

BOOK REVIEW
By Mike Spaulding

This paper is a review, analysis, and critique of Gene Edward Veith's book, *Loving God With All Your Mind: Thinking as a Christian in the Postmodern World*.¹ Veith has chosen to update his previous work to include new material related specifically to postmodernism. The first edition release was 1987 and was not able to address the significant paradigm shifts from modernism to postmodernism that emerged shortly thereafter. In the 2003 edition Veith tackles the ideas of relative truth and culturally created values within a postmodern view.

The author has divided his work into three parts. Part one is devoted to laying a foundation for the Christian pursuit of education. Veith makes the case that pursuing knowledge is foundational to Christianity. The Christian faith according to Veith provides a basis for learning and encourages the "life of the mind," a legitimate God-pleasing calling. In part two the author discusses the prominent current secular framework of assumptions and characteristics that explain why secularism remains adrift and how Christians can contribute to discussions within all fields of knowledge. Part three is devoted to laying out a Christian worldview that is seen to be intellectually superior to secular counterparts.

PART ONE

It has been well documented in the past three decades that secular institutions have abandoned any pretense to objectiveness in their educational goals,² opting instead to propagandize and

¹Gene Edward Veith Jr., *Loving God With All Your Mind: Thinking as a Christian in a Postmodern World* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2003).

²Alan Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind: How Education has Failed Democracy and Impoverished the Souls of Today's Students* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1987).

develop a particular mindset in their consumers.³ This disregard for traditional liberal classical education – not to be confused with liberalism today – has produced a negative response from most Christians as seen in the withdrawal from and criticism of secular educational institutions. Most criticism is just and fairly accurate but the response of withdrawal while understandable to an extent is somewhat troubling.

Withdrawal in the current Christian context results in separation and disengagement. Some see this as a right response. I do not agree however, that the interests of faith and Christian cultural influence are best served by separation and disengagement. The reasons are obvious but necessarily stated. We are called to be salt and light in and to the world. Salt is tasted and light is seen and neither quality is available to a secular culture when they are confined to a Christian subculture.

Veith states his own reasons for remaining engaged with secular culture and gives numerous examples of people that did from the Scriptures in support of his view. Moses for example was educated in the wisdom of Egypt, Daniel and his three companions were trained in the ways of the Chaldeans, and the apostle Paul received the best available education of his time “at the feet of Gamaliel.”⁴ The idea that Veith develops in the opening portion of his book is that, “by precept, by example, by its history, and by its very nature, the Bible opens up to us the whole world of truth.”⁵ For the author this means that all fields of study that aid in an understanding of the Bible are worthy to be explored. This would necessarily include literacy training as a foundational endeavor. The development of literacy in Europe is most certainly traced back to Christians and their efforts to have the Scriptures available to all people for their personal

³Dinesh D’Souza, *Illiberal Education: The Politics of Race and Sex on Campus* (New York: The Free Press, 1991).

⁴Acts 22:3. Unless otherwise stated all Scripture quotations are from The New American Standard Bible, *The Lockman Foundation* (Chicago, IL: Moody, 1995).

⁵Veith, 25.

reading, education, and edification. This remains a large part of many missionary efforts including Wycliffe Bible Translator missionaries. These literary efforts played an important role in the development of the printing press as demand grew for Bibles and other printed materials.

Linguistics education followed literacy training. Because the original languages of the Bible are Hebrew and Greek it is important to know those languages to determine what God inspired. That endeavor is aided by an understanding of the histories of those languages and of the nations in which they were utilized. Veith develops a convincing dovetailed chain of events that include the disciplines already mentioned as well as geography, archaeology, and anthropology all arising out of the Christian belief that the Bible should be read and understood.

The most compelling evidence for a Christian educational endeavor is found in the existence of Western civilization and thought. Veith makes it clear that in spite of the virulent attacks launched against Christianity by scientists, they must in the least acknowledge that only within a Christian worldview could science have arisen. Without laboring the point here, one can look to other cultures that have remained undeveloped and seemingly locked in time for proof of this truth. At issue are the assumptions that characterize their worldview. For instance Christianity views nature as God's creation and therefore worthy of investigation. Nature is not to be feared or appeased as mankind has historically done. Scientific disciplines can only develop within an atmosphere of intentional pursuit of knowledge and learning. That is why Christian Europe developed and expanded to colonize the Western hemisphere. The pursuit of knowledge and discovery was paramount, other issues notwithstanding.

Today, scientists who claim to pursue truth wherever it may be found have become in the West, prisoner to their limited worldview that values technique and technology above nature as creation. Ironically while dismissing Christianity to the realm of personal individual choice they

invest in nature divine qualities such as eternity and self-sufficiency. For this writer a “bridge of contact” can be made at this point in the least.⁶ By introducing ideas of transcendence into the universe Christians can engage secular people about their underlying premises for such thoughts and beliefs. This leads inexorably to a decided advantage for the Christian over and against his or her secular counterpart.

PART TWO

Veith takes the secular mindset to task in part two. Calling on Christians to understand that they are “freed from the credulities of secular humanism, the mind-deadening cynicism of postmodernism, and the stifling limitations of scientific materialism,”⁷ he insists that the current secular attacks upon Christianity are grounded more in hyperbole than fact and reason.

This does not diminish the extent or ferocity of the secular assault upon Christianity. A key issue for this writer is that the secular assault is often sublime. This may appear to be contradictory to some as I have suggested that secularism is a ferocious adversary. What this reveals is the intellectual mindset of those given to a secular worldview, including those who consider themselves Christians.

The pivotal point in understanding this seeming contradiction is seen in the approach taken to the authority of Scripture. Christians fall into two general camps. One perspective understands the authority of the Bible to inform and teach and accepts that authority as the rule for living. Thus life is viewed through the prism of Scripture. A second group consists of those who may

⁶Francis Schaeffer used this term in his apologetic method to describe the point at which Christians can invade secular discussion. People use morally-laden and value-pregnant phrases without correctly understanding the implications of their beliefs. At that point Christians have the opportunity to inquire as to the personal premise for such statements. This provides an advantage to the believer in most discussions as they are able to provide the biblical basis for such beliefs.

⁷Veith, 37.

have understood and accepted the Bible as a rule or authority but for various reasons no longer does. This second group unwittingly it is hoped, has been duped into adopting a secular worldview. This group has succumbed to the pervasiveness of a world without God. What I mean by that is that God is never considered in light of any vocational discipline. The net effect of this conspiracy of silence regarding Christianity is the accepted though not spoken belief that all of life can be explained without appeal to the supernatural.

Some might contest this explanation as untrue or perhaps unfair but analysis proves otherwise. Theological liberals who are more attuned to secularists than traditional Christianity share a common experience. At some point in their faith journey they have acquiesced to secular pressures for respect and acceptance. The price they paid was the forfeiture of orthodoxy. In spite of the constant drumbeat of the secular media against it, doctrine remains a central point of focus for understanding God and what He has spoken to His creation. At the risk of oversimplifying the issue, God has spoken to us through the written word. It is important that we understand what He has said and live life according to that understanding. When Christians disengage from that foundation all forms of aberrant theologies follow.

A weakness of secularism and its attacks upon Christianity is revealed many times in the contradictory reasons people give for rejecting Christianity. For example critics claim that God is indifferent to the suffering of mankind. This criticism is certainly offset by a God who sent His own Son to be the suffering servant for mankind. Secularists appear schizophrenic when they charge Christianity with neglecting the poor (Marxism) and helping the poor (followers of Ayn Rand) at the same time.

The most virulent attacks are reserved for the Church as an institution. Few believers have not heard the litany of grievances against the Church that include the atrocities of the Crusades,

the Inquisition, the numerous pogroms throughout the years, the political chicanery, as well as the belated support in some instances for human and racial rights. Unfortunately these are all legitimate examples of Christians failing to live up to what they claim to believe. This does not however, invalidate the Christian faith. Sin is never consistent with Biblical faith no matter how sincerely practiced. The Biblically inconsistent actions of some cannot hold Christianity hostage. Those who shoot abortion doctors are not examples of what Christianity teaches. Believers must affirm the criticisms they face as fair when appropriate but rejoin that the true example is found in Christ to which all believers are striving to emulate.

In this section Veith also moves from the modernist to the postmodernist challenge. Modernism characterized by its dependence on and faith in scientific naturalism has been exposed much like the emperor in Andersen's fabled children's story. Postmodernism takes a scorched earth approach to cultural engagement. Any and every field of inquiry is fair game to the deconstructionist's guillotine. While Christianity has certainly not escaped postmodernism's scathing critiques, it has fared far better than its secular counterparts. For instance Christianity has always been forthright in its confession that faith operates by supposition. Christians believe certain things based on certain other things that are taken for granted. Of primary importance is the belief that God exists. Science on the other hand had, until postmodernism captured the academic fortresses, believed it was without assumption. The generally accepted albeit specious belief among academics was that science was conducted free of presuppositions. Postmodernism brought an end to that unchallenged axiom.

This turn of events is fortunate for Christianity. Previously most scientists were unwilling to discuss ideas, theories, or research that suggested alternatives to existing scientific dogma involving a beginning of the universe. By challenging scientific naturalism postmodernism has

opened the door for Christian scientists to discuss evidence of energy fields, the movements of galaxies, subatomic particles, and quantum physics within the context of a starting point for the universe. Although still derided generally and adamantly by the so-called “new atheists,”⁸ a theory of the universe that appears similar to the Christian creation origin story is being discussed.

One challenge to Christianity that postmodernism presents is seen predominantly in the area of knowledge, specifically related to epistemology. Postmodernism agrees with existentialism by stating matter-of-factly that we cannot know anything with certainty. Of course this statement itself is nonsensical because if it is true it is false as we would know at least that one thing and thus the statement becomes self-refuting.

The weight of the postmodern argument in the area of epistemology has been thrust against the notion of objective truth. Truth to the postmodernist is not objective and cannot be discovered. Instead truth is a construction of the individual based on personal likes, dislikes, cultural operators that influence an individual, and in the end is unknowable.⁹ In support of their theories most postmodernists turn to the differences evident across cultures. These differences according to postmodernism are the result of different cultural norms and values. Postmodernists conclude that because there are differences across cultures there are different truths and because there are difference truths, truth must be relative. Christians would agree with the initial observation but would disagree with the conclusion.

Christians would counter by saying that one way to account for the differences seen across cultures is to see cultures that exclude God as deliberate God-evading social constructions.

⁸Dinesh D’Souza, *What’s So Great About Christianity* (Washington D.C.: Regenery Publishing, 2007).

⁹This postmodern view of truth is the intellectual basis for the unflinching and unashamed positions of pro-abortion, pro-homosexual, pro-euthanasia, and pro-drug usage as well as almost everything else many Christians stand opposed to on Scriptural grounds. The postmodernist ethical insistence on individual choice as an unassailable right effectively negates any consideration of the substance or consequence of their choice.

Truth cannot be apprehended nor denied by choosing to deliberately avoid it. This is an effective method of restating the postmodern position in a way that turns it on itself. The advantage for the Christian in pursuing this line of reasoning is that it leads quite naturally to an opportunity to introduce the Christian doctrine of original sin as the greatest underlying factor in the differences across cultures. Again, cultures have responded to both internal and external factors differently over time. Those cultures that have grasped and integrated a Christian concept of original sin and its attendant need to seek forgiveness from God as Creator are today seen as the most developed in almost all areas that can be measured.

PART THREE

Veith begins this final section of his book by emphasizing the need for Christians to maintain close fellowship with an established local body of believers. Being an educator Veith speaks of what he has seen. Academic peer pressure is a force few young and inexperienced academicians are prepared for. The author quotes noted sociologist Peter Berger extensively. Berger's research has led him to conclude that moral libertarianism and political and social liberalism are required mindsets in order to gain acceptance and although unspoken certainly implied tenure.

Berger asserts:

The symbols of class culture are important. They allow people to "sniff out" who belongs and who does not; they provide easily applied criteria of "soundness." Thus a young instructor applying for a job in an elite university is well advised to hide "unsound" views such as political allegiance to the right wing of the Republican party (perhaps even to the left wing), opposition to abortion or to other causes of the feminist movement, or a strong commitment to the virtues of the corporation.¹⁰

Within the broader scope of workplaces Christians can combat this type of secular influence and pressure to conform by remembering to serve the Lord who has called His servants into

¹⁰Peter Berger, "The Class Struggle in American Religion," *Christian Century*, February 25, 1981, p. 198, in Veith, 99.

vocations of influence. This will mean going the extra mile to discover fellow believers who are immersed in the same vocations. Many times believers allow a sense of distance to develop within their spiritual lives because they believe they are alone and awash in secularism. Wise is the believer who recalls the words of God to Elijah, “I have kept for myself seven thousand men who have not bowed the knee to Baal.”¹¹ God always provides for a viable remnant.

Veith transitions from the necessity for Christians to resist the pressure of assimilation to a comparison of the current secular climate and the Babylonian magicians and enchanter of Daniel’s time. The author’s primary contention is that only a mind educated in and influenced by God can gain true knowledge from all sources in the fullest sense while simultaneously resisting the secular. To support this view Veith presents the Hebrew youth’s accomplishments before Nebuchadnezzar compared with the accomplishments of the King’s own magicians and enchanter. Daniel and his friends are described as being ten times better.¹² The reason this was so according to Veith is that the Hebrew youths were not seduced by the superstition and pagan religion surrounding the Babylonian worldview.

The point in this analogy is that modern secular man has returned to the ways of the Babylonians and their superstitious view of life and especially of nature as sacred. The scientific naturalist’s claim that “the cosmos is all there is, all there was, and all there ever will be”¹³ is a statement of eternity. Ascribing divine characteristics to inanimate things is secular man’s way to create the sacred while maintaining control over it and conversely denying the truly sacred.

The same contempt for God is seen in secular man’s political structures (Marxism and fascism) where the state becomes god and consistent with a naturalistic worldview deny civil and human rights; promote censorship as patriotism, and political oppression as expedient for the

¹¹1 Kings 19:18.

¹²Daniel 1:18-20.

¹³Attributed to the late Carl Sagan.

greater good of all. Postmodernism is likened to the Babylonian enchanters who were able to “spin a tale” that both entertained and misled their listeners and observers. The misleading explanations of the current postmodernists have to do with their assertions that truth and meaning are constructions of the individual. True freedom and humanness is best exemplified in free choices by all people. For the postmodernist the only free choices made are those that are unconventional or cut against the grain of what is socially acceptable. It is the duty of all free-thinking individuals to see oppression lurking just beneath the surface of all culturally-constructed institutions. This in turn produces the postmodern belief that societal institutions are nothing more than power structures designed to maintain the status quo by keeping the powerful in power and oppressing those who are not. What must be obvious to even a casual observer is that the real victims in this philosophical “Wonderland” of imaginary adventures are the very people who can least afford it – those alienated from God and looking for an intellectually satisfying justification for their continued rebellion.

Against this intellectual and educational dead-end Christianity offers hope rooted in objective truth. The Christian worldview offers a satisfying and consistent understanding of the universe because it is presented within a context of a God who loves it and created it with special purpose. Randomness and chance evaporate into a sea of meaning. The Christian view speaks of time and space having meaning. Time is viewed as a linear characteristic of the universe, meaning that not only was there a beginning to all that currently is – space and time – but time is also moving toward a climax or ending. The Christian worldview makes sense of the physical evidence even now being discovered and validated by scientists who are anything but Christian.

The Christian worldview also speaks of the rationality of the creation. Because God is a rational being His creation has rational characteristics. The Bible says that God created mankind

in His image. This means that people have inherent worth and value in God's eyes in spite of the sin that dominates so many. This is why Christianity upholds the sanctity of life and takes strong stands against policies and practices that seek to wantonly destroy human life.

CONCLUSION

Veith's book is a valuable resource for Christians seeking to sharpen their understanding of the secular worldviews that currently hold sway in America. More importantly it is a concise and cogent primer on how to respond to secularism consistently and authentically. Despair accurately characterizes modern man but the Christian living in these times need not adopt the same despair relating to his or her effectiveness for the kingdom. The answer to overcoming obstacles that appear insurmountable at times is to recall the words of our Lord Jesus.

Jesus commanded His followers to love God with heart, soul, *mind*, and strength.¹⁴ The original admonition found in Deuteronomy 6 does not contain the injunction to "love God with all your mind." This is an important idea to grasp for the very simple reason that it is often most neglected by otherwise well-intentioned believers. Christians strive to love God with their hearts (will, emotions), with their soul (in a saving faith relationship), with their strength (in their service activities), but what does it mean to love God with all your mind?

This writer is of the opinion that Jesus was offering His commentary on the Deuteronomy 6 passage. There we read that Christians are to keep God's Word on our hearts, teach them to our children, bring them up in conversations at home, at work, and in every place we find ourselves with an opportunity to speak of the goodness of God. In short God is to be on our minds constantly.

¹⁴Mark 12:28-30.

The mind of the Christian has been freed to speak of the wonderful majesty of God. The secular worldviews that have intentionally marginalized the Christian faith cannot answer the questions of secular man with any degree of satisfaction. To the materialist who in despair cries out in loneliness the Christian can speak of the soul of man; to the hedonist who's pursuit of pleasure has left him jaded and cold the Christian can speak of meaning and purpose in living beyond the chains of passion; to the existentialist enslaved to his nihilism the Christian can speak of reason; to the rationalist and his dependence on the intellect the Christian can speak of emotion; and to the postmodernist who cannot move beyond the quicksand of linguistic imaginations the Christian can speak of reality. Jesus reminds us today that His peace is with us in every endeavor for as the Father sent Him so he sends us.¹⁵

¹⁵John 20:21.