

Anti-Intellectual Inertia

David R. Nienhuis notes that most of his seminary students—future Christian leaders—are deeply misinformed about basic Bible doctrines. According to Nienhuis, God functions as “divine butler-therapist” or a “nice, permissive dad with a big wallet.” Students cannot integrate Bible characters and events within the broader Old and New Testament narratives or within the biblical worldview. Moreover, Brent A. Strawn asserts that the influence of the Old Testament in the church is waning significantly. He writes, “For many contemporary Christians, at least in North America, the Old Testament has ceased to function in healthy ways in their lives as a sacred, authoritative, canonical literature.”

In 1994, prominent evangelical historian Mark Noll wrote, “The scandal of the evangelical mind is that there is not much of an evangelical mind.” In 2011, he published a cautiously optimistic reassessment of Christian intellectuality, but he maintained that this intellectual recovery “does not possess theologies full enough, traditions of intellectual practice strong enough, or conceptions of the world deep enough to sustain a full-scale intellectual revival.”

My personal experience has confirmed these concerns. Christian laypeople suffer from profound anti-intellectual inertia. They are all too often willfully naive and blissfully unaware by choice. They are sometimes curious, but usually uncommitted. They are not prepared to read, write, or reflect deeply. They are unwilling to submit to programmatic learning or qualified teachers. They think like consumers, shopping for knowledge, learning formats, and instructors that conform to their buying preferences. Their infatuation with entertainment, consumerism, and digital chatter does not leave time or energy for gaining insight. They prefer junk food for their minds...

Many evangelicals downplay analysis and rigorous thought. Some fall for “fake news” and conspiracy theories hawked by social media gurus. They do not listen with discernment to the voices that call out to them. Reasoning from Scripture and theological education are not considered useful endeavors. In short, many believers minimize and misuse the intellect. They do not recognize how sin impacts our reasoning. They do not know how to love God with the mind.

(Such A Mind As This: A Biblical-Theological Study of Thinking in the Old Testament by Richard L. Smith, Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock, Kindle, 2021, Page 17 & 18 of 581)