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# Using our minds in mission, ministry and service

Allison M. Howell

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THE British sociologist and theologian, Os Guinness, once spoke at a seminar in California where a very attractive woman introduced his session. She began her introduction by asking him, 'How's your body?' After a stunned silence, all he could reply was, 'Madam, I'm English. How's your mind?'<sup>1</sup> Guinness' response does not necessarily depict a distinction between national characteristics, but is illustrative of a deeper problem that has infected modern society like a cancer, where appearance, a pleasurable image, celebrity status, power and possessions have much greater value than the state of a person's inner life and the use of the mind in pursuit of intellec-

tual formation and excellence. Even in Ghana, television advertisements for beverages, hair products, computers and other goods, seem to reinforce the notion that the exterior image is all that matters for a successful person.

What is of greater concern, however, is the evidence that this attitude has not only penetrated into the lives of many Christians, but has been characterised by an anti-intellectualism that emerged in evangelical circles around the beginning of the 19th century. The result in our time is that many evangelicals are shallow in their thinking and do not know how their faith relates to the use of their minds. J. P. Moreland argues that 'The contemporary Christian mind is starved, and as a result we have small impoverished souls.'<sup>2</sup> In much of the western world, Christ has been taken out of the public sphere,

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1 Os Guinness, *Fit Bodies Fat Minds: Why Evangelicals don't think and what to do about it* (London: Hodder and Stoughton Ltd, 1995), p. 9.

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2 J.P. Moreland, *Love your God with all your mind: the role of reason in the life of the soul* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1997), p. 80.

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thus enhancing the perception amongst many non-Christians that a thinking mind is incompatible with Christianity.

Even more alarming is Moreland's contention that the evangelical failure to understand the relationship of faith to reason, and the separation of the secular and the sacred in the West have combined to weaken world missions, produced an irrelevant gospel and rendered Christian witness ineffective.<sup>3</sup> This is not to deny that there have been individual western and non-western Christians who have used their minds to the glory of God in both mission and ministry throughout the past century. In his book, *Translating the message: the missionary impact on culture*, Lamin Sanneh's tribute to Bible translators who produced 'translations of excellence'<sup>4</sup> is evidence of their commitment to a godly use of their thinking mind. However, the concerns of both Guinness and Moreland are real. There is an increasing danger of many Christians being sucked into a chasm filled with mind-numbing activities that indicate a preference to be 'entertained', to while away hours in computer games and avoid whatever requires serious study and a sacrificial long-term commitment to learning that can be applied to the real world.

My own interest in the way Christians use their minds was ignited by the comment of a colleague in Geography who, upon hearing that I wanted to study theology, declared it 'the waste

of a good mind'. In addition, the magnetism of the words, 'the mind of Christ' (1 Cor. 2:16), kindled in me the desire to understand what Scripture says about our minds and the way we use them.

The purpose of this paper is not to examine the reasons for the ineffective use of the mind amongst evangelicals as this has been well addressed in the writings of authors such as Os Guinness and J. P. Moreland. The aim of this paper is rather to reflect on some aspects of what Scripture has to say about the Christian mind and to consider its implications for Christian mission, ministry and service.

## 1. The understanding, feeling and desiring mind

There are a number of ways in which the mind is portrayed in the New Testament. The first is through the Greek word *dianoia* which expresses the mind as a faculty of understanding, feeling and desiring. The ultimate desire that a person can have is shown in Mark 12:30 in Jesus' answer to the scribe: 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.'<sup>5</sup>

Spoken in the context of a conversation with the Sadducees, these words show us how Jesus used his own mind. Because he had learnt and understood the position of those who questioned him, he was able powerfully and intelligently to refute their

3 J.P. Moreland, *Love your God*, pp. 30, 31.

4 Lamin Sanneh, *Translating the message: the missionary impact on culture* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1989), p. 179.

5 All references are taken from *The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1996, c1989).

arguments. Jesus' response to the scribe who questioned him about the greatest commandment, reveals the ultimate purpose for life. Contained within this profound statement is the declaration that the mind, that core of understanding, feeling and desiring, belongs to the Lord. To love God involves a total commitment of our minds.

The same Greek word *dianoia* is used in 1 Peter 1:13-15 where Peter writes about suffering, trials and salvation. Thus he states:

Therefore prepare your *minds* for action, discipline yourselves; set all your hope on the grace that Jesus Christ will bring you when he is revealed. Like obedient children, do not be conformed to the desires that you formerly had in ignorance. Instead, as he who called you is holy, be holy yourselves in all your conduct. (Emphasis mine)

In these two passages, the mind provides the link between our love (the whole area of our desires) and our conduct. We cannot divorce our mind from our behaviour. As Christians, our faculty for understanding, feeling and desiring, needs to be prepared for action. Moreland points out that 'If we are to love God with the mind, then the mind must be exercised regularly, trained to acquire certain habits of thought, and filled with an increasing rich set of distinctions and categories.'<sup>6</sup> Therefore, to be holy in our conduct, we need to prepare our minds, that is, our inner life for action and

right conduct.<sup>7</sup> Otherwise, we are constantly hampered in our response to issues and problems to remain on a superficially emotive level that reveals little rational reasoning or thinking.

In a world where distractions, noise and fatigue dissipate our energy, we should hardly be surprised that often we are caught completely unprepared for the tasks that require us to use our minds. Our minds are distracted from a wholehearted love for God. The 24-hour news services clutter TV screens with multiple ticker-tape messages that dance across the screen below a news reader with a constant re-cycling of the same images. This panders to a growing addiction that says, 'I have to know everything that is going on all the time,' and so TV screens are constantly churning out news in offices and homes. However, whatever the knowledge that is gained, it is of superficial value and the Christian viewer cannot even focus a 'Christian mind' on the task in hand. It is little wonder then that people scarcely withdraw from their 'multi-tasking' into the silence and quietness that should enable them to attentively hear the voice of God, commune with him and love him with all their minds.

Tragically, therefore, we often do not think before we act. We react to situations on the basis of assumptions or feelings that do not reflect an adequate understanding of the situations. Often

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<sup>7</sup> *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*. Vols. 5-9 edited by Gerhard Friedrich. Vol. 10 compiled by Ronald Pitkin. (G. Kittel, G. W. Bromiley & G. Friedrich, Ed.) Vol. 4 (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964-c1976), p. 967.

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<sup>6</sup> J.P. Moreland, *Love your God*, p. 104.

I speak before I think and this has got me frequently into trouble with various people. Somebody asked me recently, 'What's the most difficult thing about being in Ghana?' Upon careful reflection, I realized that it is the same difficulty that I have in Australia or any other part of the world—what I say and how I relate to people in my relationships. I seem to be in a constant struggle in these two areas. To love God with the totality of our being (including our minds) lies at the very core of mission, ministry and service to God.

## 2. The calm, impartial and discerning mind

Another Greek word used for the mind in the New Testament is *nous*, and it carries the meaning of the mind as the faculty to perceive, judge, or discern calmly and impartially. Paul writes in Romans 12:2, 'Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect.' In other words, the mind is the key to an ongoing transformation in our lives. It is the place of the transforming work of the Holy Spirit in our lives as we respond to his leading through the word of God and prayer.

We need to learn to have our minds renewed for the purpose of calm and impartial discernment which in turn will contribute to our transformation. We need to be able to perceive, discern and judge with the mind of Christ so that we recognize what is right and good as well as what is wrong and evil. We also need to be able to withhold judgement sometimes when we do not

understand what is happening around us. That, too, is discernment. It is very easy to go into a new situation and condemn it as syncretistic, demonic and not right before God, because we feel uncomfortable with what we have seen or heard, when in reality we may not have even understood the situation.

Many years ago in Northern Ghana, a young western woman accompanied a group of us to a Christian funeral in a traditional house. The Church leaders with whom we worked had, over time, thought through their response to traditional funerals. They used Scripture to affirm those elements within the traditional funeral practices that Scripture agreed with, and to change whatever needed to be cleansed or purified. These northern Christians had developed a funeral liturgical celebration which is not only very distinctive but also related to their context.

As we sat on the ground in the courtyard of the house, there was incredible noise swirling around us from the drumming and dancing. I noticed that the young western woman sitting on the ground beside me had turned suddenly pale, as if she was about to have a heart attack, and I asked her if she was all right. She said to me, 'This is demonic!' She had been in Ghana only three weeks but she had already classified what Christians were doing as demonic because it did not fit her own expectations of a Christian funeral where there usually would be quiet organ music and individual activities following in sequence. Furthermore, she did not even have a clue as to the spiritual journey Christians in northern Ghana had made to reach that point. She was not able to recognize the scriptural input in the funeral

because her mind could not discern the transformation that had taken place in the minds and understanding of these northern Christians who were applying the mind of Christ to their specific context.

Paul uses the word *nous* again in 1 Corinthians 2:16 where he writes, 'For who has known the mind of the Lord so as to instruct him? But we have mind of Christ.' We cannot and do not know the mind of the all-knowing God, yet we have the mind of Christ! How is this possible? It is possible because God's Spirit gives us a calm mind to discern and to judge. In Ephesians 4:17-18, Paul writes, 'Now this I affirm and insist on in the Lord: you must no longer live as the Gentiles live in the futility of their minds [*nous*]. They are darkened in their understanding [*dianoia*], alienated from the life of God because of their ignorance and hardness of heart.'

Paul indicates that where this faculty to perceive, judge, or discern calmly and impartially (*nous*) is defective, it can be traced back to a defective faculty of understanding, feeling and desiring (*dianoia*). Furthermore, the failure of a person to love God with the totality of their being stems from a problem in the core of their being, their heart.<sup>8</sup> Paul reminds the Ephesians (4:23) that they are 'to be renewed in the spirit of your minds'. It is only that discerning, calm mind of Christ that enables us to break with our corrupt and deluded former ways of life. The corrupt mind needs to be constantly renewed.

In the context of our Christian mission and in ministry, the development of a Christian mind, that faculty to perceive, judge, or discern calmly and impartially, lies at the very core of discipleship. If it is not within us, then how can we claim to be disciples of Christ, that is, those who have understood and know the mind of our Master? How then can we disciple others to be renewed in their minds?

### 3. The wise mind that does not think highly of itself

A third word (*phroneo*) used for the mind in the New Testament, has to do with the acknowledgement of one's status. It depicts the mind as the virtue of wisdom and right self-knowledge where one thinks modestly and not highly of oneself. Paul uses this word in Philippians 2:5 where he says, 'Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself...' This attitude or mind is in such stark contrast to that mind that emphasizes power, high status, external image and a well-being devoid of suffering that has, unfortunately, permeated through today's church. Jesus rebuked Peter for not setting his mind (*phroneo*) on God's interests (Mark 8:33). Peter, like many of us, could not cope with the image of a suffering leader. Yet we are to have the mind of Christ and to think wisely and modestly of ourselves. Paul repeats this message concerning the need for Christians to have a mind that thinks modestly about oneself (Rom. 12:3, 16).

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<sup>8</sup> *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, p. 966.

This type of mind aims at unity with fellow believers in Christ. All too frequently in the context of mission and ministry, an unhealthy individualism undermines the sense of community and the corporate search for the mind of Christ in any new venture. Speaking at a missions conference in Australia, Oscar Muriu, a Kenyan church leader, encouraged western missions and missionaries who are considering ministry in another society or cultural group to always ask the question, 'What is the Father uniquely doing in this society?'<sup>9</sup> To sincerely ask that question and then search for the answer requires a committed attitude of humility and willingness to learn. We need to be prepared to let go of what we may regard as our privileged and rightful position and open our minds to welcome and embrace new perspectives on God's truth.

#### 4. Grasping God's perspective with your mind and making it your own

On the surface, the story of Cornelius and Peter (Acts 10:1-35) appears to have little to do with the mind, but it gives us insight into the way we use our minds for mission, ministry and service in any context. When Peter went to the Gentile centurion in Caesarea, he admitted to Cornelius and those gathered with him in his house that he had gained a new perspective on God's truth: 'I truly understand that God shows no partiality, but in every nation

anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him' (vv. 34, 35). The Greek word used for 'understand' is *katalambano* which means, to take hold of something with your mind and to take it into yourself. Here was Peter, a Jew, in the house of a Gentile, making a statement that indicated that something profound had occurred in his mind. What happened to Peter? To answer the question, we have to return to the beginning of the story.

When Peter saw the vision of the unclean animals and heard God's instructions related to eating food, it burned a new truth into his mind with a searing passion that contradicted his previous tradition. Because Peter's mind was open to the Spirit of God, he was enabled to understand that God was not just speaking about food that had been previously taboo to him. God was actually addressing his attitude to Gentiles. Peter's mind was able to grasp God's perspective and make it his own. When he left for Caesarea he had not known why he was going, for when Peter arrived at Cornelius' house, he asked him, 'Now may I ask why you sent for me?' Peter took a step of faith in his mind. In our going into mission, God provides us with the opportunity to understand his perspective and make it our own. But how do we use our mind to learn God's perspective?

At a Workshop on Gospel and Culture,<sup>10</sup> Kwame Bediako highlighted

<sup>9</sup> Oscar Muriu, Missions Conference, West Pennant Hills Community Church, Australia, 15 May, 1999.

<sup>10</sup> Kwame Bediako highlighted the three points in a talk entitled 'Theology as Christian response to culturally-rooted questions', Gospel and Culture Workshop 5, 11 May, 2001. I have related these three points to the use of our minds rather than specifically to gospel and culture issues.

three points in the story of Cornelius and Peter which illustrate the steep 'learning curve' that Peter went through to understand God's perspective on mission.

### **God takes the initiative in ministry and mission**

The first point the story shows us is that it is God who takes the initiative in mission. Furthermore, God begins that initiative on the unbeliever's side. Peter did not sit in Joppa planning an outreach programme to Caesarea. Certainly he was praying but he was also thinking about food. Prior to Peter having the vision during his midday prayer session and his questioning God about its meaning, God had already taken the initiative in the life of Cornelius, a Gentile man, and we are led to believe that many of his household had also been moved by God. God was present in Caesarea. The Lord Jesus Christ was there. God had prepared Cornelius for this encounter. There was something going on in Cornelius' mind and heart. There was a desire that God had placed there when Cornelius used his mind and his heart to pray, and to give alms. The action did not start when Peter entered the home of Cornelius. In the story told in Acts 10, there is a very strong emphasis on the sovereignty of God and on the initiative of God.

When we think about our involvement in any form of mission or ministry, we will realise that God is always ahead of us. He has always gone before us. Therefore, we have a responsibility to use our minds to learn about what God is doing. We have a responsibility to respond to the word from God saying, 'Come'. We also have the responsibility

to come without dominating those to whom God directs us. We are to come and serve and hear about what God is doing. God uses our knowledge, our learning, and above all, our willingness to hear him and to hear him through those with whom we work. We do not accomplish God's tasks simply through our training, expertise or techniques.

### **God loves all people**

The second point that profoundly affects our minds as shown in Acts 10 is that God loves all peoples whether they know him or not. We are raised by our families within a particular setting and we are culturally and mentally conditioned to have a certain attitude towards people who are different from us. That is the way Peter was brought up; in the story he finds himself in a situation where he discovers that God loves the Gentiles as much as God loves him. We need to keep this foremost in our minds, especially when the negative comments about other people begin to arise, whether they follow Islam or the New Age Movement or are simply our neighbours whose lifestyle revolves around their leisure activities.

### **A revision of our self-understanding**

The third point is that our engagement in mission and ministry with God will lead to a significant revision of our own self-understanding. In Acts 10, this engagement took place not just in the physical meeting of two men from different cultures, but it took place in their mind. This is what happened to Peter. The engagement led Peter to revise his previous self-understanding



and his grasp of the ways of God. The vision he had on the rooftop in Joppa, related to things that traditionally he had been taught to believe he should not eat. In his mind he had believed that, 'This is God's way'. All of a sudden, he faced a new situation where he had to revise his theological thinking. It took him three 'lessons' to understand what God was saying to him.

However, what I consider extraordinary is that Peter realizes in his mind that God was not just talking about food. Face to face with Cornelius, Peter shows that he has made this astonishing link in his mind for he says, 'God has shown me that I should not call anyone profane or unclean' (v.28). Although God showed him items of food, Peter was able to establish its link with his own view of the Gentiles. He made the correlation in his mind between what he believed was important for his identity and therefore his self-esteem and what he now knew to be crucial for mission and his involvement in ministry with other people. One of the key regulations that he had religiously kept was shattered because of the mission of God. And all this was God's initiative.

We, too, will face and do face a very intense period of learning in mission and ministry. Often we cling to matters of cultural preference or ecclesiastical form as if they were a biblical mandate. Learning is hard work and in the stress of adjustment to a new setting, often we assume we understand a situation based on the external forms that we see. We do not make the effort to use our minds to try to understand the meanings behind the forms we see. For instance, we condemn an initiation rite and forbid Christians from participat-

ing in it because we perceive that divination is used in the rite. However, we do not take the time to discover what actually does occur in the rite, the meanings behind each activity. If we did, we would discover, for instance, that the purpose of the divination is to seek spiritual guidance in the life of the initiates. We cannot but wonder why Christians show little enthusiasm for the recommended 'substitute' rite which has been worked out with appropriate proof-texts. In our condemnation of the whole rite, therefore, we fail to let the Scriptures interpret the issue of spiritual guidance. The result is that Christians feel that the gospel does not address the meanings of initiation.

God wants us to develop the ongoing practice of cultivating our minds for his glory. It will not be a smooth and easy journey, but we are to develop a mind that is discerning, a mind that is gentle and passionate, and prepared to take into itself things that God affirms but with which we may not be comfortable. Peter must have felt very uncomfortable when he was confronted with what he had always thought was unclean. Yet he took it into himself.

### **Cultivating our minds for hearing the Word of God.**

In the last few years, I have adopted the practice of reading the Word of God aloud to myself because I find that when I read it silently I do not listen, my mind is easily distracted and wanders off into unrelated thoughts. But when I read Scripture aloud, although the voice I hear is mine, God still speaks to me through my voice because I am reading his word.

## Cultivating a mind for reading

According to J. P. Moreland, one reason why Christians have little influence in the public sphere is because 'they tend to browse self-help books or other literature that is not intellectually engaging'.<sup>11</sup> Cultivating a mind for reading and reading widely are part of our Christian discipleship. Reading is hard work and often when we finish reading a book, we remember little of what we have read. If we want to remember what we read, then it is important that we read with a pencil or pen in our hand and we take notes. J. Adler Mortimer advises readers to 'mark up' books, unless they are a library book or a first edition book because marking a book as we read it keeps us awake. It involves thinking, and thinking expresses itself in writing. A third benefit is that it helps us remember our thoughts and responses to the author. Mortimer describes reading as a 'conversation between you and the author.' He points out that

Understanding is a two-way operation; learning doesn't consist in being an empty receptacle. The learner has to question himself and question the teacher. He even has to argue with the teacher, once he understands what the teacher is saying. And marking a book is literally an expression of your differences, or agreement of opinion with the author.<sup>12</sup>

There are some things, however, I do not read. I make it a habit not to read romantic novels. Instead, I read biographies and historical novels as a way to cultivate an understanding of the lives of other people, the world and environment around me, and current issues in life. Some years ago, I started reading books on the lives of Islamic women and it took me into places in my mind I have never physically been to such as Iran and Pakistan. On a long flight to Australia, I was seated in the same row as a young man of Middle Eastern appearance. It was shortly after the September 11, 2001 destruction of the Twin Towers in New York, USA.

Initially, I was nervous, especially when he fiddled around in his bag. After six hours into the flight to Sydney, he suddenly looked at me and asked in an annoyed manner, 'How much further to Singapore?' I said, 'Six hours!' He rattled round in his bag again and then I noticed there was a book beside him. It made me more nervous because the writing looked like Arabic, but then I realized it was not Arabic, and I gathered the courage to ask him, 'Excuse me, is that book Persian?' As a result of that simple question and my correct guess, we had the most profound six-hour conversation to Singapore. The man left the plane with my copy of the Bible, and a promise to read it. Here was a man searching for God. The interesting thing, however, was that the conversation had begun with a discussion about an Iranian woman I had 'met' in my reading who started the School of Social Work in Iran.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>11</sup> J.P. Moreland, *Love your God*, p. 87.

<sup>12</sup> J. Adler Mortimer, 'How to Mark a Book', in *The McGraw-Hill Reader: Issues Across the Disciplines*, seventh edition (Boston: McGraw-Hill, 2000), pp. 61. See also Moreland, *Love your God*, p. 166.

<sup>13</sup> Satterah Farman Farmian with Donna Munker, *Daughter of Persia* (Great Britain: Corgi Books), 1992.

### Cultivating a mind for prayer

To cultivate a mind for prayer, we need to start by listening attentively to the Lord. We need to develop a mind for prayer, a mind that thinks in the context of prayer. We must then commit **our** mind to pray actively. Working with the Church in Northern Ghana has taught me the value of prayer. I used to struggle with going to all-night prayer meetings. There is none of this two-hour business on a Friday night. They would pray right through the night, starting at 8.00 pm and still staggering through at 5.00 am. At first, I would drink espresso coffee to keep me awake, but Northern Ghanaian Christians would stand up to keep themselves awake, and I learnt to do the same thing.

### Cultivating relationships with people

We need to have a mind for relationships with people. We need to develop good relationships with people even if they have vastly different levels of education from us. We should never assume that just because someone does not have similar educational qualifications, they do not have a mind to think. It was a Northern Ghanaian woman who taught me never to make such assumptions. She had never been to school and could not speak English, yet night after night we sat together on the roof of her extended family house and we debated on issues with which we both struggled. She would argue with me, and as we debated, I realized that she had a brilliant mind, but unfortunately had never had the opportunity to learn in a formal school setting like

I had. I believe that if she had had the opportunity to learn she would probably have had a PhD today. However, she learned from life and has taught me a great deal about life. She would challenge me, argue with me and question my points of view. We discussed many things, including witchcraft and the Scriptures.

To cultivate relationships with people involves listening attentively to them and trying to understand their point of view even if we do not agree with them. All too often we are busy in our minds formulating a reply or we become caught up with our emotions and respond without being able to quietly reason. We need to focus our minds and concentrate and be as knowledgeable and well-informed as we can.

### Cultivating a mind for mission and transformation

We also need to have a mind for mission and transformation. The Lord gave us a clear mandate to be involved in the making of disciples of all the nations. This involves not only the discipling of an individual spiritually, but the discipling of the person's mind—through the conversion and transformation of every aspect of the mind and thinking. However, engaging in mission also should have a personal benefit for the individual missionary. Kwame Bediako points out that 'Engaging in mission ... is a way of gaining insight and growing in understanding of the Gospel. Knowledge is experience and without such experience, our knowledge of faith is shallow

and superficial.<sup>14</sup>

### Cultivating a mind for learning and scholarship

Finally, we need to have a mind for scholarship. Scholarship is not about abstract academia. The western Academy is often irrelevant. In many western universities, much research, even in faculties of theology, is irrelevant to life. Serious study of theology today can be found in the non-western world where we discover theology and scholarship that are living. In the non-western world, people are grappling with practical problems. It is such scholarship that needs to be restored in the western world, a scholarship that reflects on the living problems of living people within society. That is how the Christian doctrines were developed in the early church. They did not come out of a vacuum or ensue from abstract discussions. They emerged from the experience of theologians and Bible teachers struggling with the issues that people faced.

Andrew Walls very firmly anchors Christian scholarship in Christian mission. According to him, 'We need a cleansing of theological scholarship, a reorientation of academic theology to Christian mission, a return to the ideal of scholarship for the glory of God, a return to the ideal of the academic life as a liberating search for truth.' But he is also quick to point out that it may

require costly service, 'long training, constant self-discipline, intense labour, without being much noticed'.<sup>15</sup>

### Anticipating reaction

Using our minds for the glory of God is not without problems and difficulties. People can resist and misunderstand our thinking and actions sometimes because of lack of knowledge, but at other times because it threatens the very core of the identity of the one who is doing the criticizing. Peter himself discovered this. If you read Acts 11, you will see how Peter was called to account for his interaction with Gentiles. We, too, also need to be prepared for a similar reaction like this when we use our minds in the way he did. Peter's response was not to push his own agenda. He simply related the story of what God had done and shown him. However, on another occasion, Peter drew back from the truth he had taken into himself (Galatians 2:11-14) because he feared those who criticised him for the stand he had taken.

Fear causes people to react in unpredictable ways: some seek to placate those who criticize them, while others in self-defence become excessively aggressive. At other times we submit to a self-pity and despondency that completely undermine our defences. Milena Jesenská, a Czech journalist, who died after four years in the Ravensbrück prisoner of war camp during the Second World War, made these comments on fear before her

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**14** Kwame Bediako, 'The African renaissance and Theological Reconstruction: the Challenge of the Twenty-first Century', *Journal of African Christian Thought*, Vol. 4, No. 2 (December 2001), p. 31.

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**15** Andrew Walls, 'Christian Scholarship in Africa in the Twenty-first Century', *Journal of African Christian Thought*, Vol. 4, No. 2 (December 2001), pp. 48, 51.

arrest: 'The funny thing about fear is that it won't let you stand still. ... When I stand still, it means I am calmly anticipating the unknown, I'm prepared for it.'<sup>16</sup> Although her observations on fear were made in the context of people facing arrest and physical death, we can perceive the criticism of our ideas and actions to be a form of psychological restraint akin to death.

The natural reaction is usually frenetic activity to defend our position or aggressive verbal attack or a desire to humiliate our critics or retreat into despondency. We do not take the time to stand still either before we meet our critics or after we have heard their comments. There are many difficulties we face in learning and in using our minds. At times we will not see our way clearly. In using our minds, it is not a matter of just applying techniques or methods. We will make mistakes and may even retreat under genuine criticism. The result of such a retreat is

that we do not learn from our mistakes. If there is a misunderstanding, our retreat does not enable us to use the experience to become more effective in our communication. Nevertheless, we often gain from experience and our greatest learning comes from our mistakes.

### Loving the Lord with the mind

In conclusion, we see from Scripture that the core purpose of our mind as a faculty of understanding, feeling and desiring is to wholeheartedly love the Lord our God. His Spirit empowers our mind to have that faculty to perceive, judge, or discern calmly and impartially. However, this is not an avenue for any form of pride, but we are to have a wise mind and think modestly of ourselves. In our response to the Lord in the context of mission, as in our ministry and service, we are to grasp God's perspective with our mind and make it our own. Let us, therefore, make the most of our learning, and use our minds effectively to establish a credible Christian witness in the public sphere rather than let our minds stagnate by using them only in playing computer games.

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16 Milena Jesenská, 'On the Art of Standing Still', in Margarete Buber-Neumann, *Milena: The Story of a Remarkable Woman* (New York, Schocken Books, originally published in German in 1977. Translation copy in 1988), p. 151.

### The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology

Editor: Colin Brown

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