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Anti-Intellectualism: The Ultimate Tyranny

by Ian Hodge, Ph.D., AIMM

IT IS CURIOUS how the same issues arise in different form. Two events in recent weeks have prompted my thinking on an issue that has been raised before in these pages. Because the issue is so prevalent, and a major cause of the demise of Christianity in our age, it is worth exploring yet again.

The examples involve close friends who shall remain nameless. Not just to protect the innocent (or guilty, as it may be), but to also protect myself lest I read into these situations motives and ideas that may not belong to these people. It is not my intention to do this. I recognize, however, that the best intentions do not always eventuate into reality.

The first example deals with the area of witnessing. It is a fact of human nature in its fallen state that it attempts to raise itself to a higher level than it is morally entitled to. The basic temptation in Eden was to "be like God" (Gen. 3:5). This translates itself into man being his own god, determining for himself what is right and wrong.

When men (and women) meet others, however, there is a clash of the gods. Each human is attempting to "be like God." This brings him into unnecessary, but unavoidable, conflict with others. This means, amongst other things, attempts to raise oneself above others in various ways. And we can only begin to realize how subtle are the ways we do this.

One such way is to boast about ourselves. Now I am using the word boast very carefully. I do not mean the kind of boasting that causes us to puff out our

chests and pull our selves to our greatest height to give ourselves a posture of grandeur. Boasting does not require these physical signs. In fact, some of the best boasting is done in far more subtle and less obvious ways. But it is still boasting. For example, my car is better than yours. I have a newer or bigger house than my neighbours. I received a special deal that supposedly no one else received. This is boasting at its worst — and its most frequent.

In Christian circles, where the kind of crass, materialistic boasting is frowned upon, boasting can take place in other forms. God has given me a special vision that He hasn't given anyone else. My blessings are bigger than others'. (Or some alternatives: I'm made to suffer more because I'm more special to God; I've been pulled up from bigger greater depths than others.)

Consider Job's suffering and his testimony at the time. He could not say that he entirely relished the circumstances. All he could say was that God, being God, was free to do with him as He wished, and no one could question God's goodness or judgement.

These concepts and ideas are expressed to others usually as a testimony. Now I do not think there is anything wrong with testimony, *per se*. There are grounds, however, to question the kind of testimony that lets others believe we are better than they, or we are above them, or we are more spiritual than they are. This is not testimony concerning God but a form of grandstanding. And it is often most recognizable by the

The New Church

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IN HIS IMPORTANT STUDY ON EDUCATION, *The Messianic Character of Education*, R.J. Rushdoony called attention to the religious nature of modern education and the public school. "The state school has become the saving institution," argues Rushdoony, "and the function of the school has been to proclaim a new gospel of salvation. Education in this era is a messianic and utopian movement, a facet of the Enlightenment hope of regenerating man in terms of the promises of science and the new social order to be achieved in the state." (p. 4).

Since the publication of these words in 1963, private education has been involved in a major growth spurt. According to an article in *The Daily Telegraph Mirror*, September 5, 1995, "Fundamentalist Christian schooling, where biblical stories are taught as fact, is the fastest-growing sector of education in Australia." It is not just back-to-basics that is at issue here. What is also at issue is a back-to-the-Bible as the inspired Word of God and therefore trustworthy in all that it says. And some people are increasingly inclined to believe that it speaks on more than just narrowly defined "religious" issues. Thus, for example, some humanist educators at major universities in Australia "believe children who are taught that the world was created in six real days and that evolution is a false theory have problems as adults with their skills of thinking and criticising."

While the Christian and home-school movement has grown, there have been no real gains in tertiary education

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reactions of others, especially non-Christians.

There is another difficulty with this kind of testimony as a form of outreach. It is not always possible to have a comforting story to tell. This means our testimony is not very appealing

The second example is different in that it relates to the attitude some Christians have about the faith and what it means. Some very well-meaning and devout Christian friends have found, in their own growth in the faith, that it is not so easy to be dogmatic about some of the cherished dogmas of a particular denomination. This has extended to the point, unfortunately, where it seems that some dogmas held by all denominations cannot be affirmed. It is too easy, they say, to make God in our own image. Thus, the things we say about God are not so much a reflection of what God is but more a statement of our own perceptions about God. These perceptions, they argue further, are not necessarily related to the fact of what God is. Thus they conclude that many people are wrong in what they say about God.

This view posits a kind of religious skepticism. It is based, however, on a false syllogism: *Major premise:* There are many claims concerning religious dogma; *Minor premise:* Not all these claims are true; *Conclusion:* Therefore none of the claims are true. This is repetition of the silly notion that we cannot be certain about anything, which, in itself, is a contradiction since it is a claim to certainty. For many, however, illogical conclusions are not going to stop them holding to wrong ideas.

Now I have drawn these illustrations together because I think they reflect a single common error in some contemporary thinking. At back of both these illustrations is a reluctance to speak of the concept of *truth*. Thus, the person giving his testimony may be giving us his *experiences* because for him Christianity is nothing but a series of existential encounters. In some instances, these experiences can be likened to Jaspers' "final experience," which the late Francis Schaeffer described as "an experience so big that it gives you a certainty that you are there and a hope of meaning — even though, rationally, you could not have such hope. The problem with this 'final experience' is that, because it is totally separated from the rational, there is no way to communicate its content either to someone else or to yourself."¹

This is the alienation of modern man. Not only is he alienated from God, but he is alienated from himself. Made in the image of God, man is willing to deny this image in order to deny God. But in order to achieve this denial man must act irrationally, even if it means making a fool of himself with illogical systems of thought. Van Til explained this irrationalism well when he pointed out that Satan's temptation of Eve amounted "to saying that no assertion in terms of a rational scheme could predict the course of movement of time-controlled reality."² Satan, you may recall, had counter-claimed against God that His assertions about the consequences of her eating the forbidden fruit would not come true. The Fall created an "absolute separation between truth and reality."³

It is this separation between truth and reality that is evident in the unwillingness on the part of many Christians to insist on a dogmatic theology. The only dogmatism they will allow is their own assertion that we cannot be dogmatic about anything. And because many are unwilling to be dogmatic about the faith, they fall back on their experiences as the basis of the faith. This is clearly wrong.

Because there is no longer an accepted concept of truth, there is no longer any attempt to argue as St Paul did on Mars Hill against the Stoics and the Epicureans. According to Luke's description in Acts 17, the Stoic and Epicurean philosophers thought St Paul was proclaiming strange deities — because, says Luke, "he [Paul] was preaching

for Australian Christians. Attempts to establish tertiary level studies in Australia, such as Westminster Hall in Hobart (now almost disbanded), have failed due to lack of support. This is because parents have not been willing to pay the establishment costs of these institutions. And by establishment costs, I don't just mean tuition fees. Westminster Hall was not able to issue formal academic degrees, a prerogative of those institutions that have government approval to do so. Westminster Hall and its governing directors saw the necessity to maintain its academic and operational freedom outside certain government controls. The cost to parents and students was the inability, for example, to gain a "recognized degree. Westminster Hall suffered accordingly with low enrolments. And low enrolments cannot support a truly academic and disciplined tertiary learning centre.

Other religious groups have not fared any better in getting a university off the ground. There are some exceptions, but there are grave questions about the acquiescence to humanistic education standards within these institutions. This is not just a result of accepting government control over some aspects of the curriculum within the university, but also reflects the anti-intellectualism of the faith that I speak about in the accompanying article in this newsletter. There is no "Christian mind," to use a phrase from Harry Blamires' 1963 book, *The Christian Mind*. And because there is no Christian mind, all that we have is the mind of man: humanism.

The decline of Christian thinking, accompanied by an increasing abandonment of church attendance, has not seen the church's functions denied. Instead, they have been transferred to other institutions, namely the school and university. In 1969, in Boulder, Colorado, a series of paid advertisements appeared in a local newspaper. The writer complained: "Extremist professors are now substituting revolution for learning in our universities in the same way radical theologians have substituted 'humanism' for faith in God." That same year, Ivan Illich, in a speech delivered at the University of Puerto Rico, drew attention to the "secular Church" and what he saw as its imminent end. Commenting on his "folklore," Illich said:

1. Francis A. Schaeffer, *Escape From Reason* (London: Inter-Varsity Press, 1968), pp. 48-49, emphasis in original.
2. Cornelius Van Til, *The Defense of the Faith* (Philadelphia, PA: Presbyterian & Reformed Publishing Co., 1976), p. 118.
3. *idem*.

Jesus and the resurrection" (v. 18). Why would Jesus and the resurrection appear so strange to these pagan thinkers? At one level it is easy to dismiss such non-acceptance under the statement that they are not converted, and the non-converted mind is hostile to God. This is true. The hostile mind, though, portrays itself not as hostile, but as accepting another way of thinking. And it is at its basic concepts that Christianity stands in contrast to its opponent philosophies.

To preach Jesus and the resurrection was to not provide a personal testimony of experiences but to testify concerning certain historical facts. Thus, Paul in his defence of the faith, does not appeal to his conversion experience; he does not appeal to any religious phenomena such as tongue-speaking; instead, he appeals to facts that are true: "The God who made the world and all things in it" (v. 24).

So these examples listed above, it seems to me, are perhaps tacit acceptances of a non-Christian frame of reference and a capitulation to the very thought processes that Christians are to reject.

Religious experiences of the wrong kind, though, had their revival in the Great Awakening. This, perhaps, was the religious beginnings of Romanticism. As William Barrett explained in his contrast of Classicism and Romanticism, "Romanticism is not simply the rejection of the 'unities,' the heroic couplet, the Alexandrine, or any other accepted literary convention or form; its opposition to Classicism takes place at a deeper level: The Romantic sensibility, the Romantic passion for existence, posit an attitude toward life which rejects . . . inherited Christian content."⁴

The underlying religious motivation for the contemporary existentialism is man's attempts to be his own god — and therefore his own saviour. In former times, when the Bible was believed as truth, and religious thought was governed by the concept of truth, salvation depended upon God and the subordination of the individual's will to the will of God. "Now," according to E. Michael Jones, "everything [is] a function of will, and salvation [is] achieved by pursuing that will as single-mindedly as possible."⁵

While the French retreated from their attempts at Revolution at the end of the

eighteenth century, Goethe, Schiller and Beethoven, for example, were beginning to whip up a revolution of their own in artistic circles. Revolution against the Old Order was in the air, and nothing would stand in its way. Soon, romanticism would sweep all before it. This, it needs to be emphasized, was the outcome of a religious romanticism that had already swept the world during the eighteenth century. Content had been swept out of Christianity and was replaced by religious experience. Why shouldn't the rest of the world follow? And follow it did, with a vengeance. The strongest motivations for this new order were in its opposition against existing ideas and institutions. Man was now at centre-stage.

When man becomes central and is governed by his emotions rather than his will, the concepts and principles of historic Christian faith are abandoned. But this shift could come about only because the Christians themselves had already abandoned the idea that there was a rational basis for the faith. At least a part of the explanation of this problem in contemporary Christianity comes about because Protestantism has divorced itself from the Old Testament and began to fall into subjectivism. If the Old Testament laws given to Israel were no longer binding then it was incumbent upon man to discover God's new laws through religious experiences. And it is this turning inward that marked the Christianity prevalent since the beginning of the eighteenth century.

Meanwhile, humanist educators were promoting public (i.e. state) schools as the panacea for man's ills. Abandonment of a general Christian framework of thinking gave way to what the Bible describes as foolishness: trying to exclude God out of life. Surely, the fools say in their heart, there is no God. This foolishness established itself as man-centred thinking, the alternative to God-centred thinking. In education, as in other spheres, this leads to an anti-intellectualism that is necessary in order to attempt to deny the existence of God. Generally speaking, it is unfortunate that Christians have not responded to the challenge.

Os Guinness, in his 1994 book, *Fit Bodies, Fat Minds*,⁶ calls this denial of truth anti-intellectualism and believes it to be the leading problem in contempo-

The academic procession in which we have just participated evokes the ancient religious procession of clerics and cherubs at Corpus Christi. The Church, one, holy, catholic . . . has been replaced by another ritual institution: the School, compulsory, untouchable, universal, traditional. . . . Alma Mater holds the place of Santa Mater. Today we attribute to our graduating ceremonies the power of rescuing the poor from the slums as our forefathers attributed to baptism the powers of saving the 'Moor' from Hell. The one great difference between the two creeds is the following: the observance of the academic rites becomes daily more onerous and more constraining than the observance of the rites of the House of God, even at the worst moments of the Spanish Inquisition. Today the School is confused with education as formerly the Church was confused with religion. The patronage which accrediting agencies confer upon educational institutions in Puerto Rico recalls the patronage of the Kings of Spain toward the Church. Federal aid programmes correspond to the donations of yesterday's kings. (Quoted in Hazel E. Barnes, *The University as the New Church* (London: C.A. Watts, 1970), p. 5.)

According to Barnes, the University "has been in truth becoming a Church to the point of duplicating our religious institutions in function if not in rendering them obsolete. Under the guise of detachment and non-commitment, the University has been handling the problems of values surreptitiously and performing its religious duties badly. It has become a Church without ever clearly formulating its faith or seriously examining the worth of its plan for salvation" (p. 19).

Curiously, those churches that despise the use of gown and ritual in their churches are more than happy to use these items in their school and university graduation ceremonies. Ritual is not discarded; it is simply transferred to other institutions. This is an indication that the educational institutions have picked up what the churches have discarded.

If the schools are "dumbing down" the students, then what are the universities doing? Yet, Christian parents in this country are still willing to send their children to the university in order not to retard their employment opportunities.

4. William Barrett, *What is Existentialism?* (New York: Grove Press, 1964), p. 106.

5. E. Michael Jones, *Dionysos Rising: The Birth of Cultural Revolution out of the Spirit of Music* (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 1994), p. 64.

6. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1994.

rary evangelicalism. While he has American evangelicalism in mind, I think his criticism applies just as strongly — maybe even more so — to evangelicalism outside the US. "Anti-intellectualism, according to Guinness, "is a disposition to discount the importance of truth and the life of the mind."⁷ Sense and feelings replace the intellect as the source of motivation which is in stark contrast to the biblical idea of being ruled by the mind and its comprehension of the objective Word of God.

Since God, through the objective revelation of the Bible, is no longer the arbiter of morals, then man is free to find, through religious experiences, his own direction in life. And if this is true in theology, then it is also true in art, music, and other areas of life. Rationality gave way to emotion, which in time led to complete irrationality. Form in art and music gave away to no form, with a resulting loss in communication. Disorder became the order of the day. The idea of a *systematic* theology was just as much an anathema as was the idea of order and structure in music. Both were abandoned for the idea that "anything goes" and there is no need to justify, logically, the actions or outcomes.

The result is the world we live in. This is a world where people's testimony is supposed to give others a valid reason to forsake their godless ways and follow Jesus of Nazareth. "I feel good following Jesus, and you can feel good to if you do likewise." This is offering sinners a psychological fix when what they need is knowledge that salvation is only possible because of the objective fact of Christ's atoning death, together with the other great truths of the faith.

Christianity without content came about because the major content of the faith — ethics — was abandoned. And it was abandoned because of the non-acceptance of the ethics of the Old Testament, other than the Ten Commandments. These commandments, in turn, were gutted of all meaning by denying the details of the law that are the exposition and explanation of meaning and application of the Ten Principles. This is a generalization since not all ethics were abandoned. But ethics in the major areas of life, especially politics, were certainly deserted. This is evident because most people today get their ethics at the office rather than the church. Not because they don't attend church,

although this is certainly true for the majority of people, but because the churches are failing to provide people with ethical standards for the major areas of their lives.

Having abandoned the mind and rational thought, all that is left are emotions and psychology. And once the notions of rational thought and truth have gone, there are no reasons for people to come to faith other than our own personal religious experiences, real as these might be.

Does this mean there is no place for personal testimony? No, but it does mean we should not use personal religious experiences as a substitute for the facts of the faith.

This leads to what I call the ultimate tyranny. The ultimate tyranny comes about when truth is denied, for to do this, illogical reasoning must triumph. Disorder in the minds of men leads to disorder in the lives of men, which, in turn, leads to disorder in the institutions that men create in order to have order in society. At the head of these institutions is the political order, and disorder and tyranny in this realm are the result of disorder in the minds of the people within the political realm.

But it is the ultimate tyranny because the people no longer have the intellectual weapons with which to combat the tyranny. When all else has gone, we still have the minds God has created us with. If the mind of man, however, is not seen as the basis for all action — not as autonomous but in subjection to the Word of God — then the devil has surely won the day.

Conclusion

WE CANNOT WIN THE BATTLE for the hearts and minds of men and women by presenting them with personal, subjective encounters with God any more than we can win by insisting that no one can present God as He really is without falling into idolatry. It is possible to present the truths of God as they are given to us in the Bible without falling into idolatry, just as it is possible to tell the great facts of the faith without resorting to personal religious experiences.

Only a return to the great truths of Scripture *because they are true* can have enough appeal to the mind of sinful

Underneath this acceptance of the university by Christians is the mistaken belief that the university is neutral ground. If, on the other hand, the university is seen as a rival church, then we have reason to ask why Christian parents are so willing to allow their offspring to attend. Would they so willingly permit their children to attend the local Mosque, or the local Baha'i Temple? Most Protestants would not allow their children to attend the local Catholic Church on a Sunday, but they are more than willing to allow them to attend the humanistic University-as-Church every other day. Why? So their children can have a better job.

The perverseness of this situation is evident. But what can be done about it. Clearly, institutions such as Westminster Hall and the directors of this institution showed us what is necessary. But until Christian parents and others are willing to put their hands in their pockets and finance Christian Universities that will not usurp the place of the Church, we cannot expect to see the kind of changes many are hoping will come about because of the increase in Christian schools and Christian home-schooling.

The Christian education movements, therefore, will remain in infancy until it can produce tomorrow's spiritual and intellectual leaders who can lead the people of this nation out of the fog and blindness and utter futility that is at the centre of the modern university. May God give us the parents with the faith, the courage, and the stamina to begin this work in a full-scale onslaught against the hallowed walls of humanism.

man to bring about the change that is needed. This change will not happen because of the strengths of our arguments, since it is only God who can change the heart of man. But just as we recognize that God causes the wheat to grow, we similarly recognize an obligation to prepare the field and plant the seed. We do have obligations in our presentations of the Gospel. This is, and can be, our only confidence, that God's truths are the seeds of destruction for all those who oppose the God of Truth. And this, in the final run, is our sure and certain testimony.

7. *ibid.*, p. 9. There is another kind of anti-intellectualism, indicated as follows. Some people will allow that there are truths to do with the faith and may recognize, for example, that there can be such a thing as a Christian view of, say, politics. But then they make little effort to master their subject material, often making fools of themselves, and therefore the faith, when they attempt to discuss the topic.