

# The Christian Mind

By Rev. Bassam M. Madany

During the early fifties, I read a pamphlet by Roland Allen, a British missionary with long years of experience in the Far East, dealing with education in the mission field. In his critique of educating children of unbelievers in mission schools, he wrote:

***Christian education is far more the teaching of Christians than teaching given by Christians. Christian education becomes non-Christian in the non-Christian mind.***

That was the first time I came across the word "mind" used in that specific way.

More than a decade later, I read Harry Blamires, THE CHRISTIAN MIND. The first sentence of Chapter 1 read: "There is no longer a Christian mind." It was a very challenging message to Christians who are concerned about the inroads of secularism in all parts of our culture. Later on, in my work as radio missionary to the Arabic speaking world, I studied Raphael Patai's THE ARAB MIND, which was an anthropological/sociological work on what makes the Arab think the way he thinks and behave the way he behaves. The same author wrote also a book about his own people, THE JEWISH MIND. As we now live in a global milieu, the term "mind," referring to the basic way people look at the world and seek to organize their thoughts and actions, has been adopted by non-English speaking people as I recently noticed its use in a weekly Arabic news magazine.

Before we go further in our reflection on the Christian Mind, we may note that the Bible refers to "mind" on several occasions. For example, the summary of the moral law is mentioned in all the synoptic gospels. "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind." (Matt. 22:37) "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength." (Mark 12: 30) These words are repeated in Luke 10: 27 with a slight difference in order. While the Word of God challenges us to love Him and to consecrate our minds in His service, it warns us about the devastating effects of the Fall on the mind. We read in Romans 1: 28: "Furthermore, since they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, he gave them over to a depraved mind; to do what ought not to be done."

The nearest approximation to the expression "Christian Mind" occurs in two passages. In I Cor. 2: 16, we read: "For who has known the mind of the Lord that he may instruct him? But we have the mind of Christ." And in Philippians 2:5 "Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus." (AV)

We have a Biblical mandate to develop the Christian mind. This is crucial in our time since we are surrounded by secularism. All aspects of our cultural life have been taken over by non-Christian worldviews. The development of a Christian mind does not entail a journey into one's own subjective world. Rather it is a life-long exercise in appropriating

and assimilating a thoroughly Christian view of reality; in other words, it requires the adoption of a worldview which is based on the Bible as understood and expounded within the historic orthodox tradition.

A first basic and fundamental characteristic of a truly Christian worldview which must inform the Christian mind is the doctrine of creation. If we do not take seriously this Biblical truth and allow it to act upon our thought processes, we cannot claim to be thinking Christianly. Both the Book of Genesis and the Gospel according to John underline this fact. "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." (Gen. 1:1) "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made." (John 1:1-3)

During the fourth and fifth centuries, this foundational truth was clearly confessed by the church: "We believe in one God, the Father, ruler of all, maker of heaven and earth, of all things visible and invisible." (Nicene Creed as formulated at Chalcedon in 451) The Confessions of Faith and the Catechisms of the Reformation reaffirmed this fundamental tradition.

It is unfortunate that this allegiance to the Biblical truth of creation as confessed by the believing church across the ages has been eroded during the last two centuries. Darwinian evolutionism was so seductive that many Christian leaders succumbed to it and tried to harmonize it with Biblical teachings by positing a theory of "theistic evolution." The devastating effects of evolutionism can be seen in all parts of life, especially in the area of morals. The consistent Christian rejects any attempt to fit evolutionism into his worldview. It is both unbiblical and a mere hypothesis which has never been scientifically proven. It simply came in handy to the disciples of the Enlightenment whose goal was to eliminate all beliefs in the supernatural and to posit a thoroughly naturalistic worldview.

A second basic and fundamental characteristic of a truly Christian worldview which must inform the Christian mind is the doctrine of the Fall. There is something basically wrong with man as we know him throughout history. This is not due to a flaw in God's creation, but to man's rebellion against God. If this Biblical truth is denied or minimized, we cannot claim to be exercising a truly Christian mind when we reflect upon the human condition.

In my work as a missionary to the Muslims, I find the doctrine of the Fall, as taught in the Bible and as fully accepted in the Augustinian and Reformed traditions, of great importance. It is a characteristic of the Muslim mind to believe in the basic innocence of man. According to its understanding of the human nature, man commits many sins, some are small, and others are great. He needs God's forgiveness. He receives it by practicing the requirements of the Shari'a (Law). As a North African listener once wrote: "When you talk about sins in the plural I understand you, but when you talk about sin in the singular, I don't understand you." He meant that while man sins, he is not "dead in trespasses and sins." (Ephesians 2:1) What is in the back of the Muslim mind is the claim

that since man's condition is primarily that of ignorance, he only needs to "know" in order to "do" the will of Allah and thus be saved. Revelation is all that man needs. There is no need for redemption from without. This became the fundamental Islamic motif for rejecting the historicity of the crucifixion and the necessity of the vicarious atonement achieved by Christ on the cross of Calvary.

The Christian takes the results of the Fall seriously whether he is reflecting on ethical, social, economic, political or any other subject relating to human existence. His consistent testimony to the world must be clear and forthright: no superficial remedy to the deadly illness which clings to the human nature will do. Man, whether ancient, modern or postmodern, needs a radical transformation which is nothing less than a complete change of mind; he must undergo a metanoia. This takes place through the application of the redemptive work of Christ in the heart of a believer and through the creative ministry of the Holy Spirit, "the Lord and giver of life."

The church has not always been consistent in her acceptance of the Biblical doctrine of the Fall. In reading one of the earliest commentaries on the New Testament written in Arabic by a Christian from Damascus, Syria, during the ninth century AD, I was thrilled to notice his mainly evangelical convictions. Yet, when it came to the doctrine of man, I was disappointed. Somehow he had bought into the dualistic notion that the soul was basically pure, whereas the body was the focus of sin. The unity of the human personality was not maintained, neither the Pauline insistence on the sinfulness of the entire person, body and soul.

During the fourth century, Augustine of Hippo had to face the British monk Pelagius whose teachings minimized the effects of the Fall. While the church condemned Pelagianism as heretical, the sad fact is that this early heresy, with some modifications, has persisted within the life of the church to this very day. Sometimes it is plainly advocated by Liberal Protestant ministers and teachers when they proclaim the basic goodness of man and his salvation by his own efforts or through some type of social or political scheme. But quite often it invades evangelical circles which do subscribe to the supreme and final authority of the Bible while at the same time minimizing the consequences of Adam's fall. This happens when a certain type of dichotomous thinking allows them to posit the "neutrality" of the human will and its ability to initiate the process of change within man prior to his regeneration. Such an understanding of the human condition literally begets several wrong notions regarding our approach to the victims of secularism and to the adherents of non-Christian faiths. I will elaborate on this point later on in this article.

A third basic and fundamental characteristic of a Christian worldview which must inform the Christian mind is the fact of redemption which has been accomplished by the incarnation of the Son of God, his ministry, sufferings, death, resurrection and ascension. This Biblical truth forms the very heart of the Christian mind. We live under the throne of the Messiah whose victory over sin, the devil and evil is complete. He presides over the march of history. He directs his people by His Word and Spirit to be co-workers with Him in the fulfillment of his eternal plan of salvation. History is not meaningless. In

contrast to this Christian view, modern man, hounded by ennui and angst, declares the futility of life in his art, literature, and music as well as in his mad pursuit of "happiness" at any cost.

The Christian, whose worldview is informed by the Biblical doctrine of redemption, bears a joyful testimony to this undeniable fact. He points to the reality that people from all over the globe are coming to the Lord Jesus Christ and becoming members of His Body, the church. They are willing to suffer for Him within closed and undemocratic cultures. Martyrs for their faith in Jesus, the Messiah, are not merely to be found in the history of the early church or in the days of the Reformation; they are dying for the Lord in our century as well!

That Western culture has repudiated the doctrine of a divinely initiated redemption which is based on a historical act of God in the person of His Son Jesus Christ, does not change the fact or the significance of that decisive event. If we truly believe this doctrine we should never hesitate to boldly profess it in all that we say or do. It is quite instructive, for example, that Paul, in his introduction to the Letter to the Romans, did not set forth his theme in a positive manner. He could have said in Romans 1:16 "I am very proud of the gospel of Christ." But he expressed himself in a negative statement: "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ..." He did that in order to emphasize the fact that, while the prevailing cultural standards of his days considered the message of a crucified and risen savior as nonsense, he was boldly articulating his Christian mind which was under the control and guidance of the Holy Spirit. He refused to yield to the temptation of making his message culturally "correct."

We face the same attitude to the doctrine of redemption by the cultural elites who control the arts, the media and the universities. While they are willing to consider what non-Christian worldviews may have to offer, they dismiss a Christian worldview as one which has been outmoded or discredited by the discoveries of modern science! The Christian outlook on life is not considered worth examining. Those who still advocate it are regarded as reactionaries. Worse descriptions have been hurled at them, as experienced not long ago, in the aftermath of the national political conventions of 1992. I shall never forget the words of a well known columnist of a Midwestern daily who described the mere mentioning of culture wars as a product of a Nazi mind! That a concerted effort to drive away every aspect of the Christian tradition from the public square does not constitute a manifestation of cultural warfare is hard to fathom! In such a charged and anti-Christian atmosphere, Christians are tempted to be "ashamed" of the gospel, and to retreat into some religious or cultural ghettos where their existence is completely marginalized. But regardless of how the others regard him, the believer manifests his Christian mind by boldly witnessing to the Biblical gospel which is rooted in the Messiah who died and rose again to bring about our liberation from the dominion of sin and the imperialism of the Evil One.

A fourth characteristic of a truly Biblical worldview is the appropriation and assimilation of the Biblical teaching concerning the End. This must be emphasized time and again, since our secular culture is extremely preoccupied with matters of the here and now.

After all, this is what secularism is all about. The vertical dimension of life is irrelevant, according to the tenets of the prevailing humanistic worldview in the West. If there is a heaven, we must create it right here on earth, with our own efforts and according to our own blueprints.

The Christian worldview does regard the here and now as important. After all, the doctrine of creation informs us about the divine origin of everything that exists. We are not called upon to hate life, or to deny the importance of the material side of creation. God's revelation has many guidelines about how we are to order our life in this world. While the Fall has introduced a very disturbing and disrupting factor into God's good creation, the Redemption accomplished by Christ and applied by the Holy Spirit in this world, works towards the restriction of the effects of sin. Thanks to God's general and special grace, the world does not become as evil as it could possibly be. Life on earth is not what existence is in Hell. Wherever the Gospel has had its impact, there is so much good and wonderful and beautiful in the here and now. And yet, a consistently Christian worldview which directs the Christian mind must take into account the fact that the present world order is imperfect and will not last for ever. There is going to be an End. Every time Christians confess their historic faith, whether using the Apostles' Creed or the Nicene Creed, they proclaim their faith in the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting. This is not a pious wish which is intended to enable the Christian to transcend the disappointments of life. It is a fundamental component of his Christian worldview.

When Paul was about to finish his exposition of the good news, he reminded the believers in Rome that to appropriate the Christian message entailed the full acceptance of the doctrine of the Christian hope. This hope is centered on the eschatological future which will become an experienced reality at the Second Coming of Christ.

We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what he already has? But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently. (Romans 8:22-25)

It seems that this prominent Biblical theme of the Christian hope is no longer playing its important role in the mind of many evangelicals today. Having overemphasized the eschatological component of the gospel during the nineteenth and first half of the twentieth century, they seem to be very eager to "prove" to the liberals that they are very interested in the here and now. But this is done at the expense of a balanced presentation of the entire Biblical message. As seen above in the quotation from Romans 8, Christians may not overlook the fact that so many of the promises of God are to be realized in the future, i.e., that future which follows the Second Advent of Christ. The Christian must keep his balance by fully incorporating the totality of the Biblical message and never seek to modify it in order to make it more "relevant" to the spirit of the age.

Thus far, I have endeavored to delineate a basic outline of how the Christian mind ought to function in submission to the supreme and final authority of the Bible under the guidance of the Holy Spirit who has been active in the life of the church across the ages. In the remaining part of this article, I would like to submit some concrete examples which point to certain pitfalls which must be avoided in our practice of the Christian mind. I trust that in this way, what may have thus far appeared to be quite theoretical may be illustrated through examples drawn from my ministry among the Arabic-speaking Muslims.

I have always been puzzled by some evangelical broadcast ministries which send young nationals to train in communications at secular universities in the West. I am not referring to the technical aspect of radio and television. No harm is done by learning the skills which are necessary for the proper functioning of broadcasting stations. What I am referring to is the secular humanistic views of communications which are taught "as gospel truth" in the citadels of state or private universities which have long ago departed from the Christian tradition. What is learned in such circles cannot be harmonized with the teachings of the Bible on the contents of the message, the way of its delivery and the manner of its reception by the audience. Secular theories of communications ignore completely the nature of revealed truths as well as the absolute necessity of the work of the Holy Spirit.

It is very instructive that Paul in his First Letter to the Corinthians, chapters 1 and 2, emphasized not only the integrity of the Christian message, but equally the manner of "packaging" it.

When I came to you, brothers, I did not come with eloquence or superior wisdom as I proclaimed to you the testimony about God. For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. ... My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power, so that your faith might not rest on men's wisdom, but on God's power.

Paul was not implying that we may approach our work as evangelists and preachers in a sloppy manner, just saying "what's on our hearts." But in the context of the entire epistle, Paul was warning against the acceptance of Hellenistic methodologies regarding the transmission of the message of Christ. In other words, the gospel of salvation must not be packaged in accordance with the prevailing and changing views of communications, but with full reliance on the work of the Holy Spirit. Both the message and the manner of its delivery must be done according to the Biblical directives. As Paul concluded chapter 2:

We have not received the spirit of the world but the Spirit who is from God, that we may understand what God has freely given us. This is what we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, expressing spiritual truths in spiritual words. The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned. For who has known the mind of the Lord that he may instruct him? But we have the mind of Christ.

Another example I would like to cite, which causes me to lament with Harry Blamires the absence of the Christian mind, is the naiveté of evangelicals who adopted the modern Contextualization movement as their approach to followers of non-Christian religions. It was heralded as a great discovery in the "how to" of missions. It "guaranteed" success. The motifs of this movement were not so much derived from Scriptures as from cultural anthropology. One got the impression when listening to the advocates of this movement that missionaries from Paul's days down to the middle of our century have not done their work properly. After all, they did not take culture seriously. As one leading evangelical authority put it: "How are we to explain the pitifully small 'dent' which has been made, for instance, on the 600 million Hindus of India and the 700 million Moslems of the Islamic block? Although different answers are given to these questions, they are all basically cultural. The major challenge to the worldwide Christian mission today is whether we are willing to pay the cost of following in the footsteps of our incarnate Lord in order to contextualize the Gospel. Our failure of communication is a failure of contextualization." (John Stott in *DOWN TO EARTH: STUDIES IN CHRISTIANITY AND CULTURE*, Eerdmans, 1980.)

It is indeed very painful for me to take sharp exception to these words of a noted British evangelical who has played such a big role in the Lausanne Movement. The thesis that missions have failed among Muslims or Hindus cannot be sustained. It was 200 years ago that William Carey went to India and launched the modern missionary enterprise. Pioneer missionaries such as Henry Martyn, St Clair-Tisdall, Samuel Zwemer, Henry Jessup, Eli Smith, Cornelius Van Dyck and George Ford are but a few among the cloud of nineteenth and early twentieth century men and women who have done great work for the Lord in the Muslim world. Without their work, no missionary activity would take place among the Muslims today.

It is to the credit of these giants and their colleagues that they were masters of the national languages of the field such as Hindi, Persian, Turkish and Arabic. The Presbyterian missionaries who founded the Syrian Protestant College (which came to be known as the American University of Beirut) pioneered the revival of the classical Arabic culture. It was their students who carried the torch of cultural revival to Cairo, Egypt. To claim that they failed in the communication of the gospel because they did not contextualize is not an accurate description of what actually took place. It was a long standing policy of mission boards laboring in the Middle East to require language study for five years before the missionary was assigned his or her proper field of labor. I shall never forget visiting a saintly retired missionary who spent forty years of her life in Egypt. She gave me several of her Arabic books. She shared with me the fact that she still had her devotions in Arabic!

An objective rather than an ideological reading of the history of Protestant missions since the days of William Carey would reveal that the difficulties did not reside in the attitude and policies of the early missionaries and their "unwillingness" to contextualize, but in the field itself. Both Hinduism with its rigid caste system and Islam with its virulent anti-Christian worldview posed formidable obstacles to the gospel. Yet, great things have been accomplished through the work of countless men and women from North America

and Western Europe all over Africa, Asia and Latin America. It is to the credit of Christianity with its tradition of translating its sacred scriptures into the languages of the world, that it helped a multitude of peoples to have their own written languages. The pioneers did engage in cross-cultural communication, even though they did not use that expression. What escapes many of their critics is the fact that almost all the early missionaries spent all their adult lives in the field. Many of them died there as the Protestant cemeteries of Beirut and Cairo, for example, testify to their devotion to Christ and to the people they served! The autobiography of Henry Jessup is entitled: FIFTY THREE YEARS IN SYRIA. Those early missionaries were masters of communications because their minds were saturated by the Bible. They considered themselves as disciples of Paul as far as their "missiology" was concerned. And while they would not have regarded their presence in the field as incarnational, since their Christian mind reserved "incarnation" uniquely to their Lord, their works testified to their walk in the footsteps of the Savior.

Another instance which reveals the lack of a functioning Christian mind is related to the debate about priorities in missions. This has been precipitated by the tragic conditions in many third world countries. Should the Word be given priority over works of mercy? Or do they both enjoy equal status? What type of hierarchy should be adopted as we labor in third world lands?

Historically, Christian missions did not have a dichotomous outlook as they went overseas with the objective of evangelizing the world. The Bible was translated, the good news was proclaimed in the national languages, schools and hospitals were built. When liberalism triumphed among several mainline Protestant churches, it was natural for them to de-emphasize the message and to concentrate on "good works." This was very evident in the Levant (Syria and Lebanon) in the missionary policies and practices of the Presbyterian Church, USA, and beginning early in this century. I well remember my father telling me, after returning from a pastor's conference in Mount Lebanon, about an American missionary who publicly expressed his unbelief regarding the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. Liberal missions having nothing to proclaim, concentrated their efforts on medical, agricultural and educational endeavors which duplicated the secular American schools of all levels.

When we take the Bible seriously and apply its missionary principles, should there remain any doubt about the primacy of salvation and that God has ordained the preaching of His Word, as a means of salvation? Works of mercy must not take place in a vacuum. They should be accomplished within the context of the total ministry of the church in any mission field. Should the works of mercy be divorced from the Word, the nationals would tend to regard the missionaries' motifs from the standpoint of their own worldview. They would look upon them as meritorious acts performed in order to win the approval of God. And when it comes to education, it is only when the Word has had its full impact and brought a national church into being, that a truly Christian education takes place, as Roland Allen observed more than half a century ago.

In closing, the topic of the Christian mind is of utmost importance. But the Christian mind will not automatically appear just by being discussed. It will manifest itself only when there has been a thorough reformation of the Christian church and a true revival of the faith among those who claim to be followers of Jesus Christ. I thank God for the role of this journal and its serious efforts to promote such an important agenda while fully realizing that the reformation and the revival we await will come as the work of our sovereign God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, to Him be the glory for ever. Amen.

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