

Church Strategies To Overcome Anti-intellectualism

For more than twenty years I have been concerned about the anti-intellectualism in our churches. Back in the early 90's I wrote the following:

¿Cómo podemos superar las muchas “falsas ideas” que actualmente obstaculizan nuestro evangelismo, plagan nuestras iglesias y atrofian nuestra apologética? ¿Cómo podemos dejar de lado el anti-intellectualismo? ¿Cómo podemos recuperar el alto nivel cognitivo? Una manera sería promoviendo la educación cristiana a fin de desinfectar de falsas ideas a la iglesia y reconfirmar nuestra credibilidad intelectual. Porque si nuestras armas son verdaderamente la oración y la argumentación, entonces nuestros campos de batalla no son solamente la “reunión de oración” sino también el evangelismo, la apologética y la educación. Debemos, por lo tanto, dedicarnos de nuevo a erradicar “la incompatibilidad entre la honestidad intelectual y la doctrina tradicional cristiana” y “llevar cautivo todo pensamiento a la obediencia a Cristo” (2 Cor. 10:5). Por esta razón, aún más, debemos invertir mucho más dinero en nuestros futuros líderes, sus ideas y las instituciones educativas cristianas. Los colegios primarios y secundarios cristianos languidecen por escasez de recursos. Las universidades cristianas y los seminarios están desfinanciados. En tanto los estudios avanzados, en los niveles doctorales, tienen muy poca subvención, especialmente para los estudios apologéticos. No debería ser así. Deberíamos estar buscando los próximos Jonathan Edwards, Francis Schaeffer, C. S. Lewis y Cornelius Van Til.

Recently, I read a book by the philosopher and apologist, J. P. Moreland, entitled, Love Your God With All Of you Mind: The Role Of Reason In The Life Of The Soul. In this text Moreland laments the anti-intellectualism of the evangelical church in the United States. He offers several insightful observations and practical suggestions for pastors and churches that I want to pass along to you.

Sermons

Comment: “Most practicing Christians sense deep in their hearts that they know far too little about their faith and are embarrassed about it. They want to be stretched to learn something regularly and cumulatively over the years by the sermons they hear.”

Suggestions:

- 1) “From time to time a minister should intentionally preach a message aimed to the upper one-third of the congregation, intellectually speaking...(We) often dumb-down our sermons so often that the upper one-third get bored and have to look elsewhere for spiritual and intellectual food.”
- 2) “A detailed handout of two or three pages ought to be given to people. It should include detailed, structured notes following the sermon; a set of study exercises on the last page; recommendations for further reflection that week; and a bibliography.”

Sunday School and Study Centers

Comment: “We need consciously to develop fellowships of the mind, forms of gathering in which we express a joint commitment to study, learn, evangelize, defend the gospel, and penetrate the pagan culture with the radical ideas of the New Testament.”

Suggestions:

- 1) "Develop of set of course offerings...We had classes in Greek, counseling, systematic theology, church history, apologetics, philosophy, ethics, Christianity and science, etc."
- 2) "Sponsor very focused weekend retreats (on important themes)."
- 3) "It would be a good idea to hold a summer institute in apologetics and offer some worldview instruction to prepare our young people to think more carefully about what they will study at the university."

Deepening the Value of the Intellectual Life

Comment: "If the local church is to overcome its anti-intellectualism, it must find ways to raise conscious awareness of the value of the intellectual life among its members...If we evangelicals are tired of being underrepresented in the media, the university, and the government, then we need to support evangelical scholarship, especially solid evangelical colleges and seminaries, because such institutions nurture the intellectual leaders of the future...We need one hundred thousand (Christian thinkers) to write editorials, penetrate secular universities, write books, speak on talk shows, and much, much more."

Suggestions:

- 1) "We should regularly incorporate vocational or apologetical testimonies and book reports on timely topics in our service."
- 2) "Selected worshippers should be given five minutes to share how they are growing to think more Christianly as a businessperson, teacher, or whatever."
- 3) "People should share occasions where apologetics has aided their own ministry of evangelism and discipleship."
- 4) "We ought to identify intellectual leaders...and hold forth their lifework as possible vocations for our young people."
- 5) "We need to do a better job of recognizing, celebrating, enfolding, and aiding these intellectuals in their work."
- 6) "We should be more proactive in supporting and enfolding members of our body who go to graduate school. They need intellectual support. They should be paired up with someone in the church who is engaged in the same vocation."
- 7) "We need to increase our individual and congregational giving to support Christian scholarship."