



Preface

Calling is the truth that God calls us to himself so decisively that everything we are, everything we do, and everything we have is invested with a special devotion, dynamism, and direction lived out as a response to his summons and service.

OS GUINNESS, *The Call*



The topic of *Habits of the Mind* is the intellectual life, especially its integral nature. First, thinking is integral to our call to be what God wants us to be. God calls every one of us to think and to do so as well as we can. We are to love God with our mind as well as with our heart and soul and strength (Lk 10:27). How we ever thought otherwise is not the topic of this book. That fact, which should but does not astonish us, has been covered very well by others such as Mark Noll. Here I am much more interested in getting on with our call to love God with our minds by thinking as well as we can with the intelligence with which we are endowed.

Some of us, however, are called specially to a life of the mind. It is not a call that makes us either better or worse. But it is a call that must be heeded. For as Os Guinness says, "A life lived listening to the decisive call of God is a life lived before one audience that trumps all others—the Audience of One. The caller is God."¹ The central goal of this book is to identify, describe and encourage those habits of the mind that are central to fulfilling our call to glorify God by thinking well.





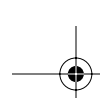
Second, thinking is rarely a matter of cold, heartless, calculating logic. Thinking feels. Sometimes when I am reading—and thinking while reading—my mind becomes so hot, so affected by the implications of the ideas, that I stop to cool off. John Henry Newman talks about the mind enraptured by the “music of the spheres.” A. G. Ser-tillanges speaks of being lifted on the downy wings of truth. There is indeed a unity between thinking and feeling. Unity, in fact, stands behind all aspects of our human *being*. I have, therefore, let my emotions be displayed as I agonize and play, think and feel, through a major theme of this book: how thinking feels.

So this is a very personal book, the most personal I have written. I have not hesitated to convey my feelings, my emotions, about the subjects I am dealing with. Moreover, I think I am learning to trust my emotions and even my gut feelings, willing to put them on display. Some might say that I am learning to be vulnerable—a term reflecting, in part and sadly, the move toward a therapeutic understanding of Christian faith. But should anyone conclude that this is really happening, be it known: I shall battle them long and hard with all the abstract intellect at my personal disposal! So there!

As I was writing this book, I had the privilege of lecturing in the Miguel de Unamuno Room in the University of Salamanca. Oddly, the topic was “responsible technology,” an analysis of the implications of technology on our social destiny. I picture Unamuno listening from the walls. What did he think? Whatever it was, one thing would have been clear. His thought would have been flavored by passion. “It is not enough to think about our destiny: it must be felt,” he wrote.² So I too would long for those who read this present book: let your thoughts be felt; let your feelings be thought. Our goal will be Unamuno’s goal: to speak as and to address “the man of flesh and bone; the man who is born, suffers, and dies—above all, who dies; the man who eats and drinks and plays and sleeps and thinks and wills; the man who is seen and heard; the brother, the real brother.”³

Third, thinking well is integral to acting righteously. Truth and





spirituality are of a piece: to know the truth is to do it. There is no dichotomy between the two. To *be* spiritual is to know/do the truth.

So my primary goal in this book is to encourage you to think more and better than you did before reading it, to strive toward “the perfection of the intellect,” to enjoy the proper habits of the mind. Though I discuss some specific biblical, theological and philosophic notions, I am far more interested in stimulating good Christian thinking and prompting it to be put into action than I am in propagating a set of ideas.

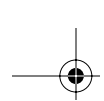
My best thinking is, however, woefully lacking in finality—even for myself. I have worked off and on for several years thinking about and writing this book. The subject is important, too important for me to publish what is still in flux in my own mind. I have wanted to wait for the last word, the final formulation, to take shape. A book on the intellectual life should be the product of settled conviction. Or so I thought. Now I have abandoned this goal. Even when I sound certain, that certainty is not absolute. Rather, may all I say reflect the wisdom of the ancient intellectual who said:

When someone is honestly 55% right, that’s very good and there’s no use wrangling. And if someone is 60% right, it’s wonderful, its great luck, and let him thank God. But what’s to be said about 75% right? Wise people say this is suspicious. Well, and what 100% right? Whoever says he’s 100% right is a fanatic, a thug, and the worst kind of rascal.⁴

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A caveat for author and reader: Always when one presumes to instruct or advise others about complex matters, there is a great danger. Dom Camillo points this out. We run the risk, he says, “of reincarnating Jesus’ message in a new culture or ideology which is destined, like all others, to perish, incapable of expressing God’s thought and fit only to be a vehicle of suffering for Christians yet to come.” Lord save us—reader and author alike—from the evil consequences of our best but erring thoughts!





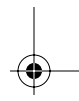
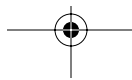
One guard against erring thoughts is the witness of the intellectual communities, both specifically Christian and generally intelligent. I have tried to submit my thoughts to these communities by consulting and quoting frequently from others across a wide spectrum of intellectual commitments. It was a delight to find ample justification for this in, of all places, a Renaissance Italian author:

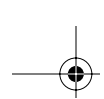
Yes, I use a great many quotations; but they are illustrious and true, and, if I am not mistaken, they convey authority pleurably. People say that I could use fewer. Of course I could; I might even omit them entirely. I shan't deny that I might even be totally silent; and perhaps that would be the wisest thing. But in view of the world's ills and shames it is hard to keep silent. . . . If anyone asks why I do so abound with quotations and seem to dwell on them so lovingly, I can merely reply that I think my reader's taste is like mine. Nothing moves me so much as the quoted maxims of great men. I like to rise above myself, to test my mind to see if it contains anything solid or lofty, or stout and firm against ill-fortune, or to find if my mind has been lying to me about itself. And there is no better way of doing this—except by direct experience, the surest mistress—than by comparing one's mind with those it would most like to resemble. Thus, as I am grateful to my authors who give me the chance of testing my mind against maxims frequently quoted, so I hope my readers will thank me.⁵

Six and a half centuries later I say, "Thank you, Petrarch." Your maxim on maxims has come in rather handy—not least in its ardent admission of authorial self-deception. May your insight help us twenty-first-century readers to detect when our minds have been lying to us about ourselves!

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I am delighted to acknowledge my debt to several scholars who have recently published books on the topic of Christian thinking. Mark Noll, Os Guinness, David Gill, Brian Walsh, Richard Middleton and George Marsden have each contributed to the development of my own views. I will only occasionally refer to their work, not





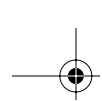
because it hasn't helped shape my own perspective but because their work is an established given. There is no need to document or give detailed explanation of American and evangelical anti-intellectualism. Noll in *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind* and Guinness in *Fit Bodies, Fat Minds* have done that. There is also no need to outline the history of the decline of a Christian presence in the academic world. Marsden has done that in *The Soul of the American University*. Nor is there need to outline a Christian worldview. Walsh and Middleton have done so in *The Transforming Vision* and *Truth Is Stranger Than It Used to Be*. Moreover, I have addressed this in *The Universe Next Door* and *Discipleship of the Mind*. David Gill has fleshed out the dimensions of the Christian mind in *The Opening of the Christian Mind*, as has Gene Edward Veith Jr. in *Loving God with All Your Mind*. The book that most parallels the themes and approach of my own is J. P. Moreland's *Love Your God with All Your Mind*, published as I had the present book well under way on paper and in my mind. I will let others judge between them.

I see in the present book a unique focus on "intellectual life" itself—not what a Christian should think but how a Christian can think better—with more accuracy, more attention to implications for life, more experience and acknowledgment of the presence of God in whatever is thought. For this I have not so much quoted my evangelical contemporaries as plumbed the riches of Christian thought of earlier centuries and other traditions.

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It has taken me several years to write this book. Though I had outlined it roughly before starting, the topic soon got away from me and the book, like Topsy, just "grewed." Even in its first conception it was never like a pine tree with a straight trunk pointing in a single upward direction. The more it grewed, the more it became like an elm or, better, a live oak. Branches went off in a dozen directions and then grew like the twigs. Only from a far distance—perhaps only *sub species aeternitatus*—could a unified form be seen. Then as it





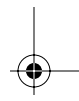
matured, a few themes appeared in different forms in a number of different chapters. I found that what I had written about reading had the same overall structure as what I was writing about knowing and doing. I saw as well that the intellectual disciplines were almost identical to the spiritual disciplines. Then I noticed the profound similarity between the engagement-abstinence disciplines and the active-passive character not just of thinking but of reading as well. Finally, another two chapters conceived at different times for different overall goals suddenly emerged as mirror images of each other but, in the final trim, were completely cut.

Chapter one introduces the intellectual life by looking at several definitions of the word *intellectual* and concluding with my own. A major source for this definition is John Henry Newman, whose own character as a Christian intellectual (the subject of chapter two) has long intrigued me, as has his concept of the “perfection of the intellect” (chapter three). Two succeeding chapters examine my own concept of *intellectual life*, first in relation to its distinctly mental dimension (chapter four) then in its moral dimension (chapter five).

Then follow three chapters detailing intellectual practice: intellectual virtues (chapter six), intellectual disciplines (chapter seven) and thinking by reading (chapter eight). A chapter on Jesus as a reasoner, even a “logician,” provides one reason (of several that could be examined) that we both can and should reason (chapter nine). The final chapter (chapter ten) challenges us as Christians to accept the responsibility to think well and in so doing to seek first the kingdom of God and to glorify God. With this structure undergirding the argument of the book, I trust it has become a tree and not a pile of dead branches.

My intent in all this could be summed up in a comment made by George Santayana about William James as a professor at Harvard University: “A philosopher who is a teacher of youth is more concerned to give people a right start than a right conclusion.”⁶ May the habits of our minds lead us to more than notebook knowledge.

Finally, I wish to thank those who have reviewed this work in





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manuscript form and offered excellent advice; for all its faults this book is better for the contributions of Harold K. Bush Jr., Steve Garber, Douglas Groothuis, Don Meeks, Terry Morrison and James Strauss. A special thanks goes to James Hoover, my stalwart and longtime editor, who has saved me from several significant gaffes. And thanks go also to Ruth Goring, the final editorial eye on these meanderings. The remaining faults are my own.

So I offer now my conception of some of the proper habits of the mind. *Tolle, lege; tolle, lege.*⁷

