

THE TRINITY REVIEW

For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh, for the weapons of our warfare [are] not fleshly but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ. And they will be ready to punish all disobedience, when your obedience is fulfilled. (2 Corinthians 10:3-6)

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Thinking Biblically

by John W. Robbins

Editor's Note: With the recent Supreme Court decision rejecting the Creator's definition of marriage – the calling of good evil and evil good, and with Biblical Truth and morality rejected, scorned, and mocked, it appears that our society has gone mad. Unfortunately things aren't much better in the church, which has rejected "the more sure prophetic word" (2 Peter 1:19) for a host of pitiful substitutes. The need of the moment is that we think Biblically. Dr. Robbins addressed this in "The Church Irrational":

The Bible provides several answers to the question: Why do people lack discernment? The fundamental answer, the will of God, is an unpopular and an unpalatable answer, and modern men will not hear it. The pagan Greeks and Romans had several similar proverbs: "Whom the gods would destroy, they first make mad." Publius Syrius (42 BC) wrote: "Whom Fortune wishes to destroy she first makes mad." Lycurgus (820 BC) wrote: "When falls on man the anger of the gods/First from his mind they banish understanding." The seventeenth-century English poet John Dryden echoed these proverbs in The Hind and the Panther (1687): "For those whom God to ruin has designed/He fits for fate, and first destroys their mind." Removing the pagan meanings from the sayings, we arrive at some pretty sound theology: "Whom God wishes to destroy he first makes foolish." Or to put it another way, "Whom God wishes to destroy, he first makes undiscerning."

This Review is taken from Dr. Robbins' lectures on Thinking Biblically, specifically Lectures 1-3: "What

Is Thinking?" "The Attack on Thinking," and "Why Think Biblically?" The lectures have been transcribed and edited for print.

What Is Thinking?

Why should we think? Does the Scripture command us to think? The Bible has much to say about thinking.

First, a quotation from Bertrand Russell who was not a Christian, but was nonetheless a very clever man. He wrote, "Many people would sooner die than think. In fact, they do." That is actually the case. Many people spend their entire lives avoiding thought. There are many distractions of the world, and many amuse themselves to death with entertainment, movies, and so forth, just to avoid thought. People engage in these things just to avoid a serious thought their whole lives.

The Definition of Thinking

How does the dictionary define thinking? Merriam-Webster's 7th edition, which is the last edition one can recommend, defines the verb "to think" as,

1. To form or have in mind.
2. To intend or plan.
3. To have an opinion or to regard as.
4. To reflect on, to ponder.

The list goes on until definition nine which is,

9. To subject to the processes of logical thought.

The intransitive verb is defined as, “To exercise the powers of judgment, conception, or inference, *i.e.* reason, to have the mind engaged in reflection, to meditate.” It is mostly that form of the verb “to think” that concerns us.

The Bible uses the word “think” many times. In the *King James Version*, the English words “think” or “thought” (and their cognates) occur 209 times. However, there are many words in Scripture with similar meaning. For example, cognates of the word “understand” occur 291 times, “judge” 674 times, and “know” 1,454 times. There are also words such as: *consider, reason, reckon, meditate*, and others. All of these words convey the general meaning to make judgments, to reason, to subject to the processes of logical thought. Meditation will be discussed later, and Biblical meditation will be distinguished from Eastern meditation.

Animals Do Not Think

With a working definition of *thinking* as “to make judgments, to reason, to subject to the processes of logical thought,” it is clear that thinking is not equivalent to being conscious. Thinking is not mere awareness. A dog is conscious. A dog is not a machine as the French philosopher thought. In fact, the Bible describes animals as having souls. They are conscious. They are aware. They have what philosophers call “sentience.” However, animals do not think. They are conscious, they are aware, but they do not think. A dog does not plan what he is going to do tomorrow. A dog cannot add $2 + 2$. A dog cannot come up with a theorem in geometry. A dog does not think.

In recent years, we have heard a great deal about people who allege that animals do think and they stomp their foot when they say it, much like Clever Hans did. At the turn of the last century there was a German fellow who owned a horse and the horse could do arithmetic. He could add, subtract, multiply, and divide. He could even answer questions about music. He learned all these things because his master had developed a table in which he gave a numeric equivalent of every letter in the alphabet. So, in addition to mathematical calculations, he could spell out words by stomping with his foot. This created quite a sensation in the early part of the 20th century and he earned the nickname of “Clever Hans.” Obviously, he did not have the apparatus in his throat to speak, but he could stomp his foot and answer questions. It is doubtful if there are any clever horses

around, but today there are dolphins, gorillas, apes, *etc.*, which are alleged to understand, to think, to reason, and to give correct answers. That these animals can do this is a very common theory among some zoologists, but animals do not think.

Look at a description of animals in *Jude 10*, “But these speak evil of whatever they do not know; and whatever they know naturally, *like brute beasts*, in these things they corrupt themselves.” In the English translations it is usually translated as “brute animals” or “brute beasts.” The Greek word behind the English word “brute” is *αλογία* and means “without speech” or “without reason” or “without logic.” There are many other verses that teach the same thing.

Returning to human beings, thinking is not daydreaming. Daydreaming is not thinking; it may be imagining things, remembering things, or wishing things, but it is not planning, calculating, or subjecting thoughts to logical processes. Thinking involves understanding.

There is a Far Side cartoon of what a dog hears when his master is talking to him... “Blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, *Fido*, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah.” That is what the dog hears. However, the dog does not even hear that much. The dog hears a sound that he recognizes. It may be *Rover*, or *Fido*, or some other sound, but he does not understand. He does not have a concept of himself. He does not have a concept of the idea of name, that things have names. He does not rise to the level of understanding. He hears a sound that he has heard before, and he knows that if he does certain things when he hears that sound, like wag his tail, or come running, or whatever it might be, he is going to be patted on the head, or given a treat, or something of that sort. So the dog hears a sound in the middle of “Blah, blah, blah, blah” and he responds to that sound by wagging his tail, and that is it. He does not have understanding.

The Scripture says in many verses that the animals do not understand, and that is a clue to what the image of God is. Certainly, they do not analyze. Thinking involves analysis, not simply understanding the words. A speaker speaks English and the audience understands the words. They analyze what is being said. They may analyze the speaker’s words and think, “That is not right because of such and such.” The audience is trying to come up with answers why, or reasons why what the speaker is saying is right or wrong. Notice that the word *reason* keeps surfacing. They are analyzing these things. They are making connections between one idea and another idea. They

are drawing inferences. If a person does these things for any length of time, he is thinking.

Most basic of all, thinking involves words. Words tag thoughts. We use words to refer to ideas. We have an idea of a domestic animal with a long tail at one end and a meow at the other end and we use the word “cat” to tag that thought. If we have an idea of an object in the front yard that is vertical and is brown on the bottom and green on the top, we use the word “tree” to tag that thought. Thinking involves words. It is impossible for us to think without words. Words are expressions of thought.

Animals do not know words. They do not understand. They do not analyze. They do not draw inferences. They do not subject what they hear to logical analysis because, as the Scripture says, they are without logic. They are without reason.

The Westminster Confession and the *Larger Catechism*, echoing Scripture, refers to the animals as having souls. However, animals do not have rational souls, but men do. Animals do not. Man is not an animal. There is quite a difference between them.

Some other verses in Scripture teaching that man is a thinking being in contrast to animals are *Psalms* 32:9, *Psalms* 73:22, *Proverbs* 26:3, and *2 Peter* 2:16.

God Thinks

Who thinks? Persons think. It is thinking that makes a person. God thinks. Look at *Jeremiah* 29:11, “For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the LORD, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope.” For I know the thoughts that I think toward you.... God not only thinks, He knows what He thinks. Another verse about God thinking is *Psalms* 40:17, “But I am poor and needy; Yet the LORD thinks upon me. You are my help and my deliverer; Do not delay, O my God.”

Some verses that use the word “remember” instead of “think” are *Nehemiah* 5:19, “My God, remember Tobiah and Sanballat, according to these their works, and the prophetess Noadiah and the rest of the prophets who would have made me afraid.” Also *Nehemiah* 6:14, “Remember me, my God, for good, according to all that I have done for this people.”

Man Thinks

Man thinks. There are many verses that demonstrate this. *Proverbs* 23:6-7a, “Do not eat the bread of a miser, Nor desire his delicacies; For as he thinks in his heart, so is he.” Notice here that it is the *heart* that thinks. *Second Samuel* 18:27, “So the watchman said,

‘I think the running of the first is like the running of Ahimaaz the son of Zadok.’ And the king said, ‘He is a good man, and comes with good news.’” Here the watchman expresses an opinion. He knows how Ahimaaz runs. He sees a figure running in the distance that has the same gate, and he reaches the conclusion that this is Ahimaaz running. The king also reaches a conclusion that good news is coming.

The New Testament gives some commands pertaining to thinking. John the Baptist commands the Pharisees not to think, not to think a certain thought. In *Matthew* 3:9 he says, “and do not think to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father.’ For I say to you that God is able to raise up children to Abraham from these stones.” See also *Matthew* 9:1, 2: “So He got into a boat, crossed over, and came to His own city. Then behold, they brought to Him a paralytic lying on a bed. When Jesus saw their faith, He said to the paralytic, ‘Son, be of good cheer; your sins are forgiven you.’ And at once some of the scribes said within themselves, ‘This Man blasphemes!’” Christ says “Son, be of good cheer; your sins are forgiven you.” Then some of the scribes conclude, “This Man blasphemes!” The Scribes had made a judgment. They concluded that Christ had blasphemed. The unstated argument that they used to arrive at this conclusion can be constructed. It involves the unstated premise that Jesus Christ is only a mere man. This premise denies Christ’s deity. Their argument goes like this: Because only God can forgive sins, and this is a mere man, therefore this man blasphemes.

Notice the response of Jesus in verse 4, “But Jesus, knowing their thoughts, said, ‘Why do you think evil in your hearts?’” Jesus knows their thoughts. He knows their conclusion. He knows the argument by which they arrived at that conclusion. Just for the record, this argument is logically valid. Only God can forgive sins, and this is a mere man, therefore this man blasphemes. The conclusion is false because one of the premises is false. The premise, this is a mere man, is false. There is a false conclusion, because there is a false premise.

Also, notice the phrase, “they said within themselves.” Frequently in Scripture, thinking is described as saying within oneself. *They said within themselves, this man blasphemes. And Jesus knowing their thoughts....* Jesus is the second Person of the Trinity. He is omniscient. He knows all things, including the thoughts of the scribes. He says, *Why do you think evil in your hearts?* Besides learning that it

is the *heart* that thinks, we should also learn that it is possible to think *evil* thoughts. There are many philosophers today, as well as many who are not philosophers, who deny that it is possible to have an evil thought. In their minds, evil can only be some outward action. That is not true. It is clear from Scripture that there is such a thing as evil thoughts and here Christ refers to them.

Matthew 17:24, 25 states, “When they had come to Capernaum, those who received the temple tax came to Peter and said, ‘Does your Teacher not pay the temple tax?’ He said, ‘Yes.’ And when he had come into the house, Jesus anticipated him, saying, ‘What do you think, Simon? From whom do the kings of the earth take customs or taxes, from their sons or from strangers?’” Jesus is asking a question that is requiring Simon to think. What do you think? Who is required to pay taxes? Simon has to give it some thought and then he answers. There are many other questions like that in Scripture.

In *John* 5:39, 40, Christ is reprimanding the Pharisees again. He says, “You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me. But you are not willing to come to Me that you may have life.” In this case they are holding an opinion, which they think they have derived from the Scriptures—that they have eternal life. However, they do not understand the Scriptures so Jesus tells them to search the Scriptures and clues them on what they should find in them.

In *Matthew* 16:15, *Mark* 8:29, and *Luke* 9:20, Jesus asks the disciples, “Who do you think I am?” There are many questions like that in Scripture. For example, in *Luke* 10:36, after telling the parable of the Good Samaritan, Jesus asks His hearers, “So which of these three do you think was neighbor to him who fell among the thieves?”

In *Matthew* 6:7 Jesus comments on a heathen misconception about prayer, “And when you pray, do not use vain repetitions as the heathen do. For they think that they will be heard for their many words.”

In *Acts* 17:29 Paul tells the pagan philosophers that they ought not to think certain things about God, “Therefore, since we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Divine Nature is like gold or silver or stone, something shaped by art and man’s devising.”

Some verses use words that are synonymous for “think,” like “reason” or “meditate” as in *Psalms* 1:1, 2: “Blessed is the man Who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, Nor stands in the path of sinners, Nor

sits in the seat of the scornful; But his delight is in the law of the LORD, And in His law he *meditates* day and night.

Here is a contrast between the godly man and the ungodly man. The counsel of the ungodly is the philosophy, the advice, the ideas of the ungodly. The godly man does not walk according to those. He does not stand in the path of sinners. He does not sit in the seat of the scornful. But his delight is in the Law (the revelation) of the Lord. The Law refers to the entire Scriptures and not simply the Ten Commandments or the case law of Old Testament Israel. His delight is in the Law of the Lord, and in His Law he meditates day and night. He studies it.

Meditation

Meditation in Scripture is not Eastern meditation. A popular, best-selling book in the 1970s was *How to Meditate: A Guide to Self-Discovery*¹ by Lawrence Leshan, who was a psychotherapist in New York City. What he suggests as meditation has nothing to do with the meditation described in Scripture. He says that meditation is primarily an emptying of the mind. One of the exercises he recommends for meditation is counting breaths. As one breathes, he counts, and if he gets really good at it, he does not think about his counting. The goal is to not think about the counting. Sit there, close your eyes, get comfortable, empty your mind of everything except an awareness of your breathing, and then count each breath. If you work at it for years, you will reach the point where you do not think about counting.

That is the complete opposite of what Scripture says in *Psalms* 1: “His delight is in the Law of the LORD, and in His Law He meditates day and night.” The goal in Biblical meditation, in Biblical thinking, is to fill the mind with the revealed propositions, not to empty the mind, not to seek for the spirit that is beyond the spirit, as Dr. Leshan recommends, which is all very mystical. Biblical meditation is to pick up the Scriptures, read them, and think about what one is reading. The godly man does that.

There are many other things involved with Eastern meditation. Leshan stresses pantheism as well, teaching that we are one with the universe and using language such as, “*We cannot fall out of the universe.*” In the past, during the Middle Ages Roman Catholic mystics practiced asceticism. There is also the matter of contradictions. To show how thoroughly anti-thinking Eastern meditation is, Leshan says, “If we

¹ Published by Little, Brown and Company, 1974.

have learned one thing from modern physics, it is that there may be two viewpoints about something which are mutually contradictory and yet both viewpoints are equally correct.” In a sense, (and he does not mean it in this sense) they are equally correct: they are both wrong. However, he means that they are equally correct, and when one arrives at the point when he can affirm contradictions, then he is making it up the scale toward the goal of denying the mind, the reason. Leshan also defends drug use, saying that drugs can give this insight that people are seeking through meditation much more quickly, but the only danger is that they will not be as prepared as they would have been had they practiced meditation. But if a person really wants the insight rapidly, sort of an instant insight, then take LSD or whatever. That will give spiritual insight as well.

Eastern Thought

Regarding Eastern thought, Carl Jung, one of the most famous psychologists of the 20th century, probably second only to Freud, had this to say about the mentality of the East and of Hindus in particular, “...the Hindus are notoriously weak in rational exposition. They think for the most part in parables or images.”² Jung says that for the most part they think in parables and images. Why did Christ teach in parables? To make people think? No. He did it to obscure. Christ explains this himself when his disciples ask him why he teaches in parables. *Matthew* 13:10, 11 states, “And the disciples came and said to Him, ‘Why do You speak to them in parables?’ He answered and said to them, ‘Because it has been given to you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given.’” He says that it is given to *you* to know, but it is not given to *them* to know. He teaches in parables to confuse people. He uses figures of speech to confuse people. However, to the disciples he speaks plainly. He takes them aside and explains in plain language what the parables mean.

Jung further says, “...They are not interested in appealing to reason. That, of course, is a basic condition of the Orient as a whole....”³ Further he says, “So far as I can see, an Indian, so long as he remains an Indian, doesn't think....”⁴ Indians are very

intelligent. This is not a matter of intelligence. It is a matter of subjecting thought to logical processes, to analysis. Jung states it thus, “Rather, he perceives a thought. In this way, the Indian approximates primitive ways of thinking” (396).

No one is denying that Orientals are human beings. They are. They are made in the image of God. And despite their best efforts, they still think the laws of logic. But if they are asked, they will deny those laws. But in their denial, they have to use those laws.

God, angels, and human individuals think. Animals do not think. Plants do not think.

Groups Do Not Think

At the other end of the spectrum, groups do not think either. Only persons think, and a group is not a person. Psychologists, sociologists, and some political scientists will talk about *the group mind*. However, groups do not think. Persons think. Individuals think. Groups do not think, and neither do nations or churches. Here is a point that is very helpful when dealing with bureaucracies. If one is unsuccessful because someone in a bureaucracy tells him, “That’s the policy! I can’t change the policy.” Somewhere, some person made that policy. To get satisfaction from a bureaucracy (which loves to hide behind the group) find the person who made the policy and get him to change it. That can work with governments. That can work with a local store. If a sales clerk says, “This is store policy.” Then ask to speak to the manager. If the store manager says, “This is store policy, and I don’t make it,” then ask to speak to the person who makes the policy. Groups do not think. Groups do not make policies. When dealing with a conglomeration such as the United States Congress, look at the voting records. Find the persons who made the decision to raise taxes. Individual persons made these decisions.

At one end of the spectrum, rocks, plants, and animals do not think. At the other end groups, churches, and nations do not think. The church has one head, and that is Christ. He thinks, and what he thinks is written in Scripture. We as individuals are called to believe it, but the Church as a group does not think.

The Attack on Thinking

Moving on from the subject of what thinking is, the next subject is the attack on thinking. Not everybody thinks that thinking is a good thing. This view is called misology, the hatred of logic, or the hatred of

² C. G. Jung *Speaking: Interviews and Encounters*, William McGuire and R. F. C. Hull editors, Princeton University Press, 1977, 394.

³ C. G. Jung *Speaking*, 394.

⁴ C. G. Jung *Speaking*, 396.

thought. There have been both religious and irreligious attacks on thinking.

Romanticism

The first movement to consider is Romanticism. Romanticism is not candlelit dinners and shiny knights on white horses. That is romance not Romanticism. Romanticism was primarily a movement in literature, but also in philosophy as well, at the end of the 18th and beginning of the 19th century.

Goethe

The German poet Goethe was one of its major figures, and his most famous work is *Faust*. In that long, epic poem, the character is struggling with the first verse of John's *Gospel*, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God...." He dislikes intensely that translation, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God...." What he dislikes is, "the Word" and he says what we have to do is come up with a different translation. Goethe knew Greek. He knew what the Greek says, so it is not a problem of translation. What he hates is the philosophy represented by the first verse of John's *Gospel*, "In the beginning was the Word...." So Goethe, after some struggle, translates it, "In the beginning was the deed...." Deed—it is action.

Sometimes this Romantic idea is expressed in the phrase, "Life is deeper than logic." Sometimes the Romantics say things like, "Life is green, but theory is grey." Life is green (that is alive); but theory (that is thought) is grey. Life is green, but thought or theory is dead. There is a contrast here. Life is deeper than logic. That is to say, thought cannot penetrate to the really important things. Sometimes the poet said things like we murder to dissect. A biology class takes apart a grasshopper, later in the week an earthworm, after that a starfish. But in order to do that, first, they must kill those things. We murder to dissect, and we are missing the life. We are missing the real thing.

This Romantic kind of thought is aimed at destroying the idea of thought and analysis—that we really cannot get to the important things through analysis, through logical thought, through understanding, through thinking. This stream of thought has been very influential, not only outside the church, but within the churches as well.

Charles Darwin

The second figure is Charles Darwin. Darwin authored a couple of very influential books, *The Origin of Species* and *The Descent of Man*. He did not invent, as many people think, the theory of evolution. The theory of evolution had been around long before Darwin. What Darwin did, or appeared to do, was to give a scientific basis for the theory of evolution. Many say that Darwin demonstrated, or gave a scientific foundation to, what the Romantic poets who predated Darwin had long suspected—that life is deeper than logic. In Darwin's theory, logic is a fairly recent phenomenon. Thought or thinking is a recent phenomenon that has developed in the last hundred thousand years when *homo sapiens* appeared. That is when logic appears. So life is, very literally in Darwinian evolutionary theory, deeper than logic. It predates logic by millions of years. Logic or thought or analysis or understanding is simply a tool of survival. It is something that certain animals evolved in order to enable them to survive. That is the role of thought or logic. Darwin appears to have given a sort of scientific basis for the Romantic idea that life is deeper than logic.

Karl Marx

The next major figure is Karl Marx, who wrote *The Communist Manifesto* in 1848, collaborating with Friedrich Engels. After that, he went on to write some much more boring books. *The Communist Manifesto*, however, is quite well written, and if one reads nothing else by Marx, *The Manifesto* should be read. It will show why we have a graduated income tax, a central bank (the Federal Reserve), free public education, and more. It is important to know these things. Marx was promoting these things over a hundred years ago.

Marx realized the significance of what Darwin had done in *The Origin of Species*. At one point he wanted to dedicate his major book, *Das Kapital*, to Darwin because he says Darwin has discovered the principles in nature that we have discovered operating in society, and our principles are an extrapolation of Darwin's. Engels said this of Marx at his funeral, "Just as Darwin discovered the law of development of organic nature, so Marx discovered the law of development of human history."⁵ As it turned out, the book was never dedicated to Darwin, which was

⁵ *The Marx-Engels Reader*, 2nd edition. R. C. Tucker, Editor, 681.

probably good for Darwin. However, the same sort of theory was developing.

Marx's contribution to the attack on logic and thought was that there are many logics, not just one. The theory is called polylogism—many logics. Each class within society has its own logic. The reason the bourgeoisie cannot understand the proletariat is because they are bourgeoisie. The bourgeoisie has one logic, and the proletariat has a different logic. As the laws that control the development of history require, the proletariat will overthrow the bourgeoisie. The proletariat, being the fittest, will survive; the bourgeoisie will disappear. This attack on logic took the form of denying that there is one logic, teaching instead that there are many logics, many different systems of thought.

Behaviorism

In the 20th century an irreligious attack on thinking came in the form of Behaviorism. Two major figures in this school of thought are William James and John Dewey. They denied, for example, that there is such a thing as a mind. James wrote a very famous essay, "Does Consciousness Exist?" to which his answer was, No. They say there is no such thing as a mind; it is a myth. Behavior is all there is.

Behavior is defined in a very complicated fashion. A crude behaviorist might say that thought is motions of the larynx when one is speaking to oneself. A more sophisticated behaviorist might say that it is much more complicated than that—the whole person is involved. The whole body is involved and how it interacts with the environment. That is what thought is. There is no mind, no intellect, and no consciousness. Knowledge lives in the muscles according to Dewey. To develop certain habits, one actually has to do things. This whole train of thought is opposed to "book learning." One learns by actually doing. A person has to have experiences. This anti-intellectual, anti-logic, anti-thought movement is still in popular culture. Think of all the derogatory terms for people who excel in thinking. They used to be called "Eggheads." Back in the 1950s, Adlai Stevenson ran for president against Dwight Eisenhower. Stevenson ran on the Democrat ticket and Eisenhower ran on the Republican ticket. Adlai Stevenson was dismissed as an "Egghead." General Eisenhower was the man who got things done. He was the general who won World War II. Stevenson was a useless academic and "Egghead."

Today that term is not heard very often; instead there are different terms. People are called "Nerds." If they are in college, they are called "Grinds," because they are grinding away at their studies. We have all these derogatory terms for people who actually put some effort into thinking. People seem to resent that for some reason. This is completely opposite to what Paul tells Timothy to do and the advice he gives him in his *First Epistle to Timothy*.

Existentialism

In addition to the Behaviorism of James and Dewey and their outright denial that there is such a thing as a mind, one of the most influential philosophies of the 20th century was existentialism. Existentialism denies that there is a human nature. In existentialism, each man makes himself, and all are confronted with an irrational universe. The titles of their books and essays give some understanding of existentialist thought, such as *Nausea*, and *No Exit*, which indicate that it is a philosophy of despair. Yet this very anti-rational philosophy has been very influential in the 20th century.

Those are some of the irreligious attacks on thinking in the modern era. Of course, attacks on thinking did not begin in the modern era. Throughout history people have been opposing thought and reason, not just in modern times, but in the Middle Ages, and in the ancient world as well. Opposition to thought and reason was not something invented in the 19th or 20th century; nonetheless, it is much more prevalent today.

Friedrich Schleiermacher

In theology, Friedrich Schleiermacher, a German who lived at the end of the 18th and beginning of the 19th century, actually thought he was defending Christianity with his ideas. Schleiermacher wrote, *On Religion*, in which he says, "I ask, therefore, that you turn from everything usually reckoned religion, and fix your regard on the inward emotions and dispositions as all utterances and acts of inspired men direct."⁶ Schleiermacher does not say who these inspired men are, but the men who wrote the Scriptures direct no such thing. The Scriptures tell us repeatedly to think and consider, but not to feel, emote, look at your inward dispositions, or contemplate your navel; rather, there are hundreds of injunctions to think, to consider, or to reckon.

⁶ *On Religion: Speeches to Its Cultured Despisers*, 1893, 18.

Whoever Schleiermacher has in mind when he refers to these inspired men, he is not referring to the apostles and prophets who wrote the Scriptures. The apostles and prophets do not direct us to focus on our emotions and inward dispositions.

A few pages later he writes, “Feelings are exclusively the elements of religion and none are excluded” (46). Notice the universal term, *exclusively*. “The feelings are exclusively the elements of religion...” Also notice the universal term, *none*: “...and none are excluded.” The feelings are *exclusively* the elements of religion and *none* are excluded. This includes anger, lust, and despair. No feeling is excluded.

Schleiermacher also says, “Ideas and principles are all foreign to religion...” Ideas are usually reckoned as religion, but he says to turn away from those things. Turn away from doctrine. Turn away from ideas. Focus on feelings. In one place, he says, “Ideas belong to knowledge which is a different department of life from religion.”

Though most have probably never read any Schleiermacher, most have probably heard the name, John Wesley. He was influential in America and in Great Britain. He is called the founder of Methodism. Wesley expressed a similar view before Schleiermacher. Wesley said, “[W]e do not lay the main stress of our religion on any opinions, right or wrong; ... [O]rthodoxy, or right opinion, is at best but a very slender part of religion; if it can be allowed to be any part of it at all.”⁷ Compare that to Schleiermacher, who said, “[religion] knows nothing of deducing and connecting” (*On Religion*, 53). Remember that in our working definition, thinking was connecting one idea with another. Seeing connections between ideas and drawing inferences is involved in thinking. Schleiermacher says religion knows absolutely nothing of deducing and connecting. Schleiermacher thought he was defending Christianity in all of this. He says the reason the churches have been so blood thirsty in the past (and he must be thinking of the Roman Church-State) is because they have been concerned with ideas and opinions. If you rid religion of ideas and opinions and concentrate on what is real, that is the feelings, then you will do away with persecution, too. These are Schleiermacher’s words, “How unjustly do you reproach religion with loving persecution, with being malignant, with overturning society, and making blood flow like

water. Blame those who corrupt religion, who flood it with an army of formulas and definitions and seek to cast it into the fetters of a so-called system” (*On Religion*, 54-55). He says it is not religion’s fault; it is those who have corrupted religion by introducing ideas and opinions into it. If they would simply concentrate on the feelings, which are the *exclusive* elements of religion, then there would not be any persecution. It would not matter whether one believed that Christ is the same substance with the Father, or of a different substance from the Father. It would not matter if Christ is God incarnate, the Second Person of the Trinity manifested in the flesh, or not. The focus is to be on love, on brotherhood, on the feelings, especially the religious feelings like awe. Focus on the feeling, as Reinhardt described it, of smallness when you walk into a cathedral in Europe. They make a person feel small, and that is the essence of religion—feeling small.

Schleiermacher says it was a feeling of absolute dependence that is the essence of religion. It is not such a shallow thing as knowing that God is one, or that Jesus Christ is the Second Person of the Trinity come in the flesh, or that Christ died for the sins of his people. They cannot get to the real reality. The real reality is the feeling of absolute dependence. These other things are just ideas and opinions over which people have killed others over the centuries. They are not religion.

Søren Kierkegaard

The next attack on thinking came from Søren Kierkegaard, a Danish philosopher of the early part of the 19th century. No one knew of him until the early part of the 20th century when the existentialists and the Neo-orthodox discovered him and came under the influence of his thought. Kierkegaard had some good qualities, many of these men do. That is what makes them so dangerous. A bottle labeled “Strychnine,” most likely will not be drunk, but add some to orange juice and it might. It is the mixture of truth and error that is so dangerous, because it is so deceptive.

Kierkegaard did not highly regard the press. He said, “There is a far greater need for abstaining societies which would not read newspapers than for ones which do not drink alcohol.” He had a very low opinion of the newspapers of his time. He wrote, “The lowest depth to which people can sink before God is defined by the word, ‘journalism.’ If I were a father and had a daughter who was seduced, I should not despair over her. I would hope for her salvation. But if

⁷ *The Works of the Reverend John Wesley, A. M.*, edited by John Emory, 1831, 172, 449.

I had a son who became a journalist and continued to be one for five years, I would give him up.”⁸

Kierkegaard also wrote, “It was intelligence, and nothing else, that had to be opposed. Presumably that is why I, who had the job, was armed with an immense intelligence” (*Journals*). He is very modest, too. He is an intellectual who knows what he is about, and he is about to launch an attack on the intellect. Kierkegaard again, like Schleiermacher, although they never met or read each other’s writings, comes down with an attack on ideas and doctrine. In his *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, he says, “Christianity protests every form of objectivity. It desires that the subject should be infinitely concerned about himself. It is subjectivity that Christianity is concerned with, and it is only in subjectivity that its truth exists. If it exists at all objectively, Christianity has no existence.”⁹ This sounds very similar to Schleiermacher’s, “...turn from everything usually called religion and fix your regard on the inward emotions and dispositions.” Like Schleiermacher, Kierkegaard comes up with this subjectivity. However, unlike Schleiermacher, Kierkegaard says that we need to understand some doctrines of Christianity. The reason we need to understand them is so that we know they are contradictory. Then we believe *because* they are contradictory. That is the reason we believe them. He wrote, “Can one learn from history anything about Christ? No. Why not? Because one can ‘know’ nothing at all about ‘Christ’; He is the paradox, the object of faith, existing only for faith. But all historical communication is communication of ‘knowledge’, hence from ‘history’ one can learn nothing about Christ” (*A Kierkegaard Anthology*, 388). Here is an ahistorical Christ who is a figment of Kierkegaard’s imagination.

At another point, he wrote, “The object of faith is the reality of another, and the relationship is one of infinite interest. The object of faith is not a doctrine, for then the relationship would be intellectual, and it would be of importance not to botch it, but to realize the maximum intellectual relationship. The object of faith is not a teacher with a doctrine; for when a teacher has a doctrine, the doctrine is *eo ipso* more important than the teacher, and the relationship is again intellectual, and it again becomes important not to botch it, but to realize the maximum intellectual

relationship. The object of faith is the reality of the teacher; that the teacher really exists. The answer of faith is therefore unconditionally yes or no. For the answer of faith is not concerned as to whether a doctrine is true or not, nor with respect to a teacher, whether his teaching is true or not; it is the answer to a question concerning a fact: ‘Do you or do you not suppose that he has really existed?’ And the answer, it must be noted, is with infinite passion.... Christianity has no doctrine concerning the unity of the divine and the human,... If Christianity were a doctrine, the relationship to it would not be one of faith, for only an intellectual type of relationship can correspond to a doctrine. Christianity is therefore not a doctrine, but the fact that God has existed.... Faith constitutes a sphere all by itself, and every misunderstanding of Christianity may at once be recognized by its transforming it into a doctrine, transferring it to the sphere of the intellectual” (*A Kierkegaard Anthology*, 230-231). Faith has nothing to do with the intellect. Christianity has nothing to do with doctrine.

Kierkegaard also had some good things to say about Roman Catholicism, “Catholicism has a conception of the Christian ideal to become nothing in the world. Protestantism is worldliness from beginning to end.”

These men have been tremendously influential in liberalism at the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th century. Liberalism is a spiritual descendant of Schleiermacher with his emphasis on the emotions and the feelings, and his elimination of doctrine. However, it is not just liberalism. It is also some fundamentalism. You have probably heard the slogan, “No Creed but Christ.” That is the same attack on thinking. We make the person of Christ, not a creed, the object of faith.

Neo-Orthodoxy

Another religious attack on thinking came in the form of Neo-orthodoxy, which developed as a reaction to liberalism in the early part of the 20th century. Liberalism was characterized by a de-emphasis of the supernatural and a denial of miracles. Neo-orthodoxy came along and said we are going to restore the emphasis on the supernatural. The Neo-orthodox theologians such as Karl Barth and Emil Brunner were very much influenced by Kierkegaard. So, religion became a matter of subjectivity and encounter, and not a matter of doctrine, opinion, ideas, understanding, or judgment.

⁸ Both quotations from Soren Kierkegaard, *Journals*, 1847.

⁹ *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to the Philosophical Fragments*, as reproduced in Bretall, *A Kierkegaard Anthology*, Princeton University Press, 1946, 207.

Roman Catholicism

Roman Catholicism has a doctrine of implicit faith, which in essence says that ignorance is the height of godliness. It is the attitude that a devout Roman Catholic believes whatever the “church” teaches. He has implicit faith in the “church.” He does not know what the “church” teaches, but that is okay. A premium is put on ignorance. This too is an attack on thinking.

Neo-Romanticism

Finally, there is a group I will call the Neo-Romantics. These people have picked up on some of the earlier Romantics and have introduced them even into Reformed circles. Some of these transmission belts were people like C.S. Lewis, Dorothy Sayers, and Douglas Wilson.

Douglas Wilson has a view he calls poetic epistemology. He denies that language is literal, that any language is literal. He asserts that all language is metaphorical. Of course, if that is the case, then the debate over whether the word “day” in *Genesis* 1 is literal or metaphorical is settled—it is metaphorical. However, of course, it is a contradictory position. In order for him to espouse that point of view, he wants us to understand him literally, not metaphorically. However, he espouses a poetic epistemology.

In Wilson’s book, *The Paideia of God*¹⁰, he has a chapter on “The Great Logic Fraud,” in which he talks about being the co-author of a logic textbook. In essence he says, “All the good work in that book is my co-author’s work. It is not mine. I don’t believe in the stuff.” The title of the essay is, “The Great Logic Fraud.” It is an attack on precision. It is an attack on analysis. It is an attack on logical processes. Wilson is a clever writer and some of the other things in the book are fine, but that is the core of the book. That is the strychnine in the orange juice.

This poetic epistemology comes out of the Neo-Romantic movement. Other figures in the church believe this view as well. The liberal churchman William Marshall Urban also held the view that all language is metaphorical. Urban wrote this about communion in his book *Language and Reality*: “Holy Communion is a simple piece of symbolism to express a number of spiritual truths too great for ordinary language. The symbol expresses something too great for words” (586). This is life is deeper than logic put into religious language. He says, “The symbol

expresses something too great for words.” There is nothing too great for words. “In the beginning was the Word...” (*John* 1:1). This reaction against the word is profoundly anti-Christian, and profoundly subversive. Life is not deeper than logic. Logic is deeper than life. We are not Darwinians. We do not believe that logic is a recent appearance on the Earth. Since logic is the way God thinks, logic steers the universe and, in fact, it created the universe—*John* 1:1-3. But to assert that something cannot be expressed in words is stupid and subversive of Christianity. In the beginning was the Word, not the deed, not the symbol, not the activity, not the feeling, but the Word. A word is an expression of thought, and it is thought that controls the universe, nothing else. That is why in the Scriptures there are a thousand occurrences of the word “know.” That is why the first and greatest commandment is to love the Lord your God with your mind.

There are other ways that this attack on thinking has been introduced into Reformed churches. For example, I happened to be in a Presbyterian church in Georgia a few weeks ago, and I was standing outside the nursery, and they had a little game for the kids to play there, and they thought it was necessary to put on the box, “Being Smart Is OK.” Of course it is okay! But they thought it is necessary to say that being smart is okay. I think that reflects something about the culture.

Aesthetics

Another way the attack on thinking is carried on is through art—painting, sculpture, or something of that sort. Art displaced doctrine in the churches a long time ago, in the Roman Catholic and Orthodox churches over a thousand years ago. Aesthetics became a major concern back then. Today emphasis on art is showing up in the form of concern with liturgy. We have a different form of it showing up in the form of entertainment in the churches. Both of which are equally opposed to doctrine and to understanding. Whether we try to work up our feelings of awe, or whether we try to whip up our feelings of joy and be entertained, both art and entertainment are opposed to thinking in church.

In advertising a few years ago there was a beer commercial on television that was profoundly anti-intellectual, *Why ask why?* The ad would begin with a question, Why something or other? It would be some perfectly legitimate question. Then the response was, *Why ask why?* Asking Why? is the most profound question that one could ask. The purpose of the ad

¹⁰ Douglas Wilson, *The Paideia of God and Other Essays on Education*, Moscow, ID: Canon Press, 1999.

campaign was to imply that it is stupid to look for reasons. Why ask why? There are no reasons. Nothing makes sense. So why ask why? Movies, music, and art are all ways of distracting ourselves and avoiding thought.

Watchman Nee

Watchman Nee is influential in some circles and regarded as a profound devotional writer. Nee writes, “How very vain it is for man to act on the basis of doctrine. He does not have the true article, the reality. The doctrine is not the true article, the reality. Sometimes we are close to being false simply because we know too much and act according to doctrine instead of following the leading of God’s Spirit.”

Along this line, I happened to be recording some radio spots for our church back in Tennessee with the pastor, and he and the station director were there talking about things and the pastor told how he had been preparing for Sunday’s sermon, and the response from the station director was, “Why don’t you just let the Spirit lead you?” For this director and many other people, study and preparation are contrary to the real thing, which is the leading of the Spirit.

Returning to Watchman Nee, “Whenever we act on the basis of doctrine we are not touching the reality. We must recognize two very different ways of help before us. First, there is a way that seemeth right, in which help is received from the outside, through the mind, by doctrine and its exposition. Second, we must see that God’s way is the way of spirit touching spirit. Instead of having our mentality develop by acquiring a storehouse of knowledge, it is by this contact that our spiritual life is built up. Let no one be deceived, until we have found this way, we have not found true Christianity.”

This all sounds very pious, does it not? Christianity has nothing to do with doctrine. It is spirit touching spirit.

D.H. Lawrence

Another attack on thinking came from D.H. Lawrence, a 20th century pornographer, but highly regarded as a writer who wrote, “My great religion is a belief in the blood, the flesh, as being wiser than the intellect. We can go wrong with our minds, but what our blood feels, and believes, and says is always right.”¹¹ He had a philosophy behind the phrase, “gut instinct.” Trust your gut instinct. It is always right.

¹¹ *The Letters of D. H. Lawrence*, edited by James Boulton, Cambridge University Press, 1979, “January 17, 1913.”

“We can go wrong with our minds, but what our blood feels, and believes, and says is always right.” This philosophical foundation for pornography is an attack on thinking.

J. Gresham Machen

To conclude this study of the attack on thinking, a quote from J. Gresham Machen is apropos. Machen is not one of those who have carried out an attack on thinking; rather, he is one of those who have defended thinking. He said, “Faith, it may be said, cannot be known except by experience, and when it is known by experience, logical analysis of it and logical separation of it from other experience will only serve to destroy its power and its charm.... Such objections are only one manifestation of a tendency that is very widespread at the present day, the tendency to disparage the intellectual aspect of the religious life. Religion, it is held, is an ineffable experience; the intellectual expression of it can be symbolical merely; the most various opinions in the religious sphere are compatible with a fundamental unity of life; theology may vary and yet religion may remain the same. Obviously this temper of mind is hostile to precise definitions” (*What is Faith?* 13). An ineffable experience is one that is too great or extreme to be expressed or described in words.

Why Think Biblically?

The Bible emphasizes thinking. Notice the frequency of occurrences of several words pertaining to thinking as they occur in the Bible. These numbers include their cognate forms. The word “know” occurs 1,454 times, “judge” 674 times, “wisdom” 460 times, “understand” 291 times, “teach” 244 times, “think” 209 times, “consider” 97 times, “reason” 88 times, “instruct” 65 times, “reckon” 33 times, “account” 31 times, and “meditate” 20 times. For the sake of contrast, notice that the word “feel” occurs 14 times, “experience” 4 times, and “sense” 4 times.

Someone once said that a religion, in order to be accepted, has to be satisfactory to the one who believes it. Before Christ, those who accepted pagan religions accepted them because they were satisfactory. Pagan religions satisfy the desires of the flesh. They satisfy the desires for emotions. They satisfy the desires for action. They satisfy the desires for the feeling of reverence or awe. However, Christianity alone satisfies the mind. Christianity alone has the answers, and the answers are intellectual. So, if you want a religion of excitement,

if you want a religion of emotion, if you want a religion that appeals to the flesh, then Christianity is not for you.

To Love God

In the New Testament Christ is asked, “What is the greatest commandment?” His answer is, “Love God with your whole heart, soul, mind, and strength. And the second is like it, Love your neighbor as yourself.” How do we love God? The greatest commandment is to love God with our whole heart, soul, mind, and strength. This means to love God totally. These do not refer to four different parts of man. They are piled up for emphasis. Some theologians have developed theories of man having three, four, five, even six parts. One part is his heart, one part is his soul, one part is his spirit, one part is his mind, one part is his body, and so on. The Bible knows nothing of such man-made doctrines. In this case, these several terms are used for emphasis. The phrase means we are to love God totally. How does one do that? Is the commandment to have an emotion? Is the commandment to have a feeling? What is it?

God has given us a book of a thousand pages. How do we show our love for the author who has given us a book with a thousand pages containing ten thousand propositions? Read it! Read it! Do we really believe that this is the Word of God? Or is that something we have just grown accustomed to hearing? If we really believe that this is the Word of God, we ought to read it. Not just devotional reading for ten minutes before falling asleep, reading a chapter or a few verses, but rather getting out paper and pen and going through the Scriptures, reading them slowly as if you loved God, as if you had a book written by the Creator of the universe, the very One who made you.

A major reason we do not read the Scriptures is that we really do not believe it is the Word of God. The first way we love God is by reading his Word. Above, we read in *Psalms* 1 about the godly man who meditates in the Law day and night. Obviously, we do not have time to sit down with pen, paper, and Bible in front of us twenty-four hours a day. But, we can commit the Word to memory, we can recall it, and we can think about it. We can think, How does the doctrine of creation affect the doctrine of the inspiration of Scripture? How are those two connected? We can ponder these questions. If God did not create the universe, can we have any confidence in the inspiration of Scripture? I do not simply mean that then we cannot believe in *Genesis* 1. I mean that if

God is not the Creator, he does not have the power to control the minds of men so that they write the truth. The doctrine of inspiration necessarily depends upon the doctrine of creation. The one explains the other, and they fit together. What we should do is read the Scripture with the idea of figuring out how the various doctrines of Scripture fit together.

Emotion and Religious Affections

Look at the passages in Scripture where the apostle Paul breaks out in praise for God. People would say at this point he was overcome by emotion. Look at *1 Timothy* 6:13-16, “I urge you in the sight of God who gives life to all things, and before Christ Jesus who witnessed the good confession before Pontius Pilate, that you keep this commandment without spot, blameless until our Lord Jesus Christ’s appearing, which He will manifest in His own time, He who is the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings and Lord of lords, who alone has immortality, dwelling in unapproachable light, whom no man has seen or can see, to whom be honor and everlasting power. Amen” (compare *Romans* 9:3-5; *Romans* 11:30-36; *Romans* 15:7-13; and *Ephesians* 1:3-14). He is not overcome by emotion. He is writing words, and they express his emotion. His emotion is a reaction to the doctrine of the majesty of God, and unless he had that understanding first, the emotion would be worthless. In fact, it would be very misleading.

Jonathan Edwards wrote the book, *Religious Affections*. Many people think by the title of that book he was defending the centrality of emotions. They might be surprised at what Jonathan Edwards had to say about the matter. However, he makes a very good point. He says the affections indicate nothing. Although they did not have movies or television in the 18th century, they did have stage plays and books. Edwards said people are frequently moved to tears by stage plays and books of fiction, and they are moved to tears even though they do not believe the story being told. He says I fear the same thing happens in our churches. They hear the story of Christ and his sufferings, and many people are moved by that. But just like attending a stage play or reading a book, they do not believe it. He says they are destitute of spiritual life, yet they have these emotions.

One does not have to believe the truth of something to be moved by it. This happens all the time. Go to a “chick flick.” They will be moved by the pathetic story of these lost souls, and they know that none of it is true, but yet they are moved by it. They

have an emotional response. Edwards' concern is that the same thing happens in church. What is important is the understanding and the belief of the truth of the doctrines of the Word of God. That is what is important.

We have the greatest commandment—to love God with our whole heart, soul, mind, and strength. There are scores of other commandments in Scripture, which say similar things. Seek wisdom. Consider.... Know.... Understand.... Meditate....

First Samuel 12:6-7, "Then Samuel said to the people, 'It is the LORD who raised up Moses and Aaron, and who brought your fathers up from the land of Egypt. Now therefore, stand still, that I may reason with you before the LORD concerning all the righteous acts of the LORD which He did to you and your fathers.'" One of the requirements of understanding is standing still. We have to do it with a calm mind. We have to pay attention. All this frenetic activity that we engage in and emotional upheaval is inimical to understanding. It is inimical to thinking Biblically. Stand still.

Psalms 4:4, "Be angry, and do not sin. Meditate within your heart on your bed, and be still. Selah. Be still and know that I am God." There is nothing necessarily sinful about emotions, but if they interfere with our thinking there is. When we call a man an emotional man, we are not paying him a compliment. We mean he is unstable, that he is given to mood swings, that he has a temper. Christ became angry, so there is nothing wrong necessarily with being angry *per se*. Christ wept at the death of Lazarus, so there is nothing wrong necessarily with weeping. But if it interferes with our thinking, it is.

The reason that certain things such as drunkenness are prohibited in Scripture is that they interfere with our ability to think. One cannot obey the Scriptural commands to consider, to know, to meditate, or to understand, when he is drunk. The same principle that applies to drunkenness, applies to every other thing that might interfere with our thinking ability. Drug use is one of those things. We lie to children if we tell them that drugs are not pleasurable. That is the attraction of drugs, and if we tell them that, they know we are lying. That is the whole attraction, but that attraction interferes with the ability to think. Whether one is tripping on some hallucinogenic drug, or is silly and giggling with marijuana; thinking is impaired, and that is what makes it sinful. If emotions interfere with the ability to think, they are likewise sinful.

To Understand the Bible

Another reason to think Biblically is to understand the Bible. Act like you believe it is God's Word. As James says, ask God for wisdom and he will give it to you liberally, if you ask without being double-minded.

To Understand Ourselves and the World

Another reason to think is to understand ourselves and the world. The Bible does not just talk about God, although that is its major concern of course. It also talks about the creation. It talks about us. We do not learn about ourselves through introspection. We learn about ourselves through Scripture. The motto of Socrates was, Know yourself. This is impossible apart from Scripture. Socrates had no idea who he was. He had no idea that he was a creature of God. He had no idea of God. He had no idea that he was created in the image of God. He had no idea that he was a sinner. He had no idea that he needed a Savior. He failed miserably at knowing himself. If we want to know ourselves, we have to know Scripture. If we want to know who we are, we have to know Scripture. This is for our own benefit. Since the 16th century when the Reformation occurred and the Gospel began to be preached and believed on a large scale, the benefits that have accrued to mankind have been enormous.

The Gospel is not only for our eternal benefit, but for our temporal benefit as well. We need to think Biblically to proclaim the Gospel. We need to think Biblically to defend the Gospel. There are many more reasons for thinking Biblically, but the first and the greatest is the Great Commandment.

Above we referred to Jonathan Edwards. He was an 18th century American prodigy and these are a few of the things he wrote: "Men by mere principles of nature are capable of being affected with things that have a special relation to religion as well as other things. A person by mere nature, for instance, may be liable to be affected with the story of Jesus Christ and the sufferings He underwent as well as by any other tragical story. He may be the more affected with it from the interest he conceives mankind to have in it. Yea, he may be affected with it without believing it as well as a man may be affected with what he reads in a romance or sees acted in a stage play. A person therefore may have affecting views of the things of religion and yet be destitute of spiritual light."¹²

Edwards also wrote, "It cannot be said that we

¹² "A Divine and Supernatural Light," Sermon included in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, Volume 2, The Banner of Truth Trust, [1834], 1974. 13.

come to the knowledge of any part of Christian truth by the light of nature. It is only the Word of God contained in the Old and New Testament, which teaches us Christian divinity. The sacraments of the Gospel can only have a proper effect no other way than be conveying some knowledge. Without knowledge in divinity, none would differ from the most ignorant and barbarous heathens. Divine subjects are the things to know which we had the faculty of reason given to us. No speech can be a means of grace but by conveying knowledge. The Bible can be of no manner of profit to us any other wise than as it conveys some knowledge to the mind.”¹³

Further he wrote, “There is no other way by which any means of grace whatsoever can be of any benefit but by knowledge.”¹⁴

Notice the great contrast between the position of Jonathan Edwards and the positions of Friedrich Schleiermacher and Søren Kierkegaard. The difference is that Jonathan Edwards echoes the Bible, and Schleiermacher and Kierkegaard do not.

Consider

Following are some verses of Scriptures that use the verb, *consider*.

Job 37:14, “Hearken unto this, O Job: stand still, and *consider* the wondrous works of God.” Here is a command to think about what God Has done, to *consider* the wondrous works of God.

Psalms 8:3, “When I *consider* thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which thou hast ordained.” The psalmist goes on to reflect about man. He is considering this. He is thinking about it. He is pondering it.

Psalms 13:3, “*Consider* and hear me, O LORD my God: lighten mine eyes, lest I sleep the sleep of death.” The Psalmist is asking God to think about him.

Psalms 50:22, “Now *consider* this, ye that forget God, lest I tear you in pieces, and there be none to deliver.”

Psalms 119:159, “*Consider* how I love thy precepts: quicken me, O LORD, according to thy lovingkindness.” The psalmist makes no distinction between loving God and loving his precepts. In fact, loving God is loving his precepts. If someone says, I love God, I just don’t like the Bible, they are not telling the truth.

Ecclesiastes 7:13, “*Consider* the work of God: for who can make that straight, which he hath made crooked?”

Isaiah 41:20, “That they may see, and know, and *consider*, and understand together, that the hand of the LORD hath done this, and the Holy One of Israel hath created it.”

Jeremiah 2:10, “For pass over the isles of Chittim, and see; and send unto Kedar, and *consider* diligently, and see if there be such a thing.”

The list goes on and on. In a concordance look up the words *know, knew, wisdom, wise, understand, understood, teach, taught, think, thought, consider, reason, instruct, reckon, account, and meditate*. These words from Scripture are profoundly intellectual. Look at the hundreds of times that they are used, not only in an imperative fashion, but in a descriptive fashion as well.

When Jonathan Edwards says things like, “No means of grace does any good except through knowledge,” he is echoing what Scripture says. However, today it is very common to hear this view castigated as Gnosticism, from the Greek word, γνῶσις, meaning knowledge. If this be Gnosticism, let us make the most of it. The people who talk about Gnosticism do not have the foggiest idea what a Gnostic was. They simply know that they dislike knowledge. But when we read Scripture, we find statements such as, “...by his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many” (*Isaiah 53:11*). There are hundreds of such verses. Edwards says salvation comes through knowledge. Faith is knowledge. Disbelief of the truth of Scripture is not knowledge.

Questions and Answers

Question: Can an emotion be completely independent of an understanding?

Answer: No, an emotion is always a reaction to some understanding. Even when you watch a movie and are moved by it, you do not believe that what is happening is true, but it is your understanding of what is happening that gives rise to the emotion. So, in that sense, an emotion cannot exist apart from an understanding.

Question: Are babies capable of thinking?

Answer: Babies are not capable of thinking as we have defined it. Babies are lighted by Christ, but they cannot articulate. They are conscious and aware, but their ability to calculate and analyze is dubious. They can probably do so earlier than most people credit

¹³ “Christian Knowledge” included in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, Volume 2, 158.

¹⁴ Same as 6 above.

them. There are one-year-olds who seem to understand very well what is happening when you speak to them. They are incapable of expressing themselves, but they understand very well from all appearances.

Question: Isn't it true that Christianity is not a religion, but a relationship?

Answer: If you read the Bible, you will see that the command is always to believe the Word. How am I to be saved? "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved" (*Acts* 16:31). Does the apostle Paul tell the Philippian jailer to have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ? No. Judas had a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. It did him no good. He travelled with him for three years. Mary had an even closer relationship with Jesus Christ. What saved Mary and did not save Judas was belief of the truth. Mary believed the truth. She understood the information given to her, and she accepted it as true. Judas may have understood the information given to him, but he did not accept it as true, and that makes all the difference. It is not something called a personal relationship. This is especially the case if you separate the person from the doctrines and the truth revealed in Scripture. Then the person becomes simply a figment of your imagination.

Question: If pagan religions satisfy the emotions, and Christianity alone satisfies the mind, what about the emotionalism of Charismatic and Pentecostal churches?

Answer: Gibberish is not restricted to Charismatic and Pentecostal churches. Gibberish is common to pagan religions. *Glossolalia* is not just a 20th century phenomenon. If you read a history of comparative religions, you will see that various pagan religions have devotees who have spoken in gibberish. *Glossolalia*, whether pagan or Charismatic, is gibberish. It is not tongues. It is not language. Language has meaning. Gibberish has no meaning. It is an appeal to an emotion, and they mistake the emotion for Christianity. Perhaps Charismatics and Pentecostals are less emotional about other things they do, but for the last century it seems that their central focus has been the phenomenon of *glossolalia* and it has nothing to do with Christianity. So there is an influence of paganism within those movements.

Question: What do you mean when you say that Christianity alone satisfies the mind?

Answer: It means that Christianity alone has answers. Christianity alone can give us the information we need to understand God, the world, and ourselves. No other religion can do that. No other religion even comes close to answering the kind of questions that every college freshman has—Where did we come from? Why are we here? Tell them to go read their Bible. They will learn where they came from and why they are here. Christianity gives information. It does not seek to evoke an emotion or a feeling. It is a revelation given in propositions by God to mankind, and it is given for the purpose of being understood and believed. It is not given for any other purpose than to be understood and believed. This revelation answers questions people have asked for millennia, and in doing this, Christianity satisfies the mind.

Pagan religions do not do this. They have other appeals. They appeal to the desires of the flesh, the desires for emotions, the desires for action, the desires for the feeling of reverence or awe. But they are not intellectual appeals. If you want to see what pagan religion looked like, read a history of Corinth in Greece. We have this romanticized view of Greece and Rome. They were horrible societies. Read the ancient historian Moses I. Finley if you want to find out what Greece and Rome were like. They were absolutely horrible societies, and today we are told that they are the basis for our Western culture and Western government. M.I. Finley will disabuse you of such an idea.

Question: Does not *Romans* 1 say that we can discern the existence of God from the creation?

Answer: *Romans* 1 appears to say that, but it does not say that. Christ denies that anyone knows God except through him, so any construction of the philosophers that purports to prove the existence of God is a figment of their imagination. The arguments that have been constructed to prove the existence of God should not be seen as aids to evangelism or the Christian religion, but as impediments. Those arguments were constructed notably by Aristotle, and as Paul tells us in *Romans* 1, for the purpose of suppressing the innate knowledge of being a creature of God, that even Aristotle had. Through his philosophy he devised a doctrine of God that left him irresponsible. Sinful man does not want someone to whom he is accountable. So Aristotle's god exists not knowing anything of life on Earth. He is not the Creator, he is not omnipotent, and he is ignorant of

anything happening on Earth. Obviously he is ignorant of Aristotle, so Aristotle and everyone else is free to do as they please. That is the sinful motivation behind such constructions.

Paul says in *1 Corinthians* 1:21, “the world by wisdom did not know God...” Paul in the first four chapters of *1 Corinthians* is intent on denying natural theology. In fact, he is intent on denying any source of knowledge except Scripture. He says, through wisdom they did not know God. Jesus says in *Matthew* 11:27, “No one knows the Father except the Son and he to whom the Son reveals him.” That eliminates Plato and Aristotle. To claim knowledge apart from Christ is to express belief in a figment of one’s imagination. Jesus teaches that He is the only way. He says, “No one comes to the Father but by me” (*John* 14:6).