

Fit Bodies, Fat Minds: Why Evangelicals Don't Think and What to Do about It by Os Guinness, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1994) (45 Quotes selected by Doug Nichols)

1. Danger of Anti-intellectualism

At root, evangelical anti-intellectualism is both a scandal and a sin. It is a scandal in the sense of being an offense and a stumbling block that needlessly hinders serious people from considering the Christian faith and coming to Christ. It is a sin because it is a refusal, contrary to the first of Jesus' two great commandments, to love the Lord our God with our minds. As Ambassador Charles Malik warned in his incisive address at the dedication of the Billy Graham Center at Wheaton College in 1980, speaking as an Orthodox believer to evangelicals, "I must be frank with you: the greatest danger besetting American Evangelical Christianity is the danger of anti-intellectualism. The mind as to its greatest and deepest reaches is not cared for enough."² [pp. 10-11] ². Charles Malik, *THE TWO TASKS* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1980), p. 33.

2. Cultural Imitators and Adapters

Failing to think Christianly, evangelicals have been forced into the role of cultural imitators and adapters rather than originators. In biblical terms, it is to be worldly and conformist not decisively Christian. [pp 14]

3. Criticism of Evangelical Anti-intellectualism

Critics of evangelical anti-intellectualism commonly cite four great facts of our shame. First, no general evangelical magazine of serious ideas exists. Second, no cogent case for the Christian faith has been written by a living evangelical that can be confidently given to a serious non-Christian reader. Third, there is no evangelical university worthy of the name that has a program of graduate studies on a par with other major universities. Fourth, there has been no generally accepted, constructive formulation of an evangelical public philosophy for the last hundred years. [pp 14]

4. Evangelicals Exceed National Average Not Completing 8th Grade

Those more educated now tend to be significantly less religious; those more religious tend to be significantly less educated. For example, evangelicals are the only religious group in America that exceeds the national average of those not completing the eighth grade or high school. At the same time only 24.2 percent of evangelicals achieve some university training, compared with 68 percent of non-Christians. [pp 16]

5. Tribes People, Not Citizens

Thirty-four percent of academics rated evangelicals as a menace to democracy, compared with only 14 percent who saw any danger from racists, the Ku Klux Klan, or Nazis.⁷

Without a clear commitment to a common vision for the common good, evangelicals are vulnerable to the charge that we are tribes people rather than citizens--or as the charge has been leveled, that our real concern is not justice but 'just us." [pp 17] ⁷ See THE WILLIAMSBURG CHARTER SURVEY ON RELIGION AND PUBLIC LIFE (Washington, D.C.: The Williamsburg Charter Foundation, 1988).

6. Christian Centers Less Strategic

... evangelicals have concentrated their power in the peripheries of modern society rather than the center. Whereas, for example, the Jewish community has concentrated its strength wisely and strategically in such cities as New York, Los Angeles, and Chicago, evangelicals have chosen to do so in less strategic centers, such as Wheaton, Colorado Springs, and Orlando. The 1977 shift of the Christianity Today office from Washington, D.C., to Carol Stream, Illinois, is the epitome of this attitude.) [pp 17]

7. Change Society through Culture

... evangelicals have sought to change society through politics rather than through changing the culture. Not only does this recent position reverse the traditional emphasis on transforming society through changing individuals, but it comes at a time when many people acknowledge that politics cannot touch many of the deepest crises in society. These crises are now termed cultural and "pre-political." [pp 17]

8. Protest Rather than Persuasion

Evangelicals have chosen to rely on a rhetoric of protest, pronouncement, and picketing rather than persuasion. This is despite the fact that the nature of the gospel, the precedents of our history, and the challenges of contemporary pluralism combine to make the winning of hearts and minds an urgent priority. [pp 18]

9. Danger in Reforming the Christian Mind

There are unquestionable dangers in this call to reform the Christian mind. First is the age-old pitfall concerning the principle of the matter. Mounting an attack on evangelical anti-intellectualism almost automatically releases a cloud of darkly

unhelpful attitudes toward thinking. Anyone who makes such a call must be guilty of superiority, it is feared. Any who heed the call surely suffer from snobbery. All who resist the call are clearly victims of reverse-snobbery. Any who stand back detached because they have seen it all before are obviously guilty of cynicism. [pp 19]

10. Puritans – the Golden Age

Evangelicals are often surprised that one of the greatest examples of a Christian mind was at the very beginning of the American story when conditions were most precarious and least settled-the Puritan movement. For Christians, no past age is ever a Golden Age, but in this case the first is-thus far-the best. [pp 22]

11. Satan Uses Ignorance of Men

Whereas, says the law, "Satan, the enemy of mankind, finds his strongest weapons in the ignorance of men, and whereas it is important that the wisdom of our fathers shall not remain buried in their tombs, and whereas the education of children is one of the prime concerns of the state, with the aid of the Lord ... "

Tocqueville's conclusion is a glorious tribute to the Christian mind of the Puritans: "In America religion is the road to knowledge and the observance of divine laws leads man to civil freedom." [po 23] ¹. Alexis de Tocqueville, *DEMOCRACY IN AMERICA*, vol. 1 (New York: Vintage, 1945), p. 43.

12. After Settling, Puritans Focused on Learning

The same commitment is abundantly clear in *New England's First Fruits* (1643), the Puritan explanation of what led to the founding of Harvard College:

After God had carried us safe to New England, and we had builded our houses, provided necessaries for our livelihood, rear'd convenient places for God's worship, and settled the Civill Government; One of the next things we longed for, and looked after was to advance Learning and perpetuate it to Posterity; dreading to have an illiterate Ministry to the Churches, when our present Ministers shall lie in the Dust."² [p.23] ². Quoted in Sydney E. Ahlstrom, *A RELIGIOUS HISTORY OF THE AMERICAN PEOPLE*, vol. I (Garden City, N.Y.: Image, 1975, p. 198.

13. No Other Community Honored Study

Historian Richard Hofstadter gives an equally ringing tribute to the Puritans in his classic work *Anti-Intellectualism in American Life*. Known for not mincing his words

about the baleful influence of evangelicalism on thinking, he praises the Puritans. "It is doubtful that any community ever had more faith in the value of learning and intellect than Massachusetts Bay." Indeed, Hofstadter continues, citing an earlier historian,

In its inception, New England was not an agricultural community, nor a manufacturing community, nor a trading community: it was a thinking community; an arena and mart for ideas; its characteristic organ being not the hand, nor the heart, nor the pocket, but the brain Probably no other community of pioneers ever so honored study, so revered the symbols and instruments of learning.³ [pp 23-24] ³ Richard Hofstadter, ANTI-INTELLECTUALISM IN AMERICAN LIFE (New York: Vintage, 1962), p. 59.

14. The Secular Mind Has Expanded

To our shame it is the secular mind, not the Christian mind, that has expanded most fruitfully in the settled conditions of later times. There is a grand irony in the fact that we evangelicals are citizens in a republic whose revolution was led by intellectuals and are disciples in a community of faith whose reformation was led by intellectuals-yet we are the epitome of anti-intellectualism and proud of it. [pp24]

15. Polarization of Truth

The first influence that helped to undermine what was left of the Puritan mind and leave its mark on evangelicalism is the polarization of truth, in the sense of a false antagonism between heart and mind. To be sure, no one in the fallen world-believer or unbeliever-has the capacity to hold God's truth in its entirety. As the Apostle Paul wrote to the Romans, the unbeliever "holds the truth in unrighteousness." If no unbeliever is totally wrong or completely evil-because the truth is inextinguishable-no believer has the full truth by the scruff of the neck. Holding the truth in a sinful manner, our grasp is always incomplete, however conscientious or hardworking we may be. In Martin Luther's picture, we are like a drunken peasant clambering onto his donkey from one side only to tumble off the other. [p.28]

16. Creation Belongs to Christ

As the great Calvinist prime minister and pastor Abraham Kuyper was to express it later in Holland, "There is not one square inch of the entire creation about which Jesus Christ does not cry out, "This is mine! This belongs to me!"¹ [p.29] ¹. Quoted in Richard J. Mouw, UNCOMMON DECENCY (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1992), p. 145.

17. Faith at the Expense of Learning

... when the First Great Awakening occurred, many people emphasized one of the two poles at the expense of the other—faith, with its warm heart, experience, and fervor usually being favored at the expense of learning and a sharp mind.

There were, of course, magnificent exceptions even then. Jonathan Edwards, for example, ranks as one of America's finest thinkers in his or any age. And his was a style of thinking rooted in worship and suffused with deep devotion, combining the old Puritan's regard for doctrine with the new revivalists' passion for deep experience. [pp 29]

18. Heart versus Head

More often we evangelicals choose a good thing but in a bad way because we choose at the expense of another good thing. In terms of a Christian mind, we evangelicals characteristically pit "heart" versus "head" and opt for heart as the more spiritual choice. [pp 30]

19. Faith Without Theology

The trouble was that after the movement of revivalistic pietism swept by, evangelicalism had also become anti-intellectual and anti-theological to a fault. Examples of this anti-theological anti-intellectualism abound. "My theology!" Dwight L. Moody said later, "I didn't know I had any."⁶ "If I had a creed," Sam Jones, the Moody of the South, added, "I would sell it to a museum."⁷ Billy Sunday did not "know any more about theology," he used to boast, "than a jack-rabbit knew about ping pong."⁸

Faith without theology? Creeds fit only for a museum? Theology at a jack-rabbit level something to brag about? The statements themselves are flamboyantly brash; the assumptions behind them appalling. But they reveal our evangelical anti-intellectualism beyond any contradiction. [p.38]

⁶ Quoted in Hofstadter, *ANTI-INTELLECTUALISM IN AMERICAN LIFE*, p. 108.

⁷ Quoted in Ahlstrom, *A RELIGIOUS HISTORY OF THE AMERICAN PEOPLE*, vol. II, p. 204.

⁸ Quoted in William G. McLoughlin, *BILLY SUNDAY WAS HIS REAL NAME* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1955), p. 123.

20. No Longer a People of Truth

Thus our evangelical experience has become our strength and our weakness. We are people with a true, sometimes a deep experience of God. But we are no longer people of truth. Only rarely are we serious about theology at a popular level. We are still suspicious of thinking and scholarship. We are still attracted to movements that replace thinking and theology by other emphases—relational, therapeutic, charismatic, and managerial (as in church growth). Some of our ministries and organizations that operate at the highest levels of national life are still deeply, explicitly, and persistently anti-intellectual. [pp 38]

21. Yale President Attacks Populism

... in his inaugural sermon Timothy Dwight, president of Yale College and grandson of Jonathan Edwards, did not attack deism but populism.

Dwight's assault was on those "who declare, both in their language and conduct, that the desk ought to be yielded up to the occupancy of Ignorance. While they demand a seven-year apprenticeship, for the purpose of learning to make a shoe, or an axe, they suppose the system of Providence, together with the numerous, and frequently abstruse, doctrines and precepts, contained in the Scriptures, may all be comprehended without learning, labor, or time."⁶ [p.47] ⁶ Quoted in Hatch, *THE DEMOCRATIZATION OF AMERICAN CHRISTIANITY*, p.19.

22. No Great Native Protestant Thinkers

But this nation has had almost no great native Protestant thinkers and theologians since Jonathan Edwards. Populism is the principal reason why. As the Pentecostal leader A. J. Tomlinson claimed, "We have the Bible for everything, and we have no creeds, rituals, or articles of faith."⁷

In the face of such nonsense in our heritage, our task is plain. We evangelicals must assess our populist heritage realistically and take a more discerning stand against its liabilities. Otherwise we will perpetuate its limitations, fatally handicap ourselves in a world of experts and elites that is not congenial to populism, and never enter into the profundity of the simple faith that is ours. [pp 48] ⁷ Quoted in Hatch, *THE DEMOCRATIZATION OF AMERICAN CHRISTIANITY*, p. 215.

23. America, a Nation of Behavers, not Believers

.. .in historian Martin E. Marty's description, America is religiously speaking a "nation of behavers" rather than believers. Truth is commonly regarded as divisive, clarity of distinctions is not prized, and serious thinking is reckoned unnecessary. One irony is often pointed out: "heresy," which is clearly defined and arguably a matter of eternal consequence, has become less important to the average American Protestant than "un-American," a concept defined nowhere and unarguably of lesser importance to the believer. [pp. 53-54]

24. "Will it work? Overshadows "Is it True?"

The overall result of such different trends as prosperity piety, positive thinking, engineered revivalism, and the church-growth movement has been to stamp pragmatism indelibly on the evangelical soul. The concern "Will it work?" has long overshadowed "Is it true?" Theology has given way to technique. Know-whom has faded before know-how. Serving God has subtly been deformed into servicing the self. At its worst, the result is a shift from faith to the "faith in faith," which-along with faith in religion-is a perniciously distinctive American heresy. But even at its best, pragmatism results in an evangelicalism rich in ingenuity and organization but poor in spirituality and superficial, if not banal, in doctrine. We have become the worldliest Christians in America. [po 59]

25. No Literary Aristocracy

Many common people in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries had a knowledge of Shakespeare and the Bible that people today would view as the preserve of the literary scholar or theologian. There simply was no literary aristocracy. By 1772, Jacob Duche' could write, "The poorest laborer upon the shores of the Delaware thinks himself entitled to deliver his sentiment on matters of religion or politics with as much freedom as the gentleman or scholar ... Such is the prevailing taste for books of every kind, that almost every man is a reader."⁴ [pp 72] ⁴ Quoted in Neil Postman, *AMUSING OURSELVES TO DEATH* (New York: Viking, 1985), p. 34.

26. Literacy, the Level of 12-yr-olds

George Steiner describes the result of modern mass education as "semi-literacy."⁵ The ability to read is widespread, but the inability to read any but the shallowest texts is equally widespread. He cites recent estimates that put the literacy of more than half the

population of the United States at the level of twelve-year-olds. Steiner concludes: "Such semi- or sub-literacy is not being eradicated by mass-schooling: it is being made politically and psychologically acceptable."⁶ [pp 72] George Steiner, EXTRATERRITORIAL (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968), p. 168. Ibid.

27. US Founding by Intellectuals

From its beginning until well into the nineteenth century, American thinking and discourse was as dominated both by the printed word and by speech shaped by the printed word as any society in history. Seventeenth-century America was an extremely literate society. The founding of the United States in the eighteenth century was successfully led by intellectuals, which itself is a rare occurrence. [pp 77]

28. Leading Away from Knowledge

"Disinformation does not mean false information. It means misleading information-misplaced, irrelevant, fragmented, or superficial information-information that creates the illusion of knowing something, but which in fact leads one away from knowing."⁵ [pp 78] ⁵ Postman, AMUSING OURSELVES TO DEATH, p. 107.

29. TV Mutilated Solitude

Italian film director Federico Fellini, for example, charged that "Television has mutilated our capacity for solitude. It has violated our most intimate, private, and secret dimension." ⁸ [pp. 79-80] ⁸. Quoted in Jacques Ellul, TECHNOLOGICAL BLUFF, p. 339.

30. We Are Buying What We Don't Need

"Advertising," says the cynic, "is the art of getting people to buy what they don't need by describing it in ways they know are not true." Yet advertising is not only as inescapable as death and taxes, it is central to American life as in no other society. By the age of twenty, we are told, the average American has seen about eight hundred thousand advertisements on television alone--or about eight hundred a week. This does not include countless others seen and heard through radio, print, billboards, and other forms of advertising. [pp 81]

31. Preoccupied with Style

... preoccupation with style undermines Christian speech of all kind. Christian speaking on both the individual and public levels was once the art of communicating the

understanding of truth and ideas. Increasingly it has become a matter of performance and even of pretense—for example, the use of the "ghost-written sermon," an anti-evangelical contradiction in terms if ever there was one.

Surveys show that only eight percent of an American audience pays attention to the content of a speech, 42 percent to the speaker's appearance, and 50 percent to how the person speaks.⁷ Style has overpowered substance. As one consultant puts it, "Animation is the greatest cosmetic in the world." Neither the unprepossessing Apostle Paul nor his content-packed, reformation-triggering letter to the Romans appear to stand much chance under these conditions. [pp.92-93] ⁷ Quoted in Stuart Ewen, *ALL CONSUMING IMAGES: THE POLITICS OF STYLE IN CONTEMPORARY CULTURE* (New York: Basic Books, 1988), p. 260-261.

32. Christians Side with the Image, not Truth

Many Christians have deserted their two-thousand-year commitment to words and have sided with the triumphant image. Not so much because of their birthdate, perhaps. They have turned to the image either because they have been unknowingly influenced by the general cultural tide or because of high-minded commitments to such notions as "seeker-friendly" and "audience driven." The first say, "Isn't this the world we live in?" And the second say, "How else will we reach people in an image-dominated age." [p.96]

33 . Everything Becomes Chaos without Meaning

... this stress on words is only because words are what we are. Created by a word speaking God, human beings are word speaking people. Unless words have meaning, everything becomes chaos. Unless words have power, everything becomes barren. In Hebrew, the Ten Commandments are "the ten words." For the Jews, the heroism of Moses is partly that of an instinctive man of action who was not "a man of words," but whom God transformed into "the man who learned to speak." ¹⁰ [p.97] ¹⁰. David J. Wolpe, *IN SPEECH AND IN SILENCE: THE JEWISH QUEST FOR GOD* (New York: Henry Holt, 1992), p. 78.

34. Words and the Word Linked

Our Puritan forebears would have been at home with this view. For them words and the Word were linked. Perhaps the most literate people in the history of the world, they gained their ideas and shaped their tough-minded thinking from one chief source---the

sermon. Historian Harry Stout of Yale University estimates that the average New Englander heard seven thousand sermons in a lifetime-about fifteen thousand hours of concentrated listening. There were no competing voices, he points out, so the sermon was an even more influential medium than television is today.

Such tough-mindedness about words is rare in Protestant circles today. Our piety is soft-minded, even sentimental. But our best writers on the subject have warned us clearly enough. "Anyone wishing to save humanity today," wrote Jacques Ellul, "must first of all save the word."¹¹ (A century ago Soren Kierkegaard noted the beginning of the process. The Christian faith had become so diluted that what was needed "was to win back the lost power and meaning of words."¹² [p.98] ¹¹. Ellul, THE HUMILIATION OF THE WORD, p. 254. ¹². Quoted in Perry D. LeFevre, ed., THE PRAYERS OF KIERKEGAARD (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1956), p. 132.

35. Idolatry Is Everywhere

The link between images and idolatry is critical. Camille Paglia openly celebrates the triumph of the image as the return of paganism and idolatry- "We are steeped in idolatry. The sacred is everywhere. I don't see anti-secularism. We've returned to the age of polytheism. It's a rebirth of the pagan gods."¹³ But too many evangelicals forget the biblical link between image, sin, and idolatry. They do not realize how our image-dominant culture is both essentially religious and decisively harmful to Christian notions of truth and falsehood. [pp 99] ¹³. "She Wants her TV! He Wants his Book!" HARPER'S, March 1991, p. 47.

36. Christians Are the Custodians of Faith

But perhaps postmodernism's main challenge to the church is to our central mission as Christians: following Christ and making him Lord in all of life. The church cannot become simply another customer center that offers designer religion and catalogue spirituality to the hoppers and shoppers of the modern world. Followers of Christ are custodians of the faith passed on down the running centuries. Never must we allow anyone outside or inside the church to become cannibals who devour the truth and meaning of this priceless heritage of faith. Letting the church be the church and the gospel be the gospel is integral to letting God be God. [pp. 110]

37. Concern for Truth Has Degenerated

With the use of e-mail, fax machines, and desktop publishing as well as radio and television, what were once the "rent-a-mob" propaganda tactics of the left-wing can now be marshaled against any Christian leader, speaker, or writer with whom one disagrees. In the process a genuine Christian concern for truth, orthodoxy, fidelity, and accountability has degenerated into vile campaigns of rumor, slander, disinformation, and vilification. Where talk-show truth at the more benign level represents a shift from exposition to entertainment, the malignant version is a shift from exposition to expose that is typical of the tabloid press at its worst and utterly unworthy of a community that bears the name of Christ. [pp. 119]

38. Generational Identifications Are Distorted

Modern generational awareness is trivial when compared with the biblical understanding. Christians should therefore think twice before picking up the categories, either as a serious effort in identification or as a bid to be relevant, up-to-date, or "seeker friendly." For one thing, generational identifications are too often distorting. Vague and simplistic at their best, they can easily pander to those too lazy to think for themselves and create a reductionist form of labeling. [pp 123]

39. Christ's Truth Influences Everything

A common error about the Christian mind is the notion that it is only about belief and doctrine. As we shall see, it is about far, far more. The Christian mind bears on everything that Christ's truth bears upon-which is quite simply everything, including the very distinctive and vital biblical sense of time.

There are important convergences between the Christian and the contemporary views of time. But there are also major differences. Not to recognize their differences is to fall for another of the bewitching pressures of our culture. Christians can learn much from the restiveness of the "twenty something" young person frustrated at being pinned down and exploited as Generation Hex. [pp. 124]

40. Conform No Longer to this World

Many evangelicals were rightly shocked and incensed at the liberal Protestant "Re-imagining," the "Global Theological Conference by Women" held in Minneapolis in 1993. Presentations deriding orthodoxy and denying the atonement of Jesus Christ, a standing ovation for lesbians, a service of milk and honey to the goddess Sophia-what

is left of "mainline Protestantism" was flaunting some of the vilest heresies that have ever reared their heads in the church of Christ in two thousand years.

Yet what many evangelicals fail to recognize and protest is the similar movement growing in conservative circles. Listen carefully to the Faith teachers. The theology, politics, and cultural style are different, but the heresy, blasphemy, and weirdness are the same. Paganism is growing up in our churches. Speculative gnosticism is resurgent in our own circles. A horror of great darkness is welling up in our own house. Yet judging by the way heresy is published and marketed by respected evangelical houses and watched and read by millions of good evangelical viewers and readers, we evangelicals love to have it so. And this is only the beginning of the degradation of evangelical thinking that is coming unless we experience reformation.

Our task, as followers of Christ, is not easy but it is clear: The challenge, in St. Paul's words, is to "not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind." Thus the currents are swift and the pressures strong, but a focus on the negative is far from negative. It is the first step to the most glorious positive of all, having the mind of Christ. [pp 131] ⁶ Romans 12:2.

41. Love God with Our Minds

The first step in reformation is repentance. We evangelicals need to confess individually and collectively that we have betrayed the Great Commandment to love God with our minds. We need to confess that we have given ourselves up to countless forms of unutterable folly. God has given us minds, but many of us have left them underdeveloped or undeveloped. God has given us education, beyond that of most people in human history, but we have used it for other ends. God has given us great exemplars of thinking in Christian history, but we have ignored them or admired them for other virtues. God has given us opportunities, but we have failed to grasp them because we have refused to think them through before him. [pp. 133-134]

42. Affirm that Christ is Lord of All

What matters is not the term but the substance and spirit of the truth. Is it not absurd to affirm that Jesus Christ is Lord of all, the Alpha and the Omega, our creator, redeemer, and judge, the source, guide, and goal of all there is, and yet not be decisive over our minds and thinking? Evangelicals who rightly glory in all the new things in the gospel—a new birth, a new people, new powers, and a new age—must reinsert the vital,

missing component of "new minds." Nowhere are the lordship of Christ and the power of the gospel more needed at the beginning and more glorious at the end. [pp. 136]

43. Think Christianly as an Act of Obedience

The fifth step in reformation is a commitment to thinking Christianly as a form of active obedience. Like every other part of the Christian life, thinking Christianly is active and demanding. It is neither easy nor automatic. St. Paul writes to the Corinthians that "we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ."¹⁵ Thus thinking Christianly is inevitably moment by moment, question by question, issue by issue, point by point, and thought by thought. As Oswald Chambers wrote, "God will not make me think like Jesus, I have to do it myself; I have to bring every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ."¹⁶ [pp 140] ¹⁵. 2 Corinthians 10: 5. ¹⁶. Oswald Chambers, MY UTMOST FOR HIS HIGHEST, June 14 (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1935), p. 166.

44. Study Classically as a Spiritual Discipline

Thinking Christianly is premised only on the fear of the Lord that is the beginning of wisdom. Likewise, it proceeds only when we rely continually on God's word and Spirit. It always operates with the awareness of the supernatural source and dimensions of false thinking. As Paul writes to the Christians in Corinth, "For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of this world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. 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."²⁰ Much of today's Christian scholarship would be transformed simply by returning to the classical notion of study as a spiritual discipline. [pp 143] ²⁰.2 Corinthians 10:3-5.

45. Community of Christ Is Diverse

The ... more common form of particularism stems from a false desire for uniformity in the realm of practice-the fallacy that if we all think Christianly we will all behave the same way. For one thing the idea itself is false. On the one hand, the community of Christ is diverse, not uniform. Uniformity therefore denies the proper place of freedom and diversity. On the other hand, our highest accomplishments in this life are provisional, not final. Our best thinking and behavior is therefore not fully, finally Christian, but only more or less Christian than it was previously.

For another thing, applying the idea of uniformity is disastrous because it leads inevitably to legalism and judgmentalism. There is only a short and easy step from "This is the Christian way" to "There is only one Christian way" to "Anything different from this way is not Christian" to "All those who differ from my way are not Christians." Far too many a letter from one Christian to another has begun in reality or in spirit, "Dear former brother/sister in Christ."

The fallacy of particularism stems from the fact that God has not spoken definitively to us about everything. Obviously he did not intend to. Thus if it is an error for some Christians to make relative what God has made absolute, it is equally an error for others to make absolute what God has left relative. Put differently, where God has not spoken definitively we can legitimately say "This conclusion (or policy or lifestyle) is not Christian." But it is not legitimate to go further and say, "This conclusion (or policy or lifestyle) alone is Christian."

We must all think Christianly, but for that very reason we must not all think the same way. There is no one Christian form of politics any more than there is one Christian form of poetry, raising a family, or planning a retirement. Again, many ways are definitely not Christian, but no one way alone is. Diversity rather than uniformity is a direct consequence of Christian freedom as well as Christian fallibility. Helmut Thielicke, the German theologian and ethicist, was right to ask, "Do we not have to respect the fact that under the shadow of forgiveness different decisions are possible and different liberties and loyalties may exist?"²¹ [pp. 144-145] ²¹. Helmut Thielicke, *THEOLOGICAL ETHICS*, vol. I (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1979), p. 622.