

Why We Need Christians in Higher Education

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Abstract: Many Christians who are involved with higher education encounter skepticism about whether believers should be in institutions with so much hostility toward the Bible and the Christian teaching. This talk will make a case for why Christians are desperately needed in higher education and why the calling to scholarship is so crucial for the Church. It will demonstrate that serving in higher education is significant and changes lives and that it is a valid ministry, a way in which to serve and honor God.

In the fall of 1991 my wife, Dr. Teri McCarthy, was teaching in Moscow. Priscilla Young, a friend of hers, was teaching business at the Moscow High Party School, which before perestroika had been the premier training institution for Communist Party leaders from around the world. As Priscilla took Teri on a tour of her campus, they entered a beautifully-decorated hall. There, prominently displayed on one of the walls, was a massive bronze plaque honoring some of their most noted alumni. As Teri and Priscilla stood there reading the list, they were shocked to see the names of Idi Amin, the butcher of Uganda, Saddam Hussein of Iraq, Fidel Castro of Cuba, Muammar Gaddafi of Libya, and other infamous dictators. As Teri stood there reading those names, she was overwhelmed with this question, *“What difference might it have made in the world had these tyrants been taught by godly professors who taught a biblical worldview and demonstrated the love and lordship of Jesus Christ?”*



Tragically, the Marxist education these men received at the Moscow High Party School worked. They were shaped and molded by their education. Communists have certainly understood the importance of the university. Thousands of students from all over the world were brought to numerous universities in the Soviet Union to study under Marxist professors and imbibe Communist principles. Those students then went out to spread Marxism around the world with devastating results.

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“What difference might it have made in the world had these tyrants been taught by godly professors who taught a biblical worldview and demonstrated the love and lordship of Jesus Christ?”

Teri’s experience at the Communist High Party School prompts us to ask questions about the role Christians should play in higher education. Is education important for the work of God in the world? Do we need Christians in higher education? If so, why?

In 1976 I began teaching at Kansas Christian College. Over the 40-plus years since then I have been teaching and serving in higher education. Education is important in my life. Education is what God called me to do.

But many of my colleagues in Europe and in America, and in other parts of the world, testify to encountering various levels of skepticism at best, and opposition at worst, in their churches to their involvement in education. That is why it is important to ask whether higher education is crucial for the Church and whether Christians should be engaged in higher education. What is the value of the work to which God has called us?

A couple of years ago Peter Cimala, director of the Komensky Institute, asked me to come to Prague and speak to the Christian doctoral students in Komensky’s “Hidden Seeds” program on why scholarship is important for Christians and the Church. They were encountering opposition from their Czech brothers and sisters who were suspicious if not outright opposed to evangelicals being engaged in higher education.

When Peter asked me to speak on this, I realized that after more than forty years of being an academic and delivering scores of sermons and talks at churches, conferences, universities, and seminaries on how to effectively serve Christ in higher education, I had never really focused a talk responding to the skepticism among Christians about Christians in higher education. It was high time to address this issue directly. This article is the result of Peter’s request. Over the last couple of years since I first gave this talk in Prague, I have spoken on this subject in other countries and everywhere I’ve gone, I’ve found that my fellow-academicians were hungry for help on this subject.¹

Do we really need Christians in higher education? Sadly, the dismal record of some Christian academicians has made it more difficult than ever to satisfy some skeptical believers on these questions. Far too many preening, egotistical professor-types have flaunted their abundance of learning and have gazed with haughty eye down from their ivory towers upon mere and mortal Christians who have graduated “only” from secondary school or finished “only” a baccalaureate degree. All this has left a foul taste in the mouths of many evangelicals about higher education. In recent years the brazen bent toward liberalism both theologically and politically among Christian academicians have left many evangelicals more suspicious than ever about the worthiness of the academic calling for serious believers.

¹ Another part of my talk on why Christians are needed in higher education can be found in my paper, “The Problems Christians Have with Higher Education.” Available upon request.

So after all this, is there a need for men and women of learning in the Body of Christ? Does the Church benefit from individuals with advanced degrees? Is the work of believers in higher education significant and worthwhile? Is it life-changing? Can we bring glory to God in academe? Is it legitimate to consider the work of a Christian academician as “ministry” or “service for God?” Or is higher education a superfluity without which the Church would function just fine?

I am convinced that now, more than ever, the Church does indeed need Christians in higher education. The work of God can be and throughout church history has been advanced ably by humble men and women of learning who have full heads and warm hearts.

There are a number of reasons why I believe we need Christians in higher education.

God created the mind and commands us to seek both knowledge and wisdom

The Bible makes it clear that God cares about education and our minds. After all, it was His idea to give us minds. Christian scholars are simply carrying out God’s command to seek knowledge and wisdom professionally and vocationally.

The Bible commands us to learn and to teach others. The Great Commandment Jesus gave us was to “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your *mind*.” (Luke 10:27). Some academics look at this verse and gleefully point out, “See, what I do is in right there.” But we need to be reminded that the main point of this famous command is not the mind, but rather loving God. Those of us in education are blessed with the opportunity to specialize in loving God with our minds.

Os Guinness reminds us, “When all is said and done, the point is to love and obey God by loving him with our minds. For the Christian mind is a combination of intellectual light and spiritual ardor that, in Dorothy Sayers’s term, is simply the ‘mind in love’ with God.”²

Another scholar expressed it in these words.

To love God with our minds does not mean that it is our minds that actually do the loving. Rather, we love God by using our minds. The situation is analogous to a surgeon who loves God with her hands—she uses her hands to express her love for God. Her hands are not doing the loving; she is doing the loving by using her hands. Both the surgeon and the learner can love God with all their hearts, that is, from the center of their personalities and with fervor and warmth. They do so through the special talents they have. Loving God with our minds, therefore, is no different from loving God with our hearts, or simply loving God. It is just a special way of doing so.³

The Bible commands us to seek wisdom, as we’re often reminded at church. But we are reminded less often that we are also commanded to seek *knowledge* as well.

² Os Guinness, *Fit Bodies, Fat Minds: Why Evangelicals Don't Think and What to Do About It* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Hourglass Books, 1994), 137.

³ Clifford Williams, *The Life of the Mind: A Christian Perspective* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2002), 37.

- “Wise men store up knowledge,” Proverbs 10:14 (NIV) If you work in education, that is your job description—storing up knowledge and passing it on.
- “The discerning heart seeks knowledge,” Proverbs 15:14 (NIV) That’s exactly what you do every day as an academic.
- “An intelligent mind acquires knowledge, and the ear of the wise seeks knowledge.” Proverbs 18:15 (NRSV) When you are doing your research, you are obeying God’s command.
- “It is the glory of God to conceal things, but the glory of kings is to search things out.” Proverbs 25:2 (NRSV) So our work as academicians is a truly “royal” calling.

It is clear from these verses and others like them that knowledge has intrinsic value. Learning about God and His world should lead us to a deeper level of devotion and love for Him. This is why Origen, one of the Early Church Fathers, said that God “is the mind and source from which all intellectual nature or mind takes its beginnings.”⁴

In **Romans 12:1-2** we are told that we are to be “transformed by the renewing of our mind.” Paul viewed a key part of God’s salvation plan for us as reshaping the way we think and how we use our mind. The mind counts. It matters. And consequently, our work with the mind in education matters.

In **1 Peter 3:15** we are commanded to “Always be prepared to give an answer (*apologia*) to everyone who asks you to give the reason (*logos*) for the hope that you have.” (NIV) Defending the faith with a logical answer is definitely an intellectual as well as a spiritual activity.⁵ It’s not one or the other, it’s both/and.

In **2 Corinthians 10:5** (NIV) Paul declares, “We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.” This should be a prime verse for all Christian academics, regardless of our field. Are there arguments against God in your field? This verse is not just about not harboring lust or anger or other sinful thoughts in our mind—as necessary as that is, but it is also just as importantly about seeing the world as God sees it—thinking with a Christian worldview.

My friend Kelly Leseberg told me that recently he asked his middle-school Sunday school class, “What was the first thing Jesus was known for?” The answer, according to Luke 2:47, Jesus was first noticed for His brilliant mind. Surely, if we want to be like Jesus, even though we can never match his mental prowess, we will seek to be as knowledgeable and articulate as we can be within our own limitations. As one person said, “Unthinking faith is a curious offering to be made to the creator of the human mind.”⁶

James Orr expressed it well.⁷

If there is a religion in the world which exalts the office of teaching, it is safe to say that it is the religion of Jesus Christ. It has been frequently remarked that in pagan religions

⁴ Bradley G. Green, *The Gospel and the Mind: Recovering and Shaping the Intellectual Life* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 2010), 17.

⁵ J. P. Moreland, *Love Your God with All Your Mind: The Role of Reason in the Life of the Soul*, 2nd ed. (Colorado Springs, Colorado: NavPress, 2012), 51-53.

⁶ John A. Hutchison, *Faith, Reason, and Existence*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1956, quoted in “Reflections,” *Christianity Today* October 7, 2002. 64.

⁷ John Stott introduced me to this book in his classic *Your Mind Matters*, 29-30.

the doctrinal element is at a minimum--the chief thing there is the performance of a ritual. But this is precisely where Christianity distinguishes itself from other religions--it does contain doctrine. It comes to men with definite, positive teaching; it claims to be the truth; it bases religion on knowledge, though a knowledge which is only attainable under moral conditions....A strong, stable, religious life can be built up on no other ground than that of intelligent conviction. Christianity, therefore, addresses itself to the intelligence as well as to the heart.⁸

Robert Jenson expresses this in more whimsical terms. “We serve a talkative God, who does not even seem to be able to do without a library. In his service, we will be concerned for talk and libraries.”⁹

One reason Christians should engage with education at all levels is that God created the mind and gave us a thirst to learn. God has commanded us to seek wisdom *and* knowledge.

What was the first thing Jesus was known for? His brilliant mind.

The Bible Shows the Importance of Engaging the Academy

The life of the mind and engaging the academy are important in the Bible. Do you want an example of a Christian engaging with the academy? Look no further than the Apostle Paul himself. Paul was a well-educated scholar and this is evident in his writing and his ministry.

Paul’s education shaped his missional vision. In Romans 1:14, Paul declared, “For I have a great sense of obligation to people in our culture and to people in other cultures, to the educated and uneducated alike.” (NLT)

In Acts 19:8-10 we see the impact Paul had when he taught in a secular setting on a regular basis.

Paul entered the synagogue and spoke boldly there for three months, arguing persuasively about the kingdom of God. But some of them became obstinate; they refused to believe and publicly maligned the Way. So Paul left them. He took the disciples with him and had discussions daily in the lecture hall of Tyrannus. This went on for two years, so that all the Jews and Greeks who lived in the province of Asia heard the word of the Lord. (NIV)

Ephesus was a major center of influence, thought, commerce, and the worship of the goddess Diana. Tyrannus was probably a converted teacher of rhetoric or philosophy. The Greek word

⁸ James Orr, *The Christian View of God and the World*, Kindle ed. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1908), Kindle locations 413-424.

⁹ Robert W. Jenson, *Essays in Theology of Culture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 168.

that is translated “lecture hall” here is σχολή which is the root for our word “scholar” and “school.”¹⁰

Evidently, Tyrannus’s hall was a building where teachers and students met for study and discussion. It was common for traveling teachers to lecture at such halls. It wasn’t an exact equivalent of

today’s university classroom, but it was a center for learning, for exploring new ideas. It would be fair to say it was like an embryonic college setting.



The basic point is Paul took his teaching to a place where people regularly gathered to *learn*. Certainly their motive for being there at the learning hall was not to hear a sermon, but to learn.¹¹

One of the early copyists wrote a note in the margin of one of the early manuscripts of Acts (it’s called a “gloss” and appears in the Western text) that Paul taught (or more precisely in the Greek, διαλεγόμενος “dialogued”) from about 11 am to 4 pm, 5 hours a day, during the long lunch hour and afternoon siesta many people took.¹²

Paul taught here for more than two years, probably from the autumn of 52 to the summer of 55.¹³ The amazing result was that everyone in Asia heard “the word of the Lord.” Did everyone in Asia attend Paul’s lectures? No, of course not, but those who were taught, in turn taught others, in a multiplication impact which spread across what is modern-day Turkey.

Benefits Paul Found Teaching in the Academy

¹⁰ “A building where teachers and students met for study and discussion—‘lecture hall, school.’” Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996), 82.

¹¹ One commentator stated that the “hall of Tyrannus was a perfectly suited, natural place to reach the inquiring Greeks who would be interested in a new philosophy. But Paul gave them more than a new set of ideas.” I copied this quotation years ago but unfortunately have lost the reference.

¹² “Paul, after spending the early hours of the day at his tent-making (cf. Ch 20:34), devoted the hours of burden and heat to his more important and more exhausting business, and must have infected his hearers with his own energy and zeal, so that they were willing to sacrifice their siesta for the sake of listening to Paul.” F. F. Bruce, *The Book of the Acts, New International Commentary on the New Testament*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980, 388-389.

¹³ “But according to Acts 20:31, he was there for three years. Since it was customary to count part of a unit of time as a whole, his ministry was actually between two and three years.” Stanley D. Toussaint, “Acts,” in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 2 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 410.

After the squabble at the synagogue, Paul found several benefits teaching in the academy, advantages which modern followers of Jesus may also find in educational institutions.

More Receptive Audience. He found a more receptive audience in the neutral setting of the academy than he found in the synagogue. Similarly, today Christian academicians may find students in a secular institution are sometimes more eager to hear the message than some congregations which are calloused to the Word of God.

In my work with the European Academic Network, I frequently lecture at universities about the Bible and other topics related to Christianity. A while back I was giving a lecture entitled, “Murder, Mystery, and Sex—Understanding the World’s Best-selling Work of Classic Literature” at Karazin

University at Kharkiv, Ukraine, just a few kilometers from the Russian border. My purpose in this presentation was to motivate students and professors to read the Bible and consider its truth. On that hot September afternoon, it was stuffy in the crowded lecture hall. Most of the students were very attentive, but several in the back section were restless, whispering back and forth to each other.



The final part of my talk was simply reading what I call “Famous Words,” key passages from the Bible. And when I began reading the Word, a hush settled over that lecture hall, even in the back. Stillness reigned as students listened eagerly, intently, earnestly. God’s Word was being spoken and they were listening. I’ve been blessed to speak in many churches, but I’ve not experienced that level of intensity in most churches. And I had that opportunity because I am an academic.

More opportunities to communicate. Paul was able to communicate more often. Paul could preach primarily on the Sabbath day at the synagogue. But at Tyrannus’s school he could communicate God’s Word every day. At most churches you may have one to five hours of preaching/teaching time each week. But in the university or seminary, you may have many more hours to communicate with students, both in the classroom and outside of class as well.

For several years we lived in Lithuania and my wife Teri (**below, center of first row**) was a professor of philology at Lithuania University of Education. During the years we lived in Vilnius, she was teaching more than full-time and taught 120 or more students for many hours—10-15 hours each week, plus additional hours with students outside of class. That’s certainly more face-to-face time than would be possible in almost any church.



Broader audience. Only Jews and proselytes could hear Paul in the synagogue. Now he was in open marketplace of ideas. “*All the Jews and Greeks*” could hear him. In universities and many seminaries, you have the possibility of influencing the broad sweep of society.

Greater impact. “*All... in the province of Asia.*” Paul’s impact from the hall of Tyrannus and his other ministries was so explosive that the business community eventually rioted because of him. In universities and seminaries, you will be teaching the leaders of the next generation. You may often create conflict, as Paul did, but you will definitely be impacting lives. The ripple effect of teaching in higher education is imperceptible at first glance, but difficult to overestimate, as those who are taught, in turn teach and influence others.

Daniel is a sterling example of a godly scholar in the Old Testament, who had the highest level of education at the top university in the world. He was a public servant with long-term impact in academe and beyond. Daniel 2:48 tells us that Nebuchadnezzar “placed Daniel in charge of all [the] wise men.” The Bible commentator Matthew Henry explains he became “chancellor of the university.”¹⁴

What do we know about Daniel’s character and academic ability?

- He had “aptitude for every kind of learning.” (Daniel 1:4)
- He was “well informed.” (Daniel 1:4)
- He was “quick to understand.” (Daniel 1:4)
- He had excellent linguistic skills, because he learned “the language and literature of the Babylonians.” (Daniel 1:5)
- He had “knowledge and understanding of all kinds of literature and learning.” (Daniel 1:17) One commentator observes that the “educational program probably included a

¹⁴ Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry’s Commentary on the Whole Bible: Complete and Unabridged in One Volume* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1994), 1433.

study of agriculture, architecture, astrology, astronomy, law, mathematics, and the difficult Akkadian language.”¹⁵

- When the king examined Daniel and his three companions, he found that they were ten times better than all the others. They excelled as scholars and as men of wisdom and understanding (1:20). In other words Daniel and his buddies were very intelligent and highly educated with the best academic credentials of their day.¹⁶
- And of course, we know he was courageous when he refused to stop praying at the king’s command.

All these qualities made for an outstanding academician and “university” administrator. Dean Trulear, professor at Howard University, has speculated that evidently Daniel overhauled the curriculum of the university to reflect a theistic, God-centered worldview. Trulear makes a convincing case that Daniel was so effective as an academic reformer that we see his legacy 603 years later when scholars—wise men—from Daniel’s university show up in Jerusalem seeking the new-born Savior that apparently Daniel’s worldview curriculum had foretold. As Trulear says, “They had the time and the region right, they just needed a little help on directions.”¹⁷

Lives are Transformed in the Classroom

Another reason Christians are needed in higher education is simply because lives are transformed in the classroom. Observing a university or seminary classroom can be deceiving. A prof is lecturing and students are listening (some of them). The quiet, mundane, unassuming atmosphere of the classroom lacks the excitement of an evangelistic crusade, the warmth of a gathering of friends for a Bible study, the rapid results of a sidewalk witnessing blitz, or the thrill of emotion of a Christian concert. But don’t be fooled. Lives are being changed in that classroom. For better or worse, the university works.

Several years ago, it occurred to me that we could sum up the importance of higher education like this:

To change a nation, teach the leaders.

To teach the leaders, go to the universities and seminaries.

The classroom is one of the most critical change-points in the world. The 3,000 sq. cm. space behind the lectern in a university or seminary classroom is one of the most strategic locations in all the world for impacting cultures and shaping lives. In no other place can you be so sure you are influencing future leaders—leaders in the home, government, business, culture, military, journalism, entertainment, law, and the church.

¹⁵ J. Dwight Pentecost, “Daniel,” in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 1 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 1330.

¹⁶ I highly recommend an excellent study of Daniel written by an outstanding Christian academician is John Lennox, *Against the Flow: The Inspiration of Daniel in an Age of Relativism*. Oxford: Monarch Books, 2015.

¹⁷ Dean Trulear, “The Handwriting on the Wall,” IICS Vision Conference, Kansas City, Missouri, July 16, 1999.

Christians are needed in higher education if for no other reason than that the gatekeepers of a culture are trained in the university and the seminary. Several years ago Teri did some research on the educational background of world leaders through a study of the *World Leaders Almanac*. She found that more than 90% of all world leaders are trained in institutions of higher education. Throughout history most leaders were in their position because of a dynasty or military power. But today a higher percentage of world leaders than ever before are graduates of tertiary institutions.

Charles Malik (1906-1987) was an Eastern Orthodox believer and a professor at the American University in Beirut, Lebanon. (He taught alongside Robert Young, who years later became my good friend and colleague.) After teaching at the university, Malik represented Lebanon as a diplomat and eventually was appointed president of the United Nations Security Council and General Assembly where he helped write the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Years later, at the dedication of the Billy Graham Center at Wheaton College, Malik declared, “The university is a clear-cut fulcrum with which to move the world. Change the university and you change the world.”¹⁸

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Charles Malik

Education changes the world for better or for worse. The words of Viktor Frankl are haunting, “I am absolutely convinced that the gas chambers of Auschwitz, Treblinka, and Maidanek were ultimately prepared not in some ministry or other in Berlin, but rather at the desks and in lecture halls of nihilistic scientists and philosophers.”¹⁹

“I am absolutely convinced that the gas chambers of Auschwitz, Treblinka, and Maidanek were ultimately prepared not in some ministry or other in Berlin, but rather at the desks and in lecture halls of nihilistic scientists and philosophers.” Victor Frankl

Historically, universities have been centers of change--for good and for ill. Why? Because leaders are trained there. Great revivals and reformation movements have sprung from the university--Hus, Wycliffe, Luther, Wesley—all found their beginnings in academe.

But sadly, tyrannical revolutions have also been spawned in the academy. Marxists, fascists,

¹⁸ Charles Malik, *A Christian Critique of the University*, Pascal Lectures on Christianity and the University (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1982), 100-101.

¹⁹ Viktor E. Frankl, *The Doctor and the Soul; an Introduction to Logotherapy*, 1st ed. (New York,: Knopf, 1955), xxi.

and cults have long sought to capture the hearts and minds of students. In October 1993 I was lecturing for the Philosophy Faculty at Peking University in Beijing on the role of Christianity in the founding of Western universities.



Afterwards, they presented me with an impressive full-color book on the history of the university. The book boasts that throughout the twentieth century, Peking University was a center for the Communist revolution in China and served as “the earliest base for the dissemination of Marxism in China.”

Sociologist Brigitte Berger (wife of Peter Berger) wrote, “The fate of the modern university and the fate of Western civilization are inextricably intertwined.” After a devastating critique of multiculturalism and the erroneous demands of politically correct thinking in higher education, she concludes, “Rather than witnessing the ‘end of history’ as Francis Fukuyama argued a few years ago, today we must face up to the prospect of the end of a civilization.”²⁰

Historian Gertrude Himmelfarb, said, “...there is an intimate, pervasive relationship between what happens in our schools and universities, in the intellectual and artistic communities, and what happens in society and the polity.”²¹

Many years ago as several of my colleagues were discussing the history and crucial role of universities, my friend Steve Aceto, summarized it succinctly, “Reformation or revolution. What Christians do in the university can make a difference in which way the university goes.”

Charles Malik (**right**) expressed it like this,

"Christ being the light of the world, His light must be brought to bear on the problem of the formation of the mind....The problem is not only to win souls but to save minds. If you win the whole world and lose the mind of the world, you will soon discover you have not won the world. Indeed it may turn out that you have actually lost the world.....Responsible Christians face two tasks--that of saving the soul and that of saving the mind."²²



²⁰ Brigitte Berger, “Multiculturalism and the Modern University,” from ‘The Politics of Political Correctness: A Symposium,’ in *Partisan Review*, (Howard Gotlieb Archival Research Center) Vol 60, No. 4 (fall, 1993) p. 519, 526. <http://archives.bu.edu/collections/partisan-review/search/detail?id=331578>. Accessed August 1, 2020.

²¹ Gertrude Himmelfarb, *On Looking into the Abyss: Untimely Thoughts on Culture and Society*, Kindle ed. (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), Kindle location 94.

²² Charles Malik, *The Two Tasks* (Westchester, Illinois: Cornerstone Books, 1980), 31-32, 34.

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Charles Malik

Ironically, false ideologies and religions seem to understand the strategic influence of the university often better than we do as evangelicals. For instance, Muslims are investing billions of Euros in Islamic study centers around the world.

The values being taught to students today...will shape our world tomorrow. This principle

has been true for a long time. A while back I was lecturing in Lviv, Ukraine. After the lecture, my hosts, Marcion and Mikhail showed me the beautiful, historic Old Town of Lviv. Mikhail told me the story of the Jesuit university of Lviv (**right**) in the town center. He explained that when the Reformation swept across what is now western Ukraine,



thousands of people became Protestants. As part of the Roman Catholic's counter-Reformation efforts, the Jesuits established this university in Lviv. Protestant parents wanted their children to have a good European education, so they sent their children there. A few years later, when these children graduated, most no longer were Protestants but Catholics. Education works.

A few blocks from the apartment where Teri and I lived in Vilnius, Lithuania, was the historic and prestigious Vilnius University (**right**). It also was founded by the Jesuits as part of the Counter-Reformation. Although much of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania had converted to Protestantism during the Reformation, the Jesuits slowly chiseled away, especially



through education, and today Lithuania is a majority-Catholic country and less than one percent evangelical.

Charles Malik said,

...once a Christian...realizes that Jesus Christ will find Himself less at home on the campuses of the great universities, in Europe and America, than almost anywhere else, he will be profoundly disturbed, and he will inquire what can be done to recapture the great universities for Jesus Christ, the universities which would not have come into being in the first place without Him.²³

Malik issues this challenge: “Save the university and you save Western civilization and therewith the world.”²⁴ This is why we need Christian in higher education now, more than ever before.

*If we want human life to be shaped by Jesus Christ,
then we must engage higher education.*

Someone has said that the university is the church of the secular society. Why? Because the university establishes the ethics, the priorities, and the values of a culture. It defines truth. It defines success and the good life. But tragically, universities are some of the spiritually darkest square footage in the world, the place most clearly hostile to the Gospel. So, if we are serious about reaching our world with the Gospel and if we are serious about touching the leaders of our world with the Good News, then it is essential that we nurture, equip, and support Christians who have entrée and influence in universities and seminaries.

Ideas Have Consequences

Christians are needed in higher education because ideas have consequences. Some Christians view education and ideas as having no importance. They say, “All that matters is saving souls.” When I hear this objection I think of Amy Carmichael (1867-1951), the famous Irish missionary to India. When she was defending her humanitarian work, she protested, “One cannot save and then pitchfork souls into heaven...Souls are more or less securely fastened to bodies.”²⁵

Just so, some evangelicals forget that the souls we are called to save are inextricably attached to minds which are shaped by the ideas they have accepted. They forget that if the mind which is attached to the soul holds an opinion that considers the Gospel to be ridiculous, unbelievable, or not worth considering, then that soul will resist any evangelistic appeal.



²³ Ibid., 26.

²⁴ Ibid., 35.

²⁵ Ruth Tucker, *From Jerusalem to Irian Jaya : A Biographical History of Christian Missions*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2004), 300.

Even if we were to agree that “all that matters is saving souls,” we would for that very reason insist that education is important and that the Church needs Christians in higher education. If we are serious about saving souls, we must be serious about ideas and education at all levels.

Ideas are like a map that determines the direction the world and individuals will go. Nietzsche declared that the world revolves around “new values” and that thoughts and ideas shape life more than events do.²⁶

Higher education is important precisely because souls are important and ideas have consequences for souls and eternal destinies.

Think of the BIG IDEAS which have transformed the course of civilization and changed everyday life for all of us. The entry of sin into the world with the Fall of Adam and Eve started with a simple idea, “Has God really said?” Much later, the idea that life simply evolved by chance without being created by God was birthed as an idea.

- Atheism--“There is no god.” Once accepted, it devastates nations, cultures, and individuals.
- Relativism-- Nietzsche in the late 1800’s declared, “Everything is relative. There are no absolutes.” Now that is the prevalent idea in Western cultures.
- Nihilism—Nothing matters. Nietzsche declared, “Nihilism represents the ultimate logical conclusion of our great values and ideals.”²⁷
- Cultural Marxism—The State has the right to do whatever it chooses with people, regardless of the law, for the sake of social justice.
- Deconstructionism--The reader, not the author, determines the meaning of words on a page.
- Scientism—Science is “the whole truth about reality.... [and] the only way to acquire knowledge.”²⁸

Our world is being transformed through these big ideas. Os Guinness points out, “Atheists may be small in numbers in the world as a whole, and even in much of the West, but in terms of their philosophy, their social location in society, their long-term vision and their strategies and attitudes, they are disproportionately influential.”²⁹ What a reminder of why we need Christians in higher education.

The calling of Christian academicians is to specialize in ideas—analyzing ideas, explaining ideas, warning against bad ideas, and promoting good ideas. Believers who work in other

²⁶ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spake Zarathustra* in *Nietzsche Complete Works Collection*, Darryl Marks, ed., Kindle edition, Houston: Everlasting Flames Publishing, 2010, Kindle location 22265.

²⁷ Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, Kindle location 34389.

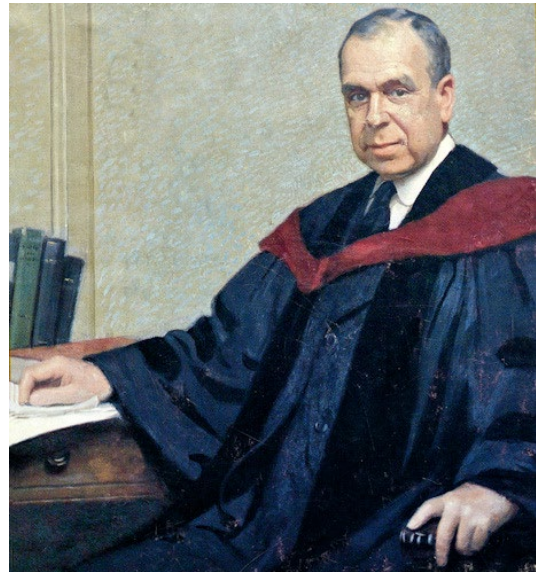
²⁸ Alex Rosenberg, *The Atheist’s Guide to Reality: Enjoying Life without Illusion*, Kindle edition, New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2011, 20.

²⁹ Os Guinness, *Impossible People: Christian Courage and the Struggle for the Soul of Civilization*, Kindle ed. (Downers Grove, Illinois: IVP Books, 2016), Kindle location 2004.

vocations simply do not have the time to examine ideas—to scrutinize them and explicate what these ideas mean and how they might change life and culture. But scholars do.

Today the Church and Western civilization are being shaken to their core by powerfully destructive ideas which have been steadily eroding away the foundation stones of our faith and culture, all while most believers and churches were blissfully unaware. The English novelist George Eliot in *Daniel Deronda* shows how ideas that most people overlook or dismiss can suddenly get our attention. “There comes a terrible moment to many souls when the great movements of the world, the larger destinies of mankind, which have lain aloof in newspapers and other neglected reading, enter like an earthquake into their lives....”³⁰ We are seeing this today in many countries around the world as cultural Marxism is gaining credibility, changing language and the rules of cultures, and even finding acceptance in the Church.

One of my heroes, J. Gresham Machen (1881-1937) **(right)** expresses this threat in more theological terms. On September 20, 1912 he addressed the opening of the 101st session of Princeton Theological Seminary, boldly declaring, “The Christian cannot be satisfied as long as any human activity is either opposed to Christianity or out of all connection with Christianity. Christianity must pervade not merely all nations, but also all of human thought....The Church must seek to conquer not merely every man for Christ, but also the whole of man.”³¹



He went on to declare,

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.³²

What is today 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 impassioned 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.³³

³⁰ George Eliot, *Daniel Deronda* in *The Complete Novels of George Eliot*, Special Nook Edition, Barnes & Noble, 2012, 3979.

³¹ J. Gresham Machen, *Education, Christianity, and the State* (Jefferson, Maryland: The Trinity Foundation, 1987), 50.

³² *Ibid.*, 51.

³³ He went on to insist that we must become “masters of the thought of the world in order to make it an instrument of truth instead of error. The Church has no right to be so absorbed in helping the individual that she forgets the world.” *Ibid.*, 52.

A man can believe only what he believes to be true. But other men hold Christianity to be false...if our position is correct, we ought at least to be able to show the other man that *his* reasons *may* be inconclusive. And that involves careful study of both sides of the question.”³⁴ He goes on to say, “Usually [God] does not bring into the Kingdom, entirely without preparation, those whose mind and fancy are completely dominated by ideas which make the acceptance of the gospel logically impossible.”³⁵

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. J. Gresham Machen

The Spirit of God must draw a person to Christ and God works in the mind *and* heart of that person. It is true that we cannot argue or reason someone to surrender to Christ. But neither can we *love* them to accept Christ. However, that does not mean reason or making a good case (argument) is unnecessary any more than we could say love is unnecessary. Our apologetics can help prepare a person to receive Christ because they come to realize that God is real, and that the plan of salvation is believable, that it is plausible.³⁶

Ideas have consequences and they have amplified consequences when presented to students who as future leaders will mold the thoughts and opinions of a culture. Students are forming their beliefs in the classroom every day. A violent war of ideas, values and truth—*a battle for the soul of society and for the souls of individuals*—is raging in universities and seminaries across Europe.

After the collapse of the Berlin Wall, Croatian Pentecostal theologian Peter Kuzmic (**right**) observed, “In Eastern Europe we’re winning their hearts but losing their minds.” Sadly, this could be said of evangelical efforts in other parts of the world as well. Now many years after the Wall came down, we must ask how the evangelical church is doing in saving both hearts and minds.



Pausing for Reflection and Discussion

1. How might local churches encourage university students and professors and help them stand strong in their faith?
2. What are your two favorite books on apologetics which have helped you understand and defend Christian truth?
3. How can pastors and local churches encourage believers to seek both wisdom and knowledge?
4. Why does Malik say “The university is a clear-cut fulcrum with which to move the world”? Do you agree? Why or why not?

³⁴ Ibid., 50.

³⁵ Ibid., 56.

³⁶ “But because intellectual effort is insufficient it does not follow,...that it is unnecessary....Usually He exerts His power in connection with certain conditions of the human mind.” Ibid.

5. What does it mean in practical terms to, as Malik exhorts us, to save both souls and minds?
6. What do you think can be done to “recapture the...universities for Jesus Christ”?
7. List some of the big ideas which have shaped life in your country and in your university.
8. Why do you think that too often we have won the hearts but lost the minds, as Peter Kuzmic claims?

Christians in Higher Education Can Help the Church Fulfill its Mission

We have seen a number of reasons why it is important for Christians to be engaged in higher education today. But another important reason Christians are needed in higher education is because of all the ways they can help the Church. At the heart of our discussion, we must understand clearly the crucial ways in which Christian academicians can directly help spread the Gospel and help the Church fulfill its mission in the world.

Scholars help believers understand the Bible.

The first way scholars serve the Church is probably the most obvious. Most commentaries on the Bible in modern times have been written by individuals with doctoral degrees or at least, years of advanced education and a depth of knowledge. Pastors and laypeople around the world—including many who otherwise may be suspicious of higher education—benefit greatly from the sanctified scholarship of Bible scholars who spent their lives understanding the subtleties of Greek and Hebrew, along with the depths of theology and philosophy, as they unfold the truths of Holy Scripture.

As we study the inerrant Word of God, it is not always easy or simple to understand how to apply biblical principles in our world today. But serious Christian scholars in every field can specialize in understanding and explaining biblical principles related to their field and how to apply those truths in our world today.

Pausing for Reflection and Discussion

1. List some ways you might be able to help other believers understand the Bible better, especially as it relates to your academic discipline.
2. List two of your favorite Bible commentaries.

Scholars help believers think critically, communicate the Gospel, and defend biblical truth.

Far more serious than the anti-intellectualism we observe in the Church today is the lack of critical thinking. In his book on the modern intellectual crisis, Allan Bloom in *The Closing of the American Mind* observes that for many people “slogans...take the place of reflection.”³⁷ Today as we see whole denominations retreating from their historic affirmations of doctrine, reflection and critical thinking is rare amidst the cacophony of sound bites and sloganeering.

³⁷ Allan David Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind* (New York, NY: Simon and Schuster, 1987), 254.

Bloom castigates America because it “has not merely become ignorant and unthinking, or even anti-intellectual..., but it is becoming incapable of thought.”³⁸

Back in 1963 Harry Blamires began his classic *The Christian Mind* with these simple words, “There is no longer a Christian mind.” He goes on to lament that “unfortunately the Christian mind has succumbed to the secular drift with a degree of weakness and nervelessness unmatched in Christian history.”³⁹ Later in the book he observes that in the culture “generally that as we are rich in scholars so we are poor in thinkers....But the Church cannot do without thinkers....”⁴⁰

Nearly sixty years later the Church has more scholars that it did in 1963 but do we have more thinkers? This is why it is so crucial that committed Christian scholars use their knowledge to help prepare their brothers and sisters to think critically, defend the biblical truth and be skilled in apologetics as they meet objections to our faith in an increasingly depraved and secular culture.⁴¹

C. S. Lewis, an outstanding Christian scholar himself, pointed out that if everyone was a Christian, the church would not need scholars to defend truth. But when enemies of the Gospel use reason and philosophy to oppose Christianity, then we must respond. Here is how Lewis expressed it.



To be ignorant and simple now—not to be able to meet the enemies on their own ground—would be to throw down our weapons, and to betray our uneducated brethren who have, under God, no defence but us against the intellectual attacks of the heathen. Good philosophy must exist, if for no other reason, because bad philosophy needs to be answered....The learned life then is, for some, a duty.⁴²

As a young student at the University of Missouri-Kansas City, my philosophy professor was a missionary—a missionary *against* Christianity. Day after day in my “History of Western Philosophy” course, he made outrageous statements blasting Christianity. Then he would slowly scan the class, challenging, “And is there anyone who disagrees with that?” His eyes would inevitably come to rest on me every time. It was intimidating. He was constantly challenging me to a duel for truth. Most of the time, I knew what he was saying was wrong, but sadly, far too often I simply didn’t know how to respond with the truth.

³⁸ Referred to by Jenson, 164.

³⁹ Harry Blamires, *The Christian Mind : How Should a Christian Think?* (London: SPCK, 1963; repr., First American Edition 1978), 3.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 50.

⁴¹ I have compiled a bibliography which lists a number of excellent books to help develop a Christian worldview in various academic disciplines, “Serving Christ in the Academy--A Partially Annotated Bibliography for Christian Academicians” which is available upon request.

⁴² “Learning in War-Time,” C. S. Lewis, *The Weight of Glory and Other Addresses*, Touchstone Simon & Schuster 1975 ed. (Originally published New York: MacMillan, 1949), 48-49.

The good news is that this professor throwing down the gauntlet spurred me on to more study, to dig into apologetics, and to find answers. I knew that I knew Jesus personally and that Jesus was real and that He was living in my heart. But I also knew there were lots of objections to biblical teaching that I was not prepared to answer satisfactorily. So I studied. I wanted the hard evidence supporting my faith. (That led me to enroll in the philosophy program at the University of Kansas and eventually to study apologetics and philosophy of religion at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School.)

But think about how different it might have been had I been under the influence of a vehemently anti-intellectual pastor who would say, “Now, Daryl, don’t worry about that stupid professor. He doesn’t know what he’s talking about. He’s an atheist. All you need to know is that Jesus lives in your heart and you’re going to heaven. Just believe. Take it by faith. Don’t try to use your mind. Go with your heart.”

Avoiding those hard questions could have easily provided a foothold for Satan to gnaw away at my confidence in Christ and the Word of God, starting with doubts and questions, “What if that professor is right and this is all just make-believe?”

Beyond that, think how it would have stymied my ability to share Christ on university campuses around the world in the 45 years since then. I would have avoided any setting where my faith was not accepted, especially universities. Consequently, Satan would have kept me from communicating the Gospel and the claims on Christ and His Lordship with hundreds of students and professors over these years.

When Amy Orr-Ewing with RZIM spoke at the European Leadership Forum in May 2018, she warned us that “the backdoor of the Church is wide open. Young people are leaving in droves because the questions and doubts they struggle with have never been addressed in church. And in too many cases they were told they were doubting Jesus and told that just because they raised the question, ‘You’re sinning. Therefore, you are backsliding and are a danger to others.’”⁴³

Swallowed questions lead to spiritual indigestion.

When our son and daughter left home to attend Kansas State University, I advised both of them, “Don’t be afraid of any question. You will have professors who will attack Christianity. They will no doubt bring up issues you have not considered. But don’t be afraid of any question. Bring the questions home. We will talk about them. You never have to fear pursuing truth.”

In the 1980’s Josh McDowell and I co-authored an article for a now defunct magazine called *Moody Monthly*. The article was on how to raise children who embrace the faith and can withstand attacks on it. We encouraged parents to listen to their children’s questions and to encourage them to pursue the answers to those who attack Christianity. This is important because “Swallowed questions lead to spiritual indigestion.”⁴⁴ We don’t have to be afraid of attacks on our faith. We can read. We can pray. We can find answers. Education helps us think critically and learn how to make the case for Christ more effectively and more persuasively.

⁴³ Amy Orr-Ewing, European Leadership Forum annual meeting, Wisla, Poland, May 2018.

⁴⁴ Daryl McCarthy and Josh McDowell, “Will Your Children’s Faith Withstand the Showdowns?” *Moody Monthly* July/August 1984, 68-70.

Truth is objective and real and can be known with our minds by the Holy Spirit's help. The Church must be protected against heresy and false teaching. Christian scholars can do this by translating the Gospel into terms which will communicate well in this generation. As the great Scottish missiologist Andrew Walls said, "Deep translation is necessary to deep mission. So periods of active mission need to be periods of active scholarship."⁴⁵

As we face a crisis of the Gospel in Europe and across the Western world, with unbelief growing more rapidly than any other belief system, evangelical scholars are needed now more than ever for this task of deep translation. In every field of knowledge, it is urgent for us to articulate the claims of Christ in our discipline, on our university, on our nation, and on our world.

After 45 years of labor spreading the Gospel in America, Francis Asbury wrote in 1815, "We will not give up the cause—we will not abandon the world to infidels."⁴⁶ Today we dare not "abandon the world to infidels." Christian academicians must engage in this battle.

Today the Church is under attack from liberal theology and from the false social justice gospel. To emerge whole and healthy from these attacks, we need academicians who affirm the full trustworthiness and power of Scripture, the full deity and the full humanity of our risen Christ, the necessity of the new birth and being filled with the Spirit, the imperative of obedience to God and His Word, the reality of God's coming judgement and eternal punishment for the unrepentant, and the hope of the Second Coming of Jesus and eternity of bliss of the redeemed with Him.

What can Christian academicians do?

- **Welcoming questions.** Christian academicians should play a key role in evangelical churches to help provide an atmosphere where young people can ask questions and work through their doubts without being condemned for thinking. We do this by heartily affirming the central tenets of Christian doctrine and at the same time demonstrate our willingness to work through these doctrines and apologetical issues with the seeker and the questioner. We do this by listening and by understanding the question before we begin speaking. We do this by paying attention to individuals and by taking time to listen and discuss these issues. We can do this by leading classes on critical thinking for Christians, how to defend the faith, and how to share the Gospel.
- **Equipping and teaching.** Christian scholars can bolster the confidence of other believers and equip them to respond to attacks from atheists, agnostics, secularists, pantheists, pagans, and other forces arrayed against God and His truth. We can do this by sharing conversations we have had with students or faculty colleagues. We can do this by teaching classes in which we present a Christian perspective and critique on false ideologies and religions. We can do this by recommending books and resources we have found helpful ourselves in responding to attacks on our faith.
- **Developing public intellectuals.** Christian scholars are called to spread the Gospel and battle evil by identifying crucial questions facing the world and the Church, and then respond to these challenges from a Christian worldview. Some may serve as public intellectuals who can articulate a Christian worldview not only in the academy, but with

⁴⁵ Andrew Walls, "Christian Scholarship and the Demographic Transformation of the Church," Rodney Lawrence Petersen and Nancy M. Rourke, *Theological Literacy for the Twenty-First Century* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans Pub., 2002), 171.

⁴⁶ Robert E. Coleman, *Nothing to Do but to Save Souls* (Nappanee, Ind.: Evangel Publishing House, 2006), 18.

the media and in the public marketplace. This may involve writing books and articles, writing letters to the editor for local or national periodicals, public debates, communicating with political and governmental leaders, interacting on social media such as Facebook, Twitter, or through podcasts, blogs, or vlogs. Daniel Hill, philosophy professor at University of Liverpool, recommends doing street evangelism because it gives you a crash course into the real questions real people are asking and they don't care what your academic credentials are.⁴⁷

When Martin Luther was commanded to recant of his writings because they contradicted the teachings of the Roman Catholic Church, how did he respond? He refused to recant based on two things: “Scripture and plain reason.” Reason is important for the believer and for the Church. With the Church and the Gospel under attack from both outside the Church and inside the Church, we need critical thinking—plain reason, alongside an inerrant Scripture.



Pausing for Reflection and Discussion

1. Why is it important that Christians think clearly and critically?
2. What are some of the key issues facing your community, your city, or your nation which need to be addressed from a Christian perspective?
3. What are some ways you can help your fellow-Christians communicate the Gospel more clearly?
4. What are ways you can equip other believers to defend the faith?
5. How can you help your church create an environment where new believers, young people, and others as well feel free to ask questions and develop a deeper understanding of Christian truth?
6. If you were to offer to teach a class for your church, what are some topics you could address?

Scholars help believers develop and live with a Christian worldview.

Abraham Kuyper (1837-1920) declared, “There is not one square inch of the entire creation about which Jesus Christ does not cry out, ‘This is mine!’” His words have become something of a battle cry against sloppy thinking and dualistic worldviews. Christian scholars affirm and declare that Christ is the Lord of everything in the world, including every field of study.

⁴⁷ Daniel Hill, “Serving Christ in Academia,” Cambridge Scholars Network, Moggerhanger, UK, July 9, 2019.

In an essay entitled, “What Academic Difference Would the Gospel Make?” Robert Jenson said, “If the Gospel is true, there can therefore be no human pursuit to which it is irrelevant...”⁴⁸ Our job as Christians in higher education is to explicate why the Gospel is relevant in our discipline.

Mark Noll, in *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind*, gave this insight,

For a Christian, the mind is important because God is important. Who, after all, made the world of nature, and then made possible the development of sciences through which we find out more about nature? Who formed the universe of human interactions, and so provided the raw material of politics, economics, sociology, and history? Who is the source of harmony, form, and narrative pattern, and so lies behind all artistic and literary possibilities? Who created the human mind in such a way that it could grasp the realities of nature, of human interactions, of beauty, and so made possible the theories on such matters by philosophers and psychologists? Who, moment by moment, sustains the natural world, the world of human interactions, and the harmonies of existence? Who, moment by moment, maintains the connections between what is in our minds and what is in the world beyond our minds? The answer in every case is the same. God did it, and God does it.”⁴⁹

*“For a Christian, the mind is important
because God is important.”* Mark Noll

Much of the relentless battle for the souls of men and women goes on in the area of worldviews—how we understand current issues, how we think about life, how we think about science, law, politics, entertainment, work, gender, marriage, economics, business—everything.

Christian academics are in the front line of this battle as they study the attacks of Satan and his followers against truth, righteousness, and the claims of Christ. They are able to not only understand and interpret these attacks, but also to develop biblical responses which can be used by other believers and help them develop a Christian worldview—believers who don’t have the luxury of specializing in apologetics and scholarship.⁵⁰

This is why one of the greatest challenges and opportunities facing Christian academics today is to put their knowledge and research to work helping their fellow-believers understand how true Christianity really is and how to apply a Christian worldview to real-life issues. We need Christian professors in psychology, engineering, philosophy, sociology, law, business, history, political science, journalism—all the disciplines to connect the dots of biblical truth and how we as believers respond today with biblical principles. In short, we need Christian academicians who will be public intellectuals—speaking truth both to the Church as well as to the secular culture.

⁴⁸ Jenson, 77.

⁴⁹ Mark A. Noll, *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind* (Inter-Varsity Press, 1994), 51.

⁵⁰ My list of recommended books “Christian Classics—Great Books for Knowing and Serving God” is available upon request. Many of these books are written by Christian scholars.

One professor put it like this. “We need a generation of scholars devoted to the evangelical mind who are willing to engage in what we might call “outreach” scholarship, or translation scholarship: taking up their scholarly work in a diaconal mode and putting their gifts and energies at the service of the wider Christian community that we might by all means save some (per 1 Cor 9:22).”⁵¹

This will inevitably involve a sacrifice, because no one can do everything. Consequently, some academicians may sacrifice some level of academic advancement because they will be unable to publish as many papers for peer reviewed journals, in order to translate the insights from their specialty into material for equipping believers.

Sadly, many times believers sink into a sacred/secular dichotomy with a limited and provincial view of Christ’s Lordship and see Him as Lord primarily of the spiritual world. Often churches give the impression that God is mostly concerned about saving souls and about praying, reading the Bible, and going to church, but not much concerned about life beyond those “spiritual” activities.

But this narrow focus on a so-called spirituality is unbiblical. The Bible contradicts this reductionistic theology by declaring that Christ’s lordship applies to all of living and learning.

Christian scholars are uniquely qualified to declare and clarify Christ’s lordship over everything, particularly over education, the life of the mind, and their field of study.

One historian described Christianity as “privately engaging, publicly irrelevant.”⁵² Sadly that could be said of many Christian academicians as well. But Robert Wuthnow from Princeton reminds us, “Christianity sacralizes—makes sacred—the intellectual life. It gives the questions we struggle with in our work and in our lives a larger significance.”⁵³

This is precisely why an important part of the Church’s mission is to equip and deploy believers into every sector of society where they can both demonstrate and articulate the lordship of Christ in all facets of life. **Christian scholars are uniquely qualified to declare and clarify Christ’s lordship over everything, and particularly over education, the life of the mind, and their field of study.** This is why we need to encourage and support Christian scholars in the academy. As one academic expressed it, “May our intellectual labors be catalysts and conduits for the renewal and reform of the church.”⁵⁴

Pausing for Reflection and Discussion

1. What do you think Noll means when he says, “For a Christian, the mind is important

⁵¹ Todd C. Ream, Pattengale, Jerry, Devers, Christopher J., *The State of the Evangelical Mind: Reflections on the Past, Prospects for the Future*, Kindle ed. (Downers Grove, Illinois: IVP Academic, 2018), 151.

⁵² Guinness, *Impossible People: Christian Courage and the Struggle for the Soul of Civilization*, Kindle location 967.

⁵³ Robert Wuthnow, “Living the Question,” in *Christianity in the Twenty-First Century: Reflections on the Challenges Ahead* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 212 quoted by George M. Marsden, *The Outrageous Idea of Christian Scholarship* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 65.

⁵⁴ Ream, 160.

because God is important.”?

2. Identify what you believe are the core doctrines of your faith and explain them in simple, understandable terms that would be accessible to people from any educational background.
3. What are things you could do to help people in your church develop a Christ-centered worldview?
4. How would you describe a Christian worldview regarding your academic discipline?
5. In what sense are many churches and Christians privately engaging but publicly irrelevant?

Scholars are better able to reach the world of education with the Gospel than other believers.

Jesus commanded each one of us to be salt and light, permeating the world around us with the Gospel. Naturally, this includes followers of Jesus in the world of education. Today God is calling evangelicals who serve in higher education to embrace the Great Commission to make disciples. No one is exempt from this calling and certainly not academicians.

In fact, there are several reasons why academicians should be the most effective in reaching their colleagues and students with the Gospel.

- **Academics can hear the Gospel best** from fellow professors whom they respect and who have earned the right to be heard who are Christians. As Donald McGavran demonstrated with the homogeneous unit principle, people tend to become Christians more readily when they can do so as a part of their own cultural group.⁵⁵
- **Students** are more likely to consider the claims of the Gospel because of the influence and status of a Christian professor. Many students view Christians as "stupid" and "unlearned." But when a student meets a well-educated, articulate professor who follows Christ (and especially if they give evidence of loving God and loving people), they are more likely to become receptive and open to the Gospel.
- Christian professors can encourage **Christian students** to be faithful to Christ in the university. Just as vocal atheistic professors have destroyed the faith of many students, so the mere presence of a Christian professor has inspired many young students to *not* abandon their faith. A Christian student may well respond, “All my other professors are attacking my faith and I don’t know how to respond most of the time. But if that professor believes the Bible and follows Jesus even with all their degrees and all their learning and experience, then maybe it is possible to be born again *and* be well educated. Maybe stupidity is not a requirement for being a Christian.”

At the dedication of the Billy Graham Center, Charles Malik declared, “For the sake of greater effectiveness in witnessing to Jesus Christ Himself, as well as for their own sakes, the Evangelicals cannot afford to keep living on the periphery of responsible intellectual existence.” He went on to say,

Wake up, my friends, wake up: the great universities control the mind of the world. Therefore how can evangelism consider its task accomplished if it leaves the university unevangelized? And how can evangelism evangelize the university if it cannot speak to the university? And how can it speak to the university if it is not itself already

⁵⁵ “Men like to become Christians without crossing racial, linguistic, or class barriers.” Donald A. McGavran, *Understanding Church Growth*. Rev. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980, 223.

intellectualized? Therefore evangelism must first intellectualize itself to be able to evangelize the university and therefore to save the world.⁵⁶

Christian academicians need to seek ways in which they can influence the big ideas in their discipline with principles from a Christian worldview. We must ask, “How does the lordship of Christ impact my field of study?”

The objective of Christian academicians is not only to make the Gospel attractive through the winsomeness of their service and the excellence of their work. As important as that is, we have three other major objectives: first, to seek opportunities to present the Gospel clearly and effectively; secondly, to deliberately undermine the secular underpinnings of our discipline by asking questions which show the fallacies of the secular perspective; and thirdly, to demonstrate how embracing a Christian worldview brings clarity to issues and cohesion to the discipline.

Pausing for Reflection and Discussion

1. In what ways does being a follower of Jesus make you a better academician?
2. What are some possible ways you might be able to influence students and faculty colleagues with Christian truth?
3. “Are there any accepted assumptions in your discipline which a Christian worldview can provide a stronger basis for, and explain more adequately?”
4. Are there any recognized paradoxes or problems in your discipline which a Christian perspective can uniquely help to address?
5. Are there any possible fruitful or new areas of research which are under-appreciated by the secular mind, but which a Christian worldview is serving to promote?
6. How have Christians contributed to the history of your discipline or faculty in a way which a secular account might overlook?
7. What light does the person of Christ himself shed on the discipline?”⁵⁷

Throughout History, God Has Used Scholars to Play a Key Role in His Work

Scholars have played a crucial role in the expansion of global Christian movement and in God’s work over the centuries. Although anti-intellectualism has attached itself to the Church from time to time, it is definitely not a part of biblical teaching nor is it the legacy of evangelical faith. Rather, it is an aberration that appears occasionally. The famous Christian educator Bruce Lockerbie was fond of saying, “Wherever the Gospel is planted, the academy follows.”⁵⁸

Here are a few brief examples of scholars who have been used by God through the history of the Church. (For more on this topic, see my paper, “Education and the Gospel—How Scholars Have Spread the Gospel and Built the Church.” Available upon request.)

⁵⁶ Malik, *The Two Tasks*, 34.

⁵⁷ Questions 3-7 are from Meredith Thompson, “Pointing to Christ Through Your Discipline,” *Faith-in-Scholarship* May 13, 2019. <https://us11.campaign-archive.com/?e=18fc22d31c&u=5f126150d548acb4a3034f0bc&id=3d2e55e2ce>. I encourage you to sign up for these blogs.

⁵⁸ Green, 11-12.

Irish monks. One of the most fascinating examples of academicians communicating the Gospel cross-culturally were the Irish monks who in successive waves, from the sixth to the ninth century, left their homeland to teach and preach throughout Scotland, England, Wales, and across the Continent, going as far south as Italy and as far east as Kyiv. They established monasteries with schools and libraries which became centers for spiritual and intellectual development and provided the prototype for the early universities. These Irish monks were able to evangelize a continent and change the course of history because of the combination of their global vision, their full-orbed Christian worldview, their breadth of learning, and their passion for Christ and for the lost.⁵⁹

Nestorians. The Nestorians took Christianity to China in the eighth century. Andrew Walls points out that when the Nestorians first reached China in the eighth century, “The Chinese emperor of the day was himself a scholar, who spent half of each day in study. His first concern was to see what books the Christians had brought with them, and to get them translated, and to review them himself. It was on this basis that Christianity was permitted to spread in his empire.”⁶⁰ This required scholarship with a Christian worldview at its core. The Nestorians spread the Gospel all along the Silk Route from the Middle East to the Far East.⁶¹

Reformers. If you want proof of the importance of scholars in helping the Church understand the Bible, then look no further than Martin Luther, the Bible professor.⁶² His fresh interpretation of the Bible sparked the Protestant Reformation which saved the Church and changed the world. Luther was a scholar who aimed to honor God through his scholarship and he did so beyond his wildest imagination. Gerhard Ebeling asserts: “It is no exaggeration to say that never in the history of the university has the work of a scholar, in the study and in the lecture-room, had so direct and so extensive an influence upon the world, and changed it so much.”⁶³

The Reformation was born in the university and many of the leaders were university professors and scholars. In turn, the Reformation sparked a global transformation in education. So it is doubly ironic for Protestants to be anti-intellectual, since Protestantism was birthed by scholars, spread by scholars, and sparked an expansion of education around the world which continues to this day.

⁵⁹ I have written more extensively on the Irish monks as a model of missional academics in “Hearts and Minds Aflame for Christ: Irish Monks—A Model for Academic Missions.” Available upon request.

⁶⁰ Walls in Petersen and Rourke, 168-169.

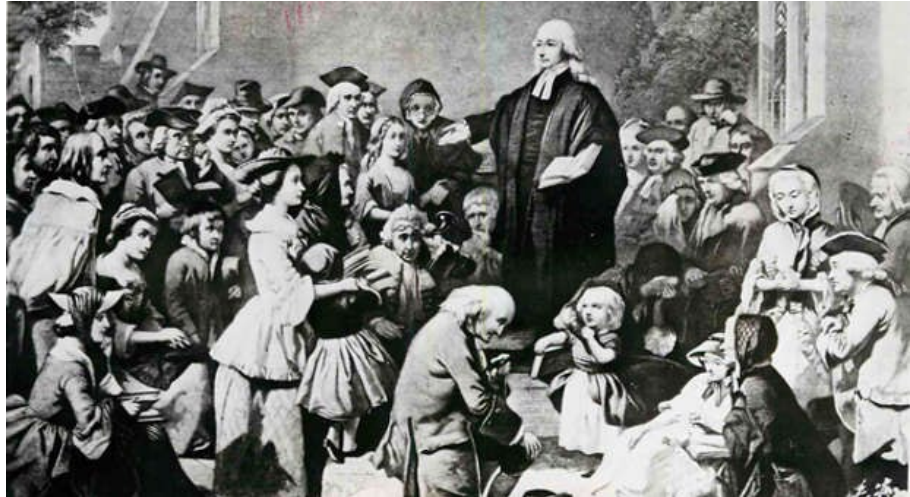
⁶¹ A fascinating book on the Nestorian missionaries is Philip Jenkins, *The Lost History of Christianity : The Thousand-Year Golden Age of the Church in the Middle East, Africa, and Asia- and How It Died*, 1st ed. (New York: HarperOne, 2008).

⁶² For more on the Reformation’s impact on education, see my paper, “Scholarship and the Reformation: Sparking a Global Transformation of Education.” Available upon request.

⁶³ Quoted by Marilyn J. Harran, *Luther and Learning : The Wittenberg University Luther Symposium* (Selinsgrove, New Jersey, and London: Susquehanna University Press; Associated University Presses, 1985), 15.

John and Charles Wesley.

The Wesley's were both educated at Oxford. One of the hallmarks of John Wesley's leadership was his insistence that education was a priority.⁶⁴ He preached often on education⁶⁵ and was a tireless advocate of education at every level. "I do not depreciate learning of any kind."⁶⁶ For Wesley learning was "highly expedient for a guide of souls."⁶⁷ He insisted, "It cannot be that the people should grow in grace, unless they give themselves to reading. A reading people will always be a knowing people."⁶⁸



He especially demanded that ministers be well-educated. He insisted that at least all ministers should be able to at least read and understand Greek, Hebrew and Latin. They should have extensive knowledge of the following fields: Scripture, the Early Church Fathers, apologetics, comparative religions, history, geography, the sciences, metaphysics, philosophy, geometry, and mathematics.⁶⁹

One of Charles Wesley's hymns speaks of the uniting of "knowledge and vital piety" and "learning and holiness," and "truth and love."⁷⁰ John Wesley served as the premier Christian public intellectual of his day.⁷¹ Certainly no anti-intellectualism was permitted with the Wesley's.

We seek to unite "knowledge and vital piety," "learning and holiness," and "truth and love." Charles Wesley

⁶⁴ I have written more extensively about John Wesley's worldview, including his work in education, "John Wesley's Reformational Worldview." Available upon request.

⁶⁵ Here are just a few examples: John Wesley, *The Works of John Wesley*, ed. Thomas Jackson, Third ed. (London: Wesleyan Methodist Book Room, 1872; repr., Logos Bible Software), 3:270, on November 230, 1766, he writes in his journal that he preached on the education of children; 1713:1474ff ("A Thought on the Manner of Educating Children") 1767:1786 (Sermon, "On the Education of Children").

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 8:219 (Article, "A Farther Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion, Part III").

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 14:353 (Letter, to Rev. Dr. Rutherford).

⁶⁸ L. Tyerman, *The Life and Times of the Rev. John Wesley*, vol. 3 (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1871), 632. I was led to this statement by David Wright's excellent book *How God Makes the World a Better Place: A Wesleyan Primer on Faith, Work, and Economic Transformation*, Kindle ed. (Christian's Library Press, 2012).

⁶⁹ Wesley, 10:491-492 (Article, "An Address to the Clergy").

⁷⁰ John Wesley and Charles Wesley, *The Poetical Works of John and Charles Wesley*, ed. G. Osborn, vol. 6 (London: Wesleyan-Methodist Conference Office, 1870), 407-408.

⁷¹ For more on this, see my paper, "Recovering Insight, Courage, and Justice in a Divided World: John Wesley as a Public Intellectual." Available upon request.

Early American Christianity. The Puritans who are today the laughing-stock of liberals, played an important role in the founding of America and were decidedly pro-intellectual. They not only founded Harvard as a Christian university less than ten years after carving out their little outpost in the New World, they were tireless advocates for the life of the mind. Cotton Mather said, “Ignorance is the Mother not of Devotion but of HERESY.”⁷² Pastor-scholars like Jonathan Edwards provided intellectual, political, and spiritual direction for the early American communities.

Modern scholars. The Christian movement has been blessed in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries with a long list of Christian scholars. I heartily agree with Mark Noll when he said, “...if what we claim about Jesus Christ is true, then evangelicals should be among the most active, most serious, and most openminded advocates of general human learning. Evangelical hesitation about scholarship in general or about pursuing learning wholeheartedly is, in other words, antithetical to the Christ-centered basis of evangelical faith.”⁷³ The purpose of the European Leadership Forum Academic Network is to encourage, united, equip, and resource Christians in higher education.

Conclusion: We Need Scholars Who Are Called by God to Serve Him in the Academy

As we draw to a close, let’s ask two important questions that every Christian serving God in higher education needs to answer.

Is our work in the academy significant?

Yes, because...

- Lives are transformed in the classroom.
- Ideas have consequences.

Is our work in the academy ministry? Is scholarship a valid way to serve God?

Yes, because...

- God created the mind and has commanded us to seek both wisdom *and* knowledge.
- In the Bible we have precedent for engaging with the academy.
- Academicians help the Church fulfill its purpose.
- We help fellow believers better understand the Bible.
- We equip believers to think clearly, communicate the Gospel, and defend biblical truth, so we can help protect the Church protect against heresy and false teaching.
- We help believers develop and live a biblically-grounded, Christ-centered worldview.
- We are often better able to reach fellow educators and students with the Gospel and Christian truth than most other believers could.
- Throughout history, God has used scholars to play a key role in His work.

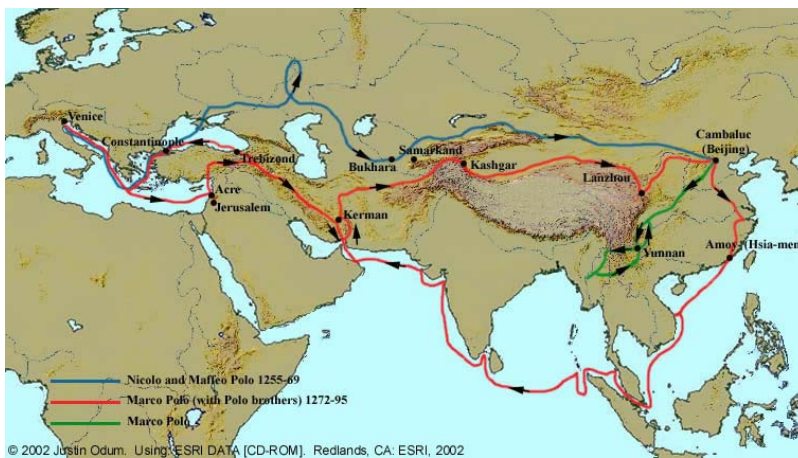
⁷² Quoted by Moreland, 22.

⁷³ Mark A. Noll, *Jesus Christ and the Life of the Mind* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans Pub., 2011), x.

As Christian academicians, we must reaffirm our calling to serve God in higher education.

Let me close by telling you a story. In 1265 Marco Polo's father and uncle made their first visit to the court of the Kublai Khan, the great emperor of China and the Mongol Empire.⁷⁴ During his reign the Mongol empire eventually included all of China, all of Central Asia and the Middle East, and huge sections of present-day Russia and Ukraine with its western border stretching well past Kyiv.⁷⁵

The emperor was fascinated with the Polo's stories "about their native land and about Christianity." He asked them to bring back one hundred "wise men" (we would call them Christian scholars) to teach Christianity to him and his entire empire. He announced that if these one hundred wise men convinced him that Christianity was true, then he and all of China would convert to Christianity.⁷⁶



So the Polo's made the long journey west over the Silk Route and returned to Europe in 1269. They presented the request of the Khan to the Church and tried to recruit the one hundred Christian scholars to go back with them to China.

But their recruiting efforts to find "academic missionaries" were spectacularly unsuccessful. They only found two Dominican monks, Friar Nicholas and Friar William, both of whom were well-educated in the liberal arts, science, and theology. Marco says they were "learned men as well as profound theologians."⁷⁷

In 1271 the Polos, along with young Marco who was now old enough to travel, departed for China with the two monks in tow. But only one day into their journey, news of a military conflict along their route reached the Polo party. Marco Polo wrote diplomatically, "The missionary zeal of the two friars evaporated.... Terrified at these accounts, and apprehensive for their lives, the two friars determined not to proceed further."⁷⁸



⁷⁴ "At its peak, it [the Mongol Empire] covered some 9 million square miles (23 million square km) of territory, making it the largest contiguous land empire in world history." "Mongol Empire," *Encyclopedia Britannica* March 21, 2020. <https://www.britannica.com/place/Mongol-empire>. Accessed July 29, 2020.

⁷⁵ John Man, *Kublai Khan—From Xanadu to Superpower*, London: Bantam Books, 2006, 348.

⁷⁶ Marco Polo and Milton Rugoff, *The Travels of Marco Polo*, Kindle ed. (New York: Signet Classics, 2004), Kindle location 579.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, Kindle location 611.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, Kindle location 622.

They turned back—back to safety, back to home, back to the comfortable, back to what they knew.

Finally, in 1275, after their long and dangerous journey east on the Silk Route, the Polos reached the Kublai Khan in Beijing. They abjectly apologized for their failure to find not one hundred Christian scholars, not fifty Christian scholars, not ten Christian scholars, but *not one single Christian scholar*.

Consider the tragedy of this scene, that out of all the hundreds of Christian scholars throughout Europe at that time, not one was willing to take the risk and represent Christian truth in a place that was asking for it. Not one!

An even greater tragedy is that it was more than a hundred years before any missionaries brought the Good News of the risen Lord to China and the Mongol Empire which was at that time the most populated nation in the world with a population of over 100 million people. Consider the generations of individuals during that century without the Gospel—individuals who were born, who lived, and who died without ever having the opportunity to hear that a Savior had come who had died to pay the penalty for their sins and to give hope and salvation.

How might the world be different today had Christian academicians in 1271 responded to the call to use their knowledge in a strategic manner for expanding the Kingdom of God?

But now today—in the twenty-first century—it is in this generation that you and I are summoned by the King of Kings—the All-wise and Omniscient God who is the Creator of all knowledge. We are summoned to faithfully serve Him in higher education—a most strategic and crucial institution. By His grace, let us be faithful to our magnificent, all-wise, all-knowing God.

Yes, definitely yes, we need Christians in higher education! We are in the midst of a mighty battle for the hearts, minds, and souls of men and women, boys and girls, in every nation, among every language and ethnic group around the world. And the intellect and ideas are at the center of this battlefield. This is why the Church must be a place which encourages and equips Christians in higher education, and in turn, welcomes the services of these academics as they serve the Church by equipping their fellow-believers.

Christian scholars are needed today more than ever to:

- *Articulate the faith*
- *Defend Christian truth*
- *Proclaim the Gospel*
- *Interpret the culture*
- *Equip believers, and*
- *Strengthen the Church.*

Let us be faithful in our calling as we serve Christ in the academy.

Recommended Reading on Why Christians are Needed in Higher Education

Guinness, Os. *Fit Bodies, Fat Minds: Why Evangelicals Don't Think and What to Do About It*. Grand Rapids: Hourglass Books, 1994. This book provides a clear diagnosis and biblical plan for responding to the anti-intellectualism of many Christians.

Malik, Charles. *The Two Tasks*. Westchester, Illinois: Crossways Books, 1980. A classic and brief address on the two central tasks of the Christian—saving the soul and saving the mind.

Moreland, J. P. *Love Your God with All Your Mind: The Role of Reason in the Life of the Soul*. 2nd ed. Colorado Springs, Colorado: NavPress, 2012.

Noll, Mark A. *Jesus Christ and the Life of the Mind*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011. 180 pp. Excellent introduction to the importance of scholarship for the Christian life and insights into how to do our scholarship Christianly.

Stott, John R. W. *Your Mind Matters; the Place of the Mind in the Christian Life*. Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1973. 64 pp. Brief but powerful case on the Christian's use of the mind.

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