infinite value of spending years of leisure in conversing with the greatest minds and souls of the past and thereby ripening and sharpening and enlarging their powers of thinking." Malik said the result is that the arena of creative thinking is abdicated to Satan.

Do we respect the use of the mind? Do we think it is important to study, to contemplate deep ideas, to interact with great thinkers of the past and present? Or do we think such endeavors are a waste of time?

Cultivating the mind is important. A study of history will show that Christianity has most often made a lasting impact on the culture of a society when it motivated the intellect of people. More than that, the mind is God's gift to us. Because God has put us into this world, we need to learn as much about our world as we possibly can. God expects us to understand our times, as the men of Issachar did (I Chronicles 12:32).

The Bible makes reference, intentionally I believe, to the mind. Jesus said we were to love him with all our being, including the mind (Mark. 12:30). Peter writes, "Prepare your minds for action." Jesus opened the minds of his disciples so they could understand the

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deep things of God. Christ himself, while he was on this earth, grew in the use of his mind.

Christians need to do creative thinking. It is sad that the book which Christians have purchased more in the last 20 years (except for the Bible) is *The Late Great Planet Earth*, a book that is hardly a feast for the brain. And, during the Gulf War four years ago, instead of reading books that helped us to understand the stir of forces in the Persian Gulf, we were reading writings that said Saddam Hussein was the antichrist and the Persian Gulf War was the beginning of the end times. Frank Peretti's books have been wildly successful, but what do they tell us about how men and women throughout history have experienced spiritual warfare and how we can learn from their experiences?

By contrast, Paul's address on Mars Hill, in the city of Athens (Acts 17:16-34) is a model of intellectual insight and acumen. As Paul wandered through that brilliant but godless city, he met Epicurean and Stoic philosophers. How many of us would have known how to talk to them? But Paul knew. He knew their philosophy, he knew their line of reasoning, he could even quote their own poets. Would I do as well dialoging with a New Ager, or a secular humanist, or an atheist? Would you?

I write to urge all of us: learn to think. Pray that you will develop your mind. Read those books that are difficult to understand, that challenge your thinking, and stretch your comprehension. Take classes that sharpen your mind, that make you think. Talk with thinking people. I pray that out of the Mennonite Brethren church will come philosophers, scientists, writers of literature, painters, sculptors, dramatists, professors, researchers, and so on. If we believe that the issues which the Bible raises are important, and if we believe the Bible gives truthful answers to every human question, then we ought to give the greatest intellectual effort possible to explain and understand the ideas of our culture. That is what Paul did.

A mind is a terrible thing to waste. I hope you and I are not wasting ours.

Endnotes:

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