Have you ever been asked a question about your faith you just could not answer? Have you ever questioned your own beliefs and wondered if what you were taught was actually truth? I can say "yes" to both questions. I am glad I can say "yes" because in doing so, I have come to realize that I must improve my understanding of my faith, of my beliefs, and of my intellectual understanding of Christianity.

There is a dangerous complacency among Christians today. Far too often we are content to listen to our pastors, our professors, or others around us without questioning what it is we believe. In many cases, we lack the skills and understanding to truly grasp what A. W. Tozer calls a "knowledge of the holy." As Christians we have been plagued by a lack of attention to the intellect and to what an intellectual understanding of Christianity means. Too often, faith is the singular ingredient and the intellect is seldom, if ever, challenged.

On the other hand, historically there has been a dangerous emphasis on intellectualism that has torn many from an integration of faith and reason. Looking back upon the founding of the Americas, we understand that many of those landing in the New World came to escape the tyranny and oppression of being told what to believe and how to live. Schools such as the Boston Latin School and the Roxbury Latin School were founded in the mid-1600's to train young men to read and write so that the intellect would be properly developed and a greater understanding of the Scriptures would be attained. This would ensure students would be fit "for publicke service both in churche and
commonwealth." In 1636, Harvard College was founded "to advance Learning and perpetuate it to posterity; dedicating to an illiterate ministry to the churches."

Intellectualism and rationalism can be traced much further back than Puritan New England. Examining Western civilization we know that the Greek intellectual movement, the Renaissance in Europe, the Scientific Revolution, and the Enlightenment each played a role in leading us to our current state. However, instead of perpetuating Christianity and creating a greater love of our God, intellectualism in many cases contributed greatly to the spiritual descent of many within Christendom.

Developing an historical understanding of intellectualism is not my goal. Nor do I wish to promote anti-intellectual fervor. On the contrary, in what follows, I want to set a course to discuss the importance of developing an intellectual passion aimed at a greater understanding and love for our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. What does it mean to develop mental maturity, to become a thinking Christian, to embrace wisdom?

I have begun with two examples of ways in which Christians have fallen into traps that God never intended—the first being Christians of "blind faith," and the second being Christians who seek to develop intellectual capacities simply for the sake of knowledge.

Because of the spiritual-intellectual conundrum faced by so many in the Christian world, in 2002 a new secondary institution was founded in Boston, Massachusetts, a city historically known for its academic institutions. The purpose of Boston Trinity Academy (www.bostontrinity.org) was established to provide academic and spiritual training to a new generation of leaders. Students from the city and the suburbs, from more than nineteen language groups, from multiple races, and from every socio-economic group come together daily to engage the mind and body, to grow in spirit. They interact with adult teachers and mentors who provide an education that would enable each student to graduate academically prepared to enter the best colleges and universities in the world, spiritually prepared to engage culture and defend the Christian faith, and socially prepared to fully engage the world around them. It is my privilege to be the headmaster of this school.

It is the goal of the school to provide teachers and mentors who will equip young men and women to influence the world with a well-developed understanding of Christianity, with faith that is real and relevant, and with the knowledge that Christians are called to use our hearts, bodies, and our minds to make a difference in the world in which we live, work, and participate.

BLIND FAITH

At Boston Trinity Academy we go further than "blind faith." By no means do I want to suggest that faith is irrelevant. On the contrary, faith is the key element of Christianity. Paul writes in Ephesians that by grace we are saved through faith and that we can do nothing ourselves to earn salvation. We are called to be people of faith. It is essential, it is imperative.

What I do not see in the Bible, however, is the call to be people of blind faith, ignorant of the tenets and underlying principles of Christianity. We are called to the opposite. Matthew 22:37 implores us to "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind." In the same chapter of Matthew, we see that Jesus employed the ability to debate using logic and rhetoric. The Pharisees, it says in verse 15, sought to "entangle him in his words." Jesus, however, saw through their methods and spoke to them in their language, quoting the law and interpreting the culture of the day.

In 1 Peter 3:15 we are called upon to "always be prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you." In love your God with all your mind, J. P. Moreland writes: "If we are to love God adequately with the mind, then the mind must be exercised regularly, trained to acquire certain habits of thought, and filled with an increasingly rich set of distinctions and categories." Our intellects are to be stretched and worked often so that we can grow to love God more.

Christians need to understand that God speaks to us through His Word, the Bible. As R. A. Rieses put it in Piety and Philosophy, "Since the message of God to man is delivered in the form of words, it is imperative that the exact meaning of those words be known." This implies the opposite of what those who call for blind faith are extolling. This implies that we must dig in. We must get to know God with our intellects and understand who He is through the study and examination of His word and His creation.

By the Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20), Christians have been called to make disciples and teach all nations. We have not been given an option. It is clear that we are to go into all the world. If we are to do so, like Jesus and the Apostle Paul we had better be equipped with more than blind faith.

As students progress through Boston Trinity Academy's middle and high schools, a great deal of time is spent considering what it means to be a Christian—a true follower of Christ. Likewise, the school takes great care and exerts considerable effort to introduce students to the tenets and foundations of Christianity, and the historical reality of Christ as man, Lord, and truth. Not all students who attend the school subscribe to the faith. Some are Muslim, Buddhist, and atheist. Nonetheless, each is exposed to the message of the Gospel. Each is trained in apologetics. Each must learn the logic necessary to defend the faith. As a result, it is the school's mission that each student will leave fully grasping an intellectual basis for the Christian faith with a heart developed to love and follow Christ, the Savior and Lord.

OVEREMPHASIZING KNOWLEDGE ONLY FOR THE SAKE OF KNOWLEDGE

Christians must be intellectually equipped in order to know God more deeply and in order to perpetuate the Kingdom of God. Unfortunately, many Christians have fallen away from faith as they have begun walking the slippery slope of intellectual advancement.

We are called to be Christians who use our minds. In his wonderful essay, "Learning in Wartime," in the collection The Weigh of Glory, C. S. Lewis writes, "Good philosophy must exist, if for no other reason, because bad philosophy needs to be answered." We must be ready to defend the faith, to answer the questions of detractors, to supply ideas to those who are seeking, and to guide lost sheep in need of a shepherd. Being culturally relevant Christians requires us to have a strong grasp of the foundations of Christianity.
as well as an intellectual understanding of the world in which we live.

The problem is that “knowledge puffs up” (1 Corinthians 8:1). Many times those who seek knowledge do so for nothing but the sake of greater knowledge. James Packer suggests in his great book, Knowing God, that when we seek theological knowledge for its own sake, we risk our spiritual health. Earlier I mentioned the example of Harvard College and how it began as an institution dedicated to training men in spiritual and theological matters. Many other institutions were born for this, the most noble and important cause. They, too, have dissolved spiritually. Knowledge became something to be gained for knowledge sake, not for the sake of knowing and loving God more fully and furthering His Kingdom.

It is the heartfelt goal of Boston Trinity Academy, and other Christian schools like it, to hold true to the faith and consistently to seek guidance from God as decisions are made. The questions that may arise in such an institution include: When is the school too academic? How much knowledge is too much knowledge?

R. A. Riesen answers:

It is not possible for Christian education... to be too academic. The purpose of education is precisely to be academic... The point is simply that we in Christian schools must do everything in our power to ensure that in future generations there is no scandal of the evangelical mind, that we have not opted out of or reneged on our responsibility to engage culture and the natural world intellectually and academically... that is, that we have not given the impression that Christian faith is somehow inimical to careful, honest thought or that honest thought destroys faith.

We believe we must train students academically and intellectually. As we do, our students’ faith will grow as they learn more about all of life. Seeking and questioning ought to be a goal for an academic institution. If we truly trust in the sovereignty of God, those same questions will certainly lead right back to the creator of all, the one true God, Jesus Christ.

This past year, one of Boston Trinity Academy’s brightest students—fluent in five languages—found truth in the person of Jesus Christ through questioning and doubting. This amazing young woman, now a graduate and off this autumn to college, came to the school a Muslim, secure in her beliefs, shared by her family. In reading, writing, and seeking answers, she came to the life-altering conclusion that Jesus Christ can only be the way to heaven and the answer to all of life’s questions. Because of her commitment to asking the difficult questions and the school’s commitment not to shy away from allowing students to explore such difficult questions, the pursuit of the intellectual resulted in a deep and steadfast faith. Since this time, I have also been able to have some genuine conversations with her father, who himself is seeking truth.

WHAT IS A CHRISTIAN TO DO?

How do we impress upon our generation the importance of developing a Christian mind for the glory of God? How do we integrate our faith with the necessary scholarship that will enable the mind to grow and the Kingdom of God to advance? The Apostle Paul appeals to us:

Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God (Romans 12:1-2).

WE MUST RENEW OUR MINDS.

We must see the importance of spending time in the Word of God—reading, praying, and meditating on the text. The perfect example was Jesus Christ himself. Consistently throughout the New Testament, Jesus used his knowledge of Scripture to thwart His detractors and to keep Himself pure. When He was tempted by Satan, He quoted scripture in order to avoid falling. When the Pharisees verbally attacked Him, He not only quoted scripture, but He had a better understanding of Jewish law than did they.

When I was in elementary school, there was a church-based program called AWANA that I attended. For five years my parents made me attend and memorize verses from the Bible. Every night after dinner my parents made me sit with my AWANA book and work on Bible memorization. While it would be less than honest to say I enjoyed it at that time, today, many years later, my recall of Bible verses memorized helps in many areas of my life. Knowing and understanding the Bible is essential as we seek true wisdom.

Likewise, if we are attempting to fill our hearts and minds with the true and the good, we should avoid inputting the wrong information into those hearts and minds. At Boston Trinity Academy, difficult conversations with parents are needed to assure them that the amount of work their children are doing is legitimate. Suggesting that studying is a priority sometimes means less “family time.” In all honesty, I have realized in many cases “family time” has meant watching television together. In such cases, I am along with their children the novels being read in English class, that they sit at the kitchen table and work along with their children on science projects, and that they simply replace television time with family study hall. It does not always go over as well as I might hope, I must admit. Nevertheless, I maintain that filling our minds with intellectual pursuits, be they directly from the Bible or otherwise, bests time spent watching “Gossip Girl” every day of the week!

Books, articles, podcasts, and other forms of media from highly reputable sources are other modes to be explored when seeking to renew our minds. Some worthy of attention are Tim Keller, Gordon Hugenberger, and John Piper.

We can renew our minds by memorizing Scripture, by reading and meditating upon the Bible, through prayer, and by spending time seeking God’s truth in every intellectual area of life. As we get to know God more intimately, J.I. Packer claims that we will expend great energy for God, think great thoughts of God, show great boldness for God, and reap great contentment in God.

WE MUST FIND MENTORS AND LEADERS TO HELP US GROW IN WISDOM AND MENTAL MATURITY.

Parents and teachers build within children the resources and reserves to handle the struggles and answer the questions the world will pose. Whether we are children of five years, or adults of twenty-five years, we continue to learn and to develop as we watch those we respect. In The Abolition of Man C.S. Lewis suggested that Aristotle and Plato believed in modelling. For Aristotle, the aim of education was to make the pupil like and dislike what he ought. According to Lewis, Plato went further, saying: “the human animal must be trained to feel pleasure, liking, disgust, and hatred at those
Deeper

- The Abolition of Man by C. S. Lewis.
- The Weight of Glory and Other Addresses by C. S. Lewis.
- Excellence without a soul: Does liberal education have a future? by R. L. Lewis.
- Knowing God by J. I. Packer.
- Piety and Philosophy: A Primer for Christian Schools by R. A. Riesen.
- The knowledge of the holy by A. W. Tozer.

WE MUST EXPOSE OURSELVES TO EDUCATIONAL EXCELLENCE.

There is a reason that much of what exists in great schools has existed for centuries. Classical literature, grammar, and rhetoric ought to be studied seriously. Students should graduate as articulate leaders. Advanced mathematics and science courses ought to be offered and taken. We should understand scientific laws and theories, able to defend our beliefs masterfully as informed and learned adults. This includes a clear understanding of the importance of Darwinism as well as other theories on creation. Becoming world language learners should be a goal. Many of our forefathers translated entire books of the Bible from Greek to Latin as a part of their college entrance exam. In our global society, we ought to be minimally conversant in a second language. Developing historical understanding of what has led to current world affairs should be common among educated men and women as we develop strategic initiatives to influence culture. How can we influence the future if we have no grasp of our past?

Knowledge of these subjects is further knowledge of our God. If we believe that all truth is God's truth, as Augustine said, we should not only seek truth, but also be encouraged to question why. After all, will not the answers lead us eventually to the Creator of all knowledge and all learning? We must not be afraid of doubt and fear. Instead, we must find the tools to uncover the answers to the questions that cause doubt and fear. As we do, we will certainly find truth waiting for us in the form of our Savior, Jesus Christ.

MATURING TOWARDS INFLUENCE

Boston Trinity Academy is just one example of a school's work to train students to become transformative, Christian leaders. Whether attending a Christian or secular university, I challenge you to become a thinking Christian—mentally mature, willing and able to embrace wisdom. This is never-ending task, as Christians must seek daily to know Jesus more and to embrace Him more fully. In so doing, we must strive to be people of faith, committed to enhancing faith with our intellects, by the renewing of our minds, learning from others, and growing in community as believers. Not only will we mature mentally and spiritually, we will influence the world around us. ☪

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