

EVANGELICAL REVIEW OF THEOLOGY

VOLUME 20

Volume 20 • Number 3 • July 1996

Evangelical Review of Theology

*Articles and book reviews original and selected from
publications worldwide for an international
readership for the purpose of discerning the
obedience of faith*

EDITOR: BRUCE J. NICHOLLS



Published by
PATERNOSTER PERIODICALS

Biblical Integration: The process of thinking like a Christian

Kenneth O. Gangel

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As the twentieth century draws to a close, the survival of the world seems tenuously dependent on the rationality of its leaders. Yet, it is a world in which the rationality of some of those leaders is increasingly being called into question, and with no small amount of evidence. It is also a world in which Christianity stands wrongly accused of irrationality by those who misunderstand the essence of biblical faith.

The premise of this book rests on a twofold presupposition: that the Christian teacher is our best hope for rationality in an irrational age; and, that those Christian teachers must have highly developed and thoroughly consecrated minds in order to meet the challenge of leadership in such an age. Such minds are tuned to the process of constant biblical integration of faith and learning, a spiritual and academic commitment which stretches far beyond the boundaries of content transmission.

The process of Christian mindbuilding begins at regeneration. T. F. Torrance spells it out:

At the end of the day that was the test I used to put to my students, as I read their essays and examinations or listened to them in the chapel. 'Has this person a genuinely theological instinct or not? Is his or her thinking spontaneously and naturally governed by the mind of Christ?' That is much more important than being theologically learned, much more important than being able to offer a formal academic account of some doctrine or historic debate in the church. What really counts in the end is whether a person's mind is radically transformed by Christ and so spiritually attuned to the mind of Christ, that he thinks instinctively from the depths of his mental being in a way worthy of God.¹ p. 210

WHY MUST OUR STUDENTS DEVELOP THEIR MINDS?

This first question seems almost primitive, certainly elementary, and I fear my answers may not be sufficiently profound. But surely those of us who stand before students with regularity are consistently called on to affirm the kind of Christianity which gives back to God all of what he has produced by grace in us, including intellectual capacity. Therefore, the first reason why our students must develop their minds is *because God has commanded it*. Indeed, the first commandment according to its affirmation by the Lord himself is, 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind' ([Mt. 22:37](#)).

This summary of the first table of the Law is expanded slightly in Mark's version by adding 'strength' ([12:30](#)). The passage emphasizes the worship of God with all aspects of the human being and the text stresses the comprehensive nature of serious Christian commitment. It is not enough to love only with heart; nor even with heart and soul; nor

¹ [Matthew 22:37](#), NIV.

yet with heart, soul, and strength. Serious Christian teachers emphasize the importance of worshipping God with the mind.

In the 1985 Griffith Thomas Lectures at Dallas Theological Seminary, D. Bruce Lockerbie reminded the students that after the eternal soul, the most Godlike attribute of man is the mind, and he warned that 'Christians may underrate the mind and overrate the heart and therefore have no stomach for the fight.'²

Oliver Barclay explains why the concept of worshipping God with one's mind seems so out of step.

This appears such an alien idea [because] our concept of love is becoming increasingly different from that of the New Testament ... it may or may not involve emotion. The Bible when it talks of the mind, is not asking us to develop a philosophy (useful as that may be in its place), but to allow revealed truth to control us. It is the truth that sets us free, it is the truth as it is in Jesus that we are to consider, believe, and act upon ... thinking is part of what it is to be a human being. The alternative is to be a 'fool' ([Prov. 18:2](#)).³

The second reason why Christians must develop their minds is *because thinking Christians are called on to construct an evangelical world and life view*. Here again the role of the Christian teacher at all levels remains foundational. According to James Sire, a worldview is 'a set of presuppositions (or assumptions) which we hold (consciously or unconsciously) about the basic make-up of the world'.⁴ How essential, therefore, for every Christian to learn how to interpret his culture 'Christianly'. But what does that mean? How can it be achieved?

How does one actually practise thinking Christianly about surrounding culture? And how does one [p. 211](#) teach one's students to do so? Such an integrated exercise requires analytical synopsis of society enlightened by God's revelation. At least three steps are involved.

Know The Scriptures Intimately

Integration of any kind can never rise from theological ignorance. This has long been a major problem in Christian elementary and secondary schools as well as in Christian colleges. While requiring adequate credentials in a particular age-level or content specialization, we require only the most rudimentary biblical instruction. Schools often hire faculty with little or no formal training in biblical and theological studies, expecting that strong church affiliation and personal devotions will fulfil that side of the requirement. Such teachers can no more construct an evangelical world and life view than a practising pastor can integrate Scripture and astronomy from watching several episodes of 'Nova'. The problem is exacerbated because the administrators who do the hiring and requiring do not themselves know the Scriptures intimately and, therefore, find that quality a less-than-demanding issue among their subalterns.

Study The Culture Diligently

For years I have been asking students to sort out and articulate the differences between secular humanism, religious humanism, and Christian humanism. Recent popular literature in the evangelical camp has been no ally in this campaign. Secular humanism is tangled in the swamp of human intellect and will rather than divine guidance. Christian

² D. Bruce Lockerbie, Griffith Thomas Lectures.

³ Oliver Barclay, 'Loving God with All Your Mind', *Christian Arena* (June, 1985), p. 17.

⁴ James W. Sire, *The Universe Next Door* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1976), p. 17.

humanism, by contrast (exemplified historically by Desiderius Erasmus and in greater modernity by C. S. Lewis), grounds itself in a commitment to God's revelation, both natural and special. Religious humanism takes a middle road, repudiating denial of God while at the same time refusing a commitment to the exclusiveness of Christian theism. All three are found in the current culture, and thinking Christians must be wary of maladroitness of use of terms.

Notice how the exercise of studying the culture depends on knowing the Scriptures.

One cannot bring his study of culture to any kind of fruition without running that evaluation through a distinctly biblical grid, an impossibility if he or she has too frail a familiarity with the Scriptures. This then leads us to yet a third step.

Analyze Events And Issues Theologically

As Christians live in the world they are bombarded constantly with ideas and issues in direct experience or through the instrumentality of the media. Five practical questions form powerful lines in the straining net of theological analysis through which all experience must pass.

Does the Bible speak to this issue? An obvious example here is the late twentieth century question of *homosexuality*. Some argue it is merely an alternative lifestyle; others, a genetically caused physical state. Still others place it within the arena of sin, dramatically condemned by any historic orthodox explanation of the Bible. When there are texts which apply, the serious Christian must find them; but sometimes there are [p. 212](#) not and the second question must be applied.

Are there general Christian principles which apply? Another cancer on the skin of contemporary life is *drug abuse* in multitudinous forms. One could argue that no specific Scripture condemns the use of drugs. But surely the principle of 'body control' provides an appropriate standard for dealing with drug and alcohol abuse: 'Everything is permissible for me,—but I will not be mastered by anything' ([1 Cor. 6:12](#)).

Have Christian scholars, past or present, dealt with this issue? The cabals of *pro-abortionists* include few evangelicals, but one could imagine a beginning integrationist, a college student struggling with relating faith to learning, thrown off balance by the less-than-dramatic body of Scripture which can be directed at this issue. Yet a part of God's gift to his church comes in the forms of those gifted individuals able to go beyond the boundaries of average thinking, to probe the depths of difficult and controversial issues. In this particular illustration, the work of Schaeffer and Koop provides strategic value and example.

Does this position or theory defy absolute standards of morality or value? Presumably when we discuss 'absolute standards' with students, we are prepared to defend that claim with specific passages drawn from special revelation. The inveterate tendency of the church, however, from ancient heresy trials to modern hyper-separationism, classifies the relative interpretation of man as the absolute standard of God and, therefore, codifies rubrics of behaviour.

Meanwhile, relativism offers us the other extreme, burning all absolute standards on the altar of expedience and existential situationism. *Premarital sex*, for example, has always been condemned by biblical Christians, who affirm the absolute value of chastity. The shifting standards of society offer no measure of morality for the Christian, for the 'times are always a changin'.

The attitude of the younger generation toward sexuality shifted in advance of their parents. Pollster Daniel Yankelovich noted that in 1969, 77 percent of college students believed extramarital sexual relations were morally wrong; in 1971, 57 percent; that in 1969, 42 percent of college students believed that relations between consenting

homosexuals were morally wrong; in 1972, 25 percent; and that in 1969, 34 percent of college students believed that casual premarital sexual relations were morally wrong; in 1971, 25 percent. A sexual revolution appeared to be in full swing.⁵

The Christian teacher has committed himself to thinking in a context which defines morality in terms of biblical absolutes and subjects all conclusions to Lord and Word.

Is the Holy Spirit leading me to a definitive viewpoint on this matter? Quite possibly, even after activating the first four rubrics, the Christian student still holds only a vacuous interrogative. Consider the questions of *war* or *personal self-defence*. The Bible truly speaks to these issues, but intelligent and committed believers down through the centuries p. 213 have differed on how that biblical information should be interpreted. We struggle with the endless flow of what seem to be conflicting values. If forced to the unpleasant choice, should I protect my family at any cost or refuse to take a human life? Should I fight for the freedom and safety of my homeland or place myself into a non-military situation allowing others to preserve my safety? Such issues we must finally decide on how the Holy Spirit teaches us with quiet but firm inner assurance. Assuming that we subject our own selfish minds to both text and principles of God's Word, such decisions can be made.

Adopt A Set Of Distinctly Christian Presuppositions

One could expound indefinitely on how these presuppositions might look and what they might include. The following list directs attention to areas which require attention, without expecting the wording to be comfortably adopted by all teachers.

Ultimate reality resides in the personal, sovereign, Triune God.

Absolute truth comes to man in the form of God's self-initiated, inerrant revelation, the Bible.

The nature of human beings is declared by God to be in his image, fallen through sin, but redeemed by the Cross.

Value is not determined by society or majority vote, but ascertained as a part of God's revelation. In short, Christian axiology (principles) depends on Christian epistemology (knowledge).

The meaning of history centres in the plan and power of God. As Groothuis puts it, 'His ordering of all events is leading to the consummation of His intent for man and the universe. The tragedy of rebellion in the Fall is followed by the drama of redemption—God pursuing man. History is not the meaningless reign of chance or impersonal necessity, but the unfolding of divine government most clearly seen in the invasion of God into time and space in Christ ([John 1:18](#)).'⁶

Our students must also develop their minds *because the structure of unbelief is more militant in our day*. Consider the knowledge explosion, the raw paganism in much of what passes for education in the public domain, and the obtuse irrationalism evident in the influence of leading educators. Marching alongside traditional paganism we also hear the occult tattoo evidenced in everything from advanced graduate classes in voodoo to documented cases of satanism.

Rejection of the disciplines of Scripture leads to the kind of loose morality commonplace in today's world. Governor Charles Robb of Virginia claims that 1.25 million teens are 'disconnected' from school, work, family, and the values these traditional agencies promote. He asserts the proportion of children in poverty has risen from 16

⁵ John D. Woodbridge, ed., *Renewing Your Mind in a Secular World* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1985), p. 13.

⁶ Douglas Groothuis, 'The Christian Mind', *CSSH Quarterly* (Winter 1984), p. 17.

percent in 1970 to 22 percent today; that drug and alcohol abuse among the young is up sixtyfold since 1960; that teenage homicide, suicide and crime have climbed steadily since 1950, and that in this most educated of nations, the number of school [p. 214](#) dropouts has risen dramatically to the point that, in some major cities, fewer than half the young people who enter high school actually graduate.⁷

Christian teachers storm the arena precisely because much of this cultural ennui can be attributed to wrong thinking, as Paul reminded the Ephesians.

So I tell you this, and insist on it in the Lord that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their thinking. They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts. Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, with a continual lust for more ([Eph. 4:17-19](#)).

Finally, our students must develop their minds *because Christian leadership in any form requires disciplined thinking*. The disciplined Christian thinker does not replace faith with reason; he integrates the two by bowing before a reasonable faith. Stott quotes Martyn Lloyd-Jones in support of such a concept.

Faith, if you like, can be defined like this: It is a man insisting upon thinking when everything seems determined to bludgeon and knock him down in an intellectual sense. The trouble with the person of little faith is that, instead of controlling his own thought, his thought is being controlled by something else, and as we put it, he goes round and round in circles. That is the essence of worry ... that is not thought; that is the absence of thought, a failure to think.⁸

Christianity invites investigation, as Thomas learned when he confronted the risen Lord ([Jn. 20](#)). Feeling is not enough, it is never enough. But such talk of defending the faith may quickly become too militant and the thinking Christian must be reminded to avoid unwarranted dogmatism.

Too much of what passes for Christian teaching today is nothing more than monarchical dogmatism wrapped in the robes of academic success. We must resist the sacred/secular paradox so that a total unified lifestyle can result from disciplined thinking. The believer's mind must be continually renewed ([Rom. 12:2](#)) as he exercises his freedom to think on virtuous things ([Phil. 4:8](#)). Woodbridge properly attacks false compartmentalization.

Though evangelical Christians affirm that the Bible is an infallible rule for faith and practice, many of them compartmentalize their faith in such a manner that biblical teachings do not much affect the way they live on a daily basis. They profess sound evangelical doctrine but betray those confessions by their deeds. They do not consciously seek each day to live under the direction of biblical ethics.⁹

HOW CAN A CHRISTIAN STUDENT BLOW HIS MIND?

⁷ Vernon Grounds.

⁸ Charles S. Robb, 'We Can't Write Off 1.25 Million Teens', *USA Today* (Nov. 8, 1985), p. 10A.

⁹ [Ephesians 4:17-19](#), NIV.

The ways seem numerous and widely variant in severity. One is reminded, for example, of that now infamous phrase which has come [P.215](#) back many times to haunt its author—‘benign neglect’.

A Christian Student Can Blow His Mind Through Carelessness.

Shoddiness in study habits, procrastination in responsibilities, rationalization of sloth—all these and a host of other common practices trick us into ‘blowing’ this wonderful gift from God. Thousands graduate from Christian schools and colleges every year never to appear again in the ranks of Christian leadership, however severe the need.

Completing some phase of one’s education merely provides certain tools. Using those tools effectively beyond the boundaries of classroom and institutional regimentation relates more closely to wisdom than to knowledge. Nevertheless, Christian students at all levels must see their present tasks in biblical perspective—they are engaged in ministry, they are doing the work of the Lord.

A Christian Student Can Blow His Mind Through Pride

By positioning the mind at the centre of all life, one traps oneself into the error of Platonic idealism, the heresy of the Cartesian imperial self. The Bible teaches that spiritual pride is a horrible sin, but those who have enjoyed the privilege of serious learning may be prone to yet another pitfall—mental pride.

Perhaps the most humbling act, both intelligent and purposeful, is the cultivation of an attitude of worship. Surely that is what Jesus had in mind when he said, ‘Love the Lord your God with all your mind.’ When the thinking Christian allows intellectual success to go to his head, he may very well discover that it ‘blows his mind’. And a mind blown on one’s own achievements is no longer a mind capable of bowing before Jesus Christ.

[Second Corinthians 10:5](#) serves as compass and lodestar for Christian teachers: ‘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.’ Many of the great minds of history were humble Christians who knew that mind-bowing in no way appeals to ignorance or shoddy anti-intellectualism.

A Christian Student May Blow His Mind Through Sin

Here the Scriptures offer repeated warnings but perhaps none more poignantly than the words of Paul, ‘The mind of sinful man is death, but the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace; the sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God’s law, nor can it do so’ ([Rom. 8:6–7](#)).

Some Christian scholars maintain fortresses of faith which Satan can never besiege with temptations of drunkenness, debauchery, thievery, murder, or lust. With such his tool may have to be a sharpened spear of mental pride, forcing them to stand as modern models of Nebuchadnezzar and Herod, pointing out to an admiring world the great thoughts they have thought and the great words they have written.

God’s Word, meanwhile, continues to talk positively about the man whose mind is stayed on God ([Isa. 26:3](#)); who shares the unity of mind with other believers ([Rom. p.216 12:16](#)); who possesses a willing mind ([2 Cor. 8:12](#)); who treasures a humble mind ([Philp. 2:3](#)); and who allows God to produce in him the Spirit of a sound mind ([2 Tim. 1:7](#)).

The Christian Student Can Blow His Mind Through Dogmatism and Rigidity

Renewal requires a process of change. The Scriptures attest to the progress involved in moving toward spiritual maturity ([Rom. 8:28–30](#); [2 Cor. 3:17–18](#); [2 Pet. 3:18](#)). The word

dogmatic is not in and of itself derogatory. We speak of a study in dogmatics as related to the pursuit of systematic theology. But modern usage has made the adjectival form almost parallel to the word 'rigid', and the epithet 'uncompromising' would be a welcome panegyric in the eyes of some Christian leaders. Nancy Barus points up the confusion in such thinking.

Sometimes we may detect an error of assurance so totally serious that it is disarming. That very sound of self-assurance should put a person on guard. Is there room for any attitudes or interpretations other than this one? If the speaker is convinced, and masterful, we will be left with the feeling that there are only two ways to view an issue: the right way and the wrong way, the good way and the foolish way. Giving you the impression of fairness and rationality, a thinker may actually be very unfair, suggesting that anyone with a clear mind would reach no other conclusions than these. If you detect such a stance, beware. This is likely to be dangerous ground.¹⁰

The Spirit-filled teacher then seeks a balance of law and gospel, of Word and Spirit. Douglas Moo reminds us that 'the new pattern of thinking that begins with conversion must undergo a constant process of renewal. In the building of this Christian mind, the commands of God and Scripture provide a basic blueprint, while the redeemed Spirit-filled mind itself applies those commands in certain situations.'¹¹

HOW CAN A CHRISTIAN STUDENT KEEP FROM BLOWING HIS MIND?

Quite obviously the way to stay healthy is to avoid disease—in this case, notably those mentioned above. But there is a positive dimension too in which the thinking Christian takes definitive steps towards mind-bowing as an alternative to mind-blowing.

A Christian Student Can Avoid Blowing His Mind By Recognizing The Dependability of Biblical Authority With Which To Combat The Irrationality Of The Age

In more than a quarter century of teaching I have frequently seen how difficult it is for students to grasp the appropriate relationship between natural and special revelation. Some are so biblically committed that they fail to see the reality and significance of God's revelation in means other than the Scriptures. Others, more inclined toward scientific research, struggle with the application of the faith principle to the learning process. **p. 217**

The Christian thinker, however, must rise to the level at which he can integrate faith with learning in any form. We must view natural revelation through the eyes of special revelation. Such a process puts it on our way toward Christo-centric thinking.

The more we see the biblical account as a reliable base, the more willing we become to test other experiences and ideas by its precepts. We find an even sanity, a respect for personhood, an undaunted realism, and, too, the possibility that restoration and redemption provide a surer foundation for goodness and idealism than the roads other thinkers have proposed. Nowhere else is there such a delicate balance between unblinking recognition of evil and commitment to human moral responsibility, such undaunted hope, such promise of goodness and restoration.¹²

¹⁰ John R. W. Stott, *Your Mind Matters* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1973), p. 38.

¹¹ Myron Augsburger.

¹² Woodbridge, *op cit.*, p. ix.

A Christian Student Can Avoid Mind-Blowing By Learning To Link Reason And Faith

This is apposite to the former discussion, but so crucial I offer it as a separate step. There is an unenlightened faith of which Paul once spoke: 'For I can testify about them that they are zealous for God, but their zeal is not based on knowledge' ([Rom. 10:2](#)). Christianity is indeed rational, but it is not rationalism; it is intellectual, but it is not intellectualism.

The mind is a tool of faith and the Christian leader allows reason and faith—the little boy and the strong man—to begin the hike together. But he must expect that somewhere down the road, perhaps in the difficult climb through mountainous terrain, the strong man (faith) may have to carry the little boy (reason) on his back. The process of believing/thinking and thinking/ believing, writes Groothuis, 'is the preoccupation and conviction of the Christian mind. One need not be an "intellectual" to apply the Christian worldview concretely to all of life and thus "give a reason for the hope that is in you" ([1 Peter 3:15](#)) to a doubting world.'

¹³

A Christian Student Can Escape The Danger Of Mind-Blowing By Creating a Word-centred Environment

The reality of environmental conditioning and the impact of one's surroundings stand as fact. How many times we remind impressionable teenagers that the television programmes they watch, the music they listen to, the movies they attend, and the friends with which they surround themselves all make indelible impressions on their lives. Yet somehow we behave as though that influence is no longer significant in the adult years. The courts are full of cases clamouring for freedom of 'consenting adults' to engage in all manner of activities, many of which corrode both mind and body.

Against this pattern the apostle Paul offers a now familiar refrain: 'Everything is permissible—but not everything is constructive' ([1 Cor. 10:23](#)). Moo argues that the surroundings in which the Christian [p. 218](#) voluntarily places himself offer the most important single factor in developing a renewed mind.

How can a Christian facilitate the process of training a renewed mind, the mind of the Spirit? The key would seem to be environment. What are the influences, the atmosphere in which his mind is being formed? What is determining the direction of his thinking? How ironic it is that many Christian parents who are concerned about the kind of school environment in which their children are being trained are completely unconcerned about or even unconscious of the environment that affects their own way of thinking. A mind that is exposed constantly to a barrage of secular television, secular advertising, secular literature, and secular ideas is probably going to turn out to be a secular mind.¹⁴

A Christian Student Can Avoid Mind-blowing By Submitting To The Holy Spirit's Control In All Things.

This is neither late medieval mysticism nor contemporary charismatic theology. Control of the mind by the Spirit is a theme melody running through the music of both Testaments, as old as God's relationship with his creation.

Earlier I alluded to the negative paragraph from the fourth chapter of Ephesians, a warning to reject the darkness of the past. The paragraph immediately following offers the positive corrective, reminding Christian thinkers to live as children of light.

¹³ [Romans 8:6-7](#), NIV.

¹⁴ [Isaiah 26:3](#).

You, however, did not come to know Christ that way. Surely you heard of him and were taught in him in accordance with the truth that is in Jesus. You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness ([Eph. 4:20-24](#)).

Grant Osborn draws a parallel between the Ephesians passage and [Romans 8](#) and sees ‘the new mind as shaping the outlook and assumptions of the Spirit, fully committed to the Spirit rather than to the flesh’.¹⁵

Christian teachers labouring to reproduce students committed both to mind-building and mind-bowing offer up with meaning the prayer contained in a familiar hymn:

May the mind of Christ my Saviour live in me from day to day,
By His love and pow’r controlling all I do and say.
May the Word of God dwell richly in my heart from hour to hour,
So that all may see I triumph only through His pow’r.¹⁶

Christian integration rests on spiritual-mindedness. It reveres not dogmatism but tolerance; not shouting but reason. And perhaps teachers should never view it as an accomplished ideal. At best, we can point to some position along the journey and trust by God’s grace [p. 219](#) that it will be more advanced than positions at previous points of evaluation. Integrating faith and learning falls within the boundaries of that magical word *liturgy*—it is both worship and service. Perhaps that is what Charles Wesley had in mind when he wrote:

To serve this present age my calling to fulfil,
O may it all my powers engage to do my Master’s will.

Dr Kenneth O. Gangel is Chairman of the Department of Christian Education at Dallas Theological Seminary, Dallas, USA. [p. 220](#)

Women in the Church An Experiment in Pentecostal Hermeneutics

John Christopher Thomas

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(1994) pp. 41–56*

I TOWARDS A PENTECOSTAL HERMENEUTIC

¹⁵ [Romans 12:16](#).

¹⁶ [2 Corinthians 8:12](#).