

# Renewing the Christian Intellectual Tradition

The phrase “Christian world-view” is heard early and often in the careers of Union University students. Many admit upon arrival that the phrase is confusing or even intimidating.

But most leave Union with an appreciation for seeking knowledge rooted in biblical truth. In other words, they see their particular disciplines in greater depth because they also see opportunities to apply Christian principles to their callings.

The idea of combining academic rigor and Christian thinking is a challenging concept in the academy of the early 21st century. The founders of America’s oldest and most respected universities treated all intellectual discoveries as steps in a journey toward discovering God’s truth.

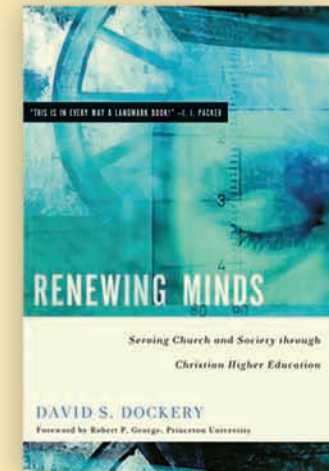
This Christian intellectual tradition forms the foundation of Union’s mission in 2007 and beyond. It’s a mission President David S. Dockery has examined in detail through the years, and a philosophy he conveys in a newly released book entitled “Renewing Minds: Serving Church and Society through Christian Higher Education.”

The book has achieved critical acclaim. Baylor University Executive Vice President and Provost J. Randall O’Brien says he will distribute a copy to every chair, dean and new faculty member. Charles Colson says the book is “a timely and valuable resource” and “there’s no greater need for the church than to equip the coming generation of Christians to engage the postmodern culture.”

In this section of the Unionite, that cultural engagement is examined through the experiences of Union students and faculty.

In addition, four members of the Union faculty and administration have addressed some of the themes that Dockery writes about in “Renewing Minds”:

- Associate Provost and Dean of Instruction Barbara McMillin writes about establishing a grace-filled academic community.
- Charles Colson Professor of Faith and Culture Hal Poe examines thinking globally about the future.
- Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences Gene Fant looks at loving God with his mind.
- Dean of the School of Christian Studies Gregory Thornbury considers a culture without Christianity. ✦





## Renewing the Christian Intellectual Tradition

In “Renewing Minds,” Union University President David S. Dockery in the chapter entitled “Establishing a Grace-Filled Academic Community” identifies unity, worship, service and the shared life as the calls incumbent upon the faculty, administration, staff and students who populate such a community.

As I pondered each of these calls I began to consider what a tour of such a community would reveal. Taking the tour was easy; I had only to look around me at the Union community in which I am blessed to serve.

### Unity

“A coherent picture of life and learning,” as Dockery describes it, comes clearly into focus when faculty, regardless of the area in which they are trained or the type of program in which they teach, unite to identify the connections and contemplate the lordship of Christ over all disciplines. On several occasions just this fall I have witnessed as engineers and historians, scientists and musicians, artists and accountants have gathered to discuss the myriad ways in which their disciplines — all our disciplines — are unified in Christ, all being created by Him and subject to Him.

### Worship

Regularly my “tour” takes me through the double doors of G.M. Savage Memorial Chapel; here it is clear that the call to worship is heard and acted upon by students, faculty and staff alike. It is evident in these weekly chapel services that the Union community makes “the worship and praise of Almighty God a high priority,” as Dockery writes. When Proclamation stirs our hearts in a mighty



song of praise or when one of our own like Roland Porter challenges us to consider our placement in this community for “such a time as this,” we are bound together in the “internal communion” that Dockery recognizes as a characteristic of worship.

### Service

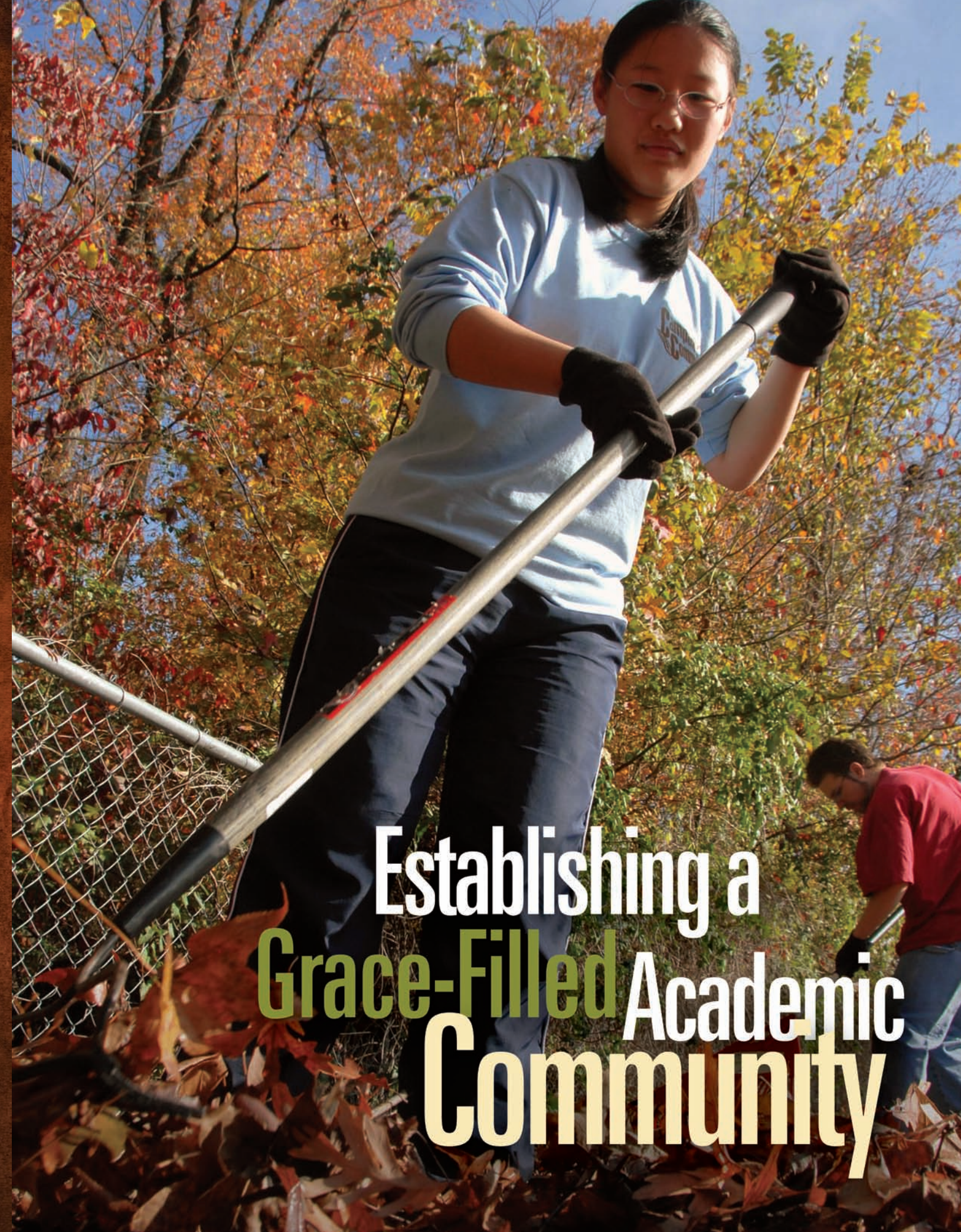
While service isn’t difficult to find on campus, the best perspective requires touring beyond the formal boundaries of the bypass and Pleasant Plains, beyond Country Club and Union University Drive. Recognizing what Dr. Dockery terms the “Augustinian tension,” Unionites are finding ways to “live in both Jerusalem and Athens.” From studies abroad and service projects to internships and GO trips, members of the Union academic community are indeed representing Christ to and in the world. Through these and other means of modeling service, we are able to engage the culture without, as Dockery notes, accommodating it.

### A Shared Life

Where are shared relationships found on our campus? In the Hundley Center? In Fresh Start (the orientation program for new faculty)? On the soccer field? In organic chemistry? In the BAC? In jazz band rehearsal? In the Greater Faculty meetings?

The answer is “yes” to all; shared relationships are found wherever two or more colleagues, two or more teammates, two or more musicians, two or more lab partners, two or more laborers in Christ come together and share their joys, their discoveries, their strengths, their weaknesses, their burdens. In short, a shared life can be found wherever there is true community.

In such a place grace abounds. To God be the glory! ✠



# Establishing a Grace-Filled Academic Community



# Thinking Globally About the Future

## Renewing the Christian Intellectual Tradition

**A**t the beginning of every semester in my New Testament class, I ask how many students have been out of the country. Twelve years ago, two or three students would raise their hands. Today only two or three students have not traveled outside the United States. They have gone on school trips and mission trips and family trips. The world is coming to the United States, but Americans also travel the world the way we once visited other states.

The experience of visiting other countries, if only for a few days, provides students with an insight into understanding the world of the New Testament. Jerusalem had a military occupation like Baghdad. Terrorists called Zealots committed assassinations on those who dared to work with the Romans. But at the more basic level of normal day-to-day life across the empire, Paul and the other Christian missionaries found that they could “get by” in any part of the world if they knew a little Greek. It was the language of commerce. No matter what the local language might be in Lystra, Antioch or Rome, almost everyone knew enough Greek to carry on business.

I ask our students if they had any trouble buying souvenirs in South America, Africa, Asia or Europe. It is never a problem, because the rest of the world knows enough English to get by. Just as the Greek language of Alexander the Great provided a basis for trade and the exchange of ideas for more than 500 years in the Mediterranean basin, English has become the new “world language.”

Twelve years ago when I came to Union, the World Wide Web was in its infancy. Now you can do anything with the Web except fry an egg, but even that will happen. Our daughter was in Oxford this fall and we spoke to her every night over the internet instead of the traditional telephone. Technology has changed the way we do almost everything.

When I graduated from high school, college education was a luxury but not a necessity. We had plenty of good

jobs in industry and other sectors that provided solid middle class incomes and opportunities for advancement. That situation has gone the way of the dial telephone. In a world of rapid change, international corporations, global competition and limited resources, America has lost much of its industrial base.

Corporate America and Washington have bet that our future lies with technology and savvy. In the new global climate, the next generation of Americans need all the education they can possibly acquire, or they will lose out in the surge of competition. China and India can do technology in addition to industry. In the end, the worldview that created the West will be our greatest advantage in the creative competition between nations.

Of course, in the future, we may not see the same kind of competition between “nations” that we have seen in the past. We can learn from the past and recognize certain patterns about human behavior, but the future is always different from the past. Thinking about what the world will be like in the future involves more than crystal ball gazing. The future is always a result of concrete actions taken in the present that produce a result for good or ill.

Thinking about the future on a global scale involves understanding the differences between what people believe and value. If we assume that every worldview promotes or desires democracy, we will continue to have dismal foreign policy experiences in the Middle East and other places.

World history has often been driven by conflict between enemies, but in an increasingly complex world in which financial markets never close, those who have the wisdom to craft beneficial relationships across cultural boundaries have the opportunity to lead the direction of the emerging global culture. Christians stepped forward during the collapse of the ancient classical culture to craft the medieval culture and they repeated this feat during the collapse of the Middle Ages as they crafted the Modern Age. Once again we have a remarkable opportunity as we think globally about the future. ✦





## Renewing the Christian Intellectual Tradition

**A**s a college junior, I studied human cadaver anatomy for my minor in biology. The course was one of the most rigorous and intense in the curriculum, and I was greatly intimidated by it. As the semester began, I attended a Bible study where the speaker encouraged us to study devotionally, to pray that we would learn about God as we learned our subject matter. What he meant was that we should not divide up our time into “learning about God” and “not learning about God,” but rather understand that there is no part of creation, including intellectual pursuits, that is not able to help us to understand God more clearly. Such a view means that we learn from subjects, not about them.

I did just that: I prayed each day as I headed to the lab, and I looked for ways to learn devotionally. I passed the class (no small feat), but I also learned so much about the providence of God that is found in the human body. The beautiful strength of the wrist’s bones and sinews. The precision of the angle of the foramen magnum, where the spinal cord enters the base of skull. The delicacy of membranes within the chest cavity. I fell in love with the idea that I could worship God even as I studied my subject matter.

Years later, I realized that what I was doing was exploring the lordship of Christ over all areas of knowledge. I switched academic fields, to literature and writing, but I saw God’s fingerprints throughout every area of intellectual pursuit. I began to discover the brilliant Christian intellectual tradition that permeates the Western tradition, the sturdy shoulders of godly giants upon which I myself might stand as a teacher-scholar.

As my career has developed, I’ve come to appreciate how my faith provides a foundation to the actual methodologies I employ. I am aware that I think differently because I believe differently. Sometimes this means that I am at odds with the more secular parts of the academy, but it also means that I must place

the lordship of Christ over and above all else.

Loving God with our minds means that we “take every thought captive to the obedience of Christ” (2 Corinthians 10:5). Such obedience employs Christ as its ultimate standard of measurement and foundational framework for thought rather than any man-made system.

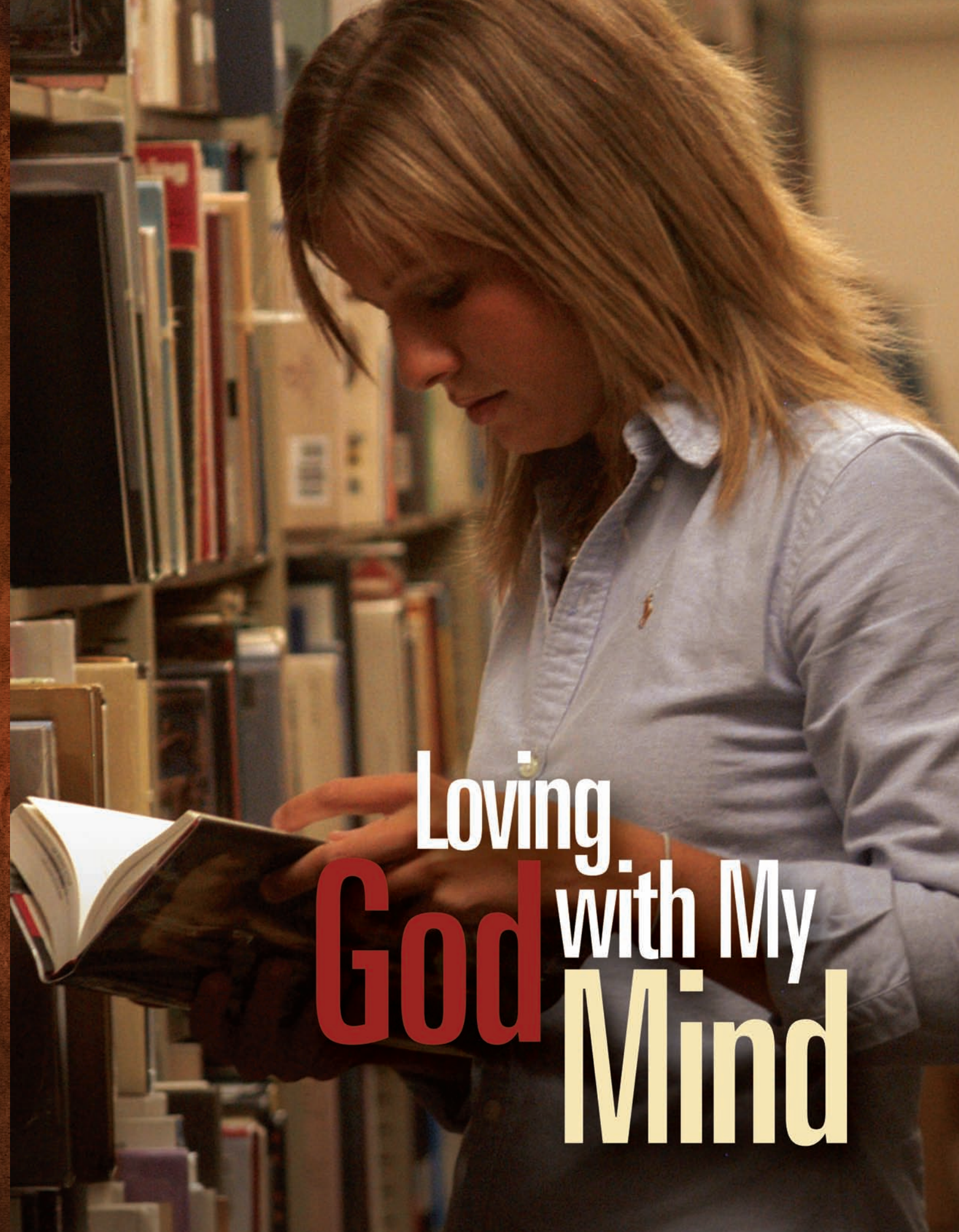
This obedience, though, also results in a Christ-like attitude of relational service. As Philippians 2:5-11 reminds us, Christ emptied himself of his royal privileges in order to take on the form of a humble servant. Such a model provides us with a further means of loving God with our minds: serving as a channel of blessings and grace to our world.

When we seek to follow after Christ’s urging, in Mark 12:29-31, to love God and love our neighbors, we find that loving God with our minds is inextricably linked to loving our neighbors.

When engineers travel to North Africa to work on clean water projects, their humanitarian engineering is a means of loving God and others with their minds. When political scientists work in Washington, D.C., to help bring integrity and godly influence to that important sphere of our society, they are doing the same. When sociologists develop

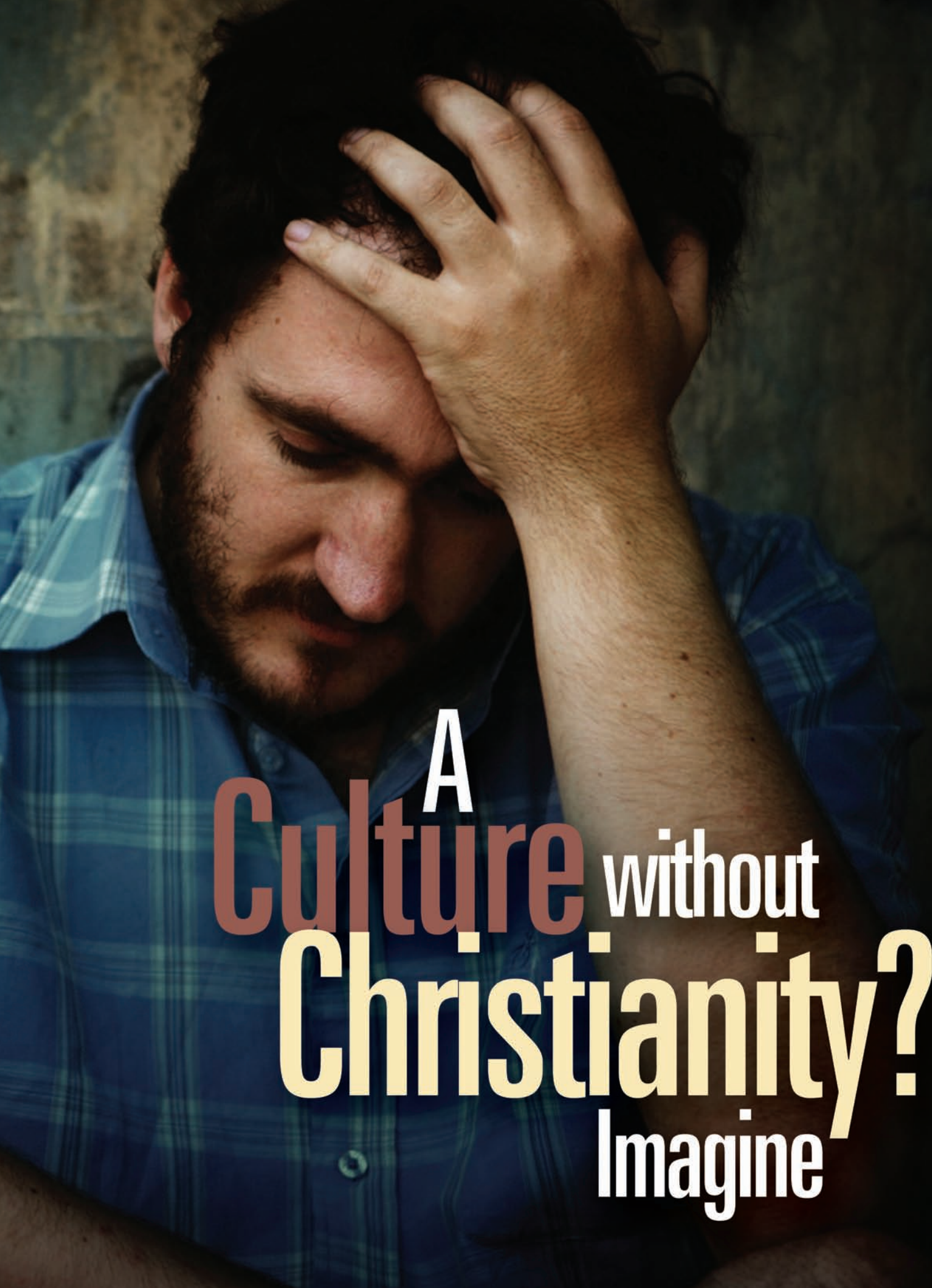
strategies to strengthen families, or artists implement aesthetically significant ventures, or scientists discover new solutions to old problems, then God is glorified and humanity is blessed.

When most people take an academic course, their goal is to learn about the subject matter, to accumulate a set of information or skills. Such an attitude in fact treats knowledge as an end unto itself. When we learn to love God with our minds, we learn from the subject matter in order to learn about God and to serve others. This means that our purpose is not relegated to being a repository but rather a conduit, a channel through which Christ’s grace can effect its world-changing purpose. Such an attitude toward learning is truly distinctive, and it’s the kind of attitude we as Christians should demonstrate. ✦



# Loving God with My Mind





# A Culture without Christianity? Imagine

## Renewing the Christian Intellectual Tradition

In 1971, John Lennon wrote a hymn for the secularist faith. The song, “Imagine,” fantasized about the state of world affairs if everyone were stripped of all beliefs and prejudices – with the notable exception, of course, of the former Beatle’s favorites.

“Imagine there’s no heaven,” sang Lennon,  
It’s easy if you try  
No hell below us

Above us only sky  
Imagine all the people  
Living for today ...  
Imagine there’s no countries  
It isn’t hard to do  
Nothing to kill or die for  
And no religion too  
Imagine all the people  
Living life in peace ...

Now while there is certainly nothing wrong with peace, love and understanding, the evidence suggests that Lennon’s dream world would in fact turn out to be a nightmare. That’s the conclusion of historical and sociological studies from two of America’s leading scholars: Rodney Stark, then from the University of Washington, and Samuel P. Huntington from Harvard.

Without any collusion, they have both found that the animating features that have made the West great – modern science, medicine, democracy and its attending freedoms – were the products of irreducibly Christian thinking derived from central biblical traditions.

In his 2004 book “Who Are We?”

Huntington, arguably the most respected political scientist of our time, contends that the United States in particular faces a national identity crisis. What was the original identity? Beginning with G. K. Chesterton’s analysis of America as “a nation with the soul of a church,” Huntington lists the following traits as explanatory of America’s success and global appeal: the English language; Christianity; religious commitment; English concepts of the rule of law; the responsibility of rulers,

and the rights of individuals; and dissenting Protestant values of individualism, the work ethic and the belief that humans have the ability and the duty to try to create a heaven on earth, a “city on a hill.” Historically, millions of immigrants were attracted to America because of this culture and the economic opportunities it helped to make possible.

In sum, the Harvard professor avers, it is the Anglo-Protestant culture that arose from scriptural foundations that made the United States great. Attempts to undermine this tradition, whether one ethnically arose from this context or not, he argues, are a misguided and dangerous social experiment which could unhinge the entire project.

In a similar manner, sociologist Stark tackles the secularist’s mantra that serious Christianity inhibits progress. This, Stark argues in his book, “For the Glory of God: How Monotheism led to Reformations, Science, Witch Hunts, and the End of Slavery,” is pure myth.

To the contrary, for example, he demonstrates with lucid historical detail that “science could only arise in a culture dominated by belief in a conscious, rational, all-powerful Creator.” Further, against the charge that orthodox Christianity is inherently repressive, he makes the case that while believers have sometimes behaved horribly toward others (i.e., witch hunts and inquisitions), only people who believed

“that slavery was an abomination in the eyes of God” were poised to defy the evil. “It was that conclusion,” writes Stark, “and only that conclusion, that enabled the West to abolish slavery.” The fear of God, in other words, means freedom for men.

Imagine a world without the Bible, without Christians and without God? That is truly a frightening thought. It would mean more slavery, far fewer freedoms and unchecked disease.

Without the moral restraints inspired by God’s people, the world would no doubt be an unthinkable worse place to live. Even a self-professed relativist can appreciate that. All those who love liberty, or so it would seem, have a vested interest in the continued influence and vitality of the Church of the Lord Jesus Christ. ✠





# Excellence-driven: Skillful Work can Change the World

BY TIM ELLSWORTH

In “Renewing Minds,” Union University President David S. Dockery addresses, among other topics, the issue of cultural engagement.

Specifically, Dockery writes that one goal of a Christian university should be to “influence society in a redemptive way without imposing our viewpoint through worldly power.”

But what does that look like?

A common trend in evangelicalism in recent years has been for Christian professionals in such fields as art, politics, communications and literature to contribute to a Christian sub-culture, complete with “Christian” art, “Christian” music, “Christian” books, and so on.

That’s not what Dockery had in mind when he talks about the importance of Christians engaging their culture.

“We do not believe that our primary responsibility and focus as educators is to denounce the fallen ways of culture though we do believe that one way we engage society is through God-centered cultural analysis,” Dockery writes. “Yet I believe we need to concentrate our efforts on a more constructive approach, focusing on ways that we can with excellence produce quality art, outstanding literature, great music, and respectable scholarship grounded in the liberal arts tradition while developing servant leaders who as change agents can manifest what it means to be salt and light in our society.”

In short, Dockery is calling for Christian institutions like Union University to produce “roaring lambs,” to borrow a phrase from author Bob Briner. These students will make positive contributions to the culture, and therefore honor God, not by withdrawing from it into the safety of a Christian sub-culture, but by pursuing their calling and doing their work with excellence.

“You’re doing art just for beauty’s sake and for the fact that it’s a good thing to create stuff, and if anyone is influenced by that toward the faith, then that’s gravy,” said Kirby Atkins (’91).

Atkins was an animator for the movie “Jimmy Neutron,” then directed some of the television shows that followed the movie. He has also worked with Big Idea Productions and is now at work on an animated movie that he wrote.

“Christians can’t just react to what the world makes,” Atkins said. “We’ve got to make our own stuff. And it needs to be good. It’s got to come from an honest place, and then it sort of has a natural, organic way of affecting people.”

“If you’re good at what you do, people are going to be drawn toward your point of view,” he continued. “And if your point of view is a Christian point of view, then they get to entertain thoughts that they don’t normally entertain, and that’s always good.”

The idea of Christians influencing people simply by the way they do their work is a concept that Union University art professor Lee Benson regularly communicates

to his art students.

“We talk a lot about how the number one thing

is the life you live in front of someone,” Benson said. “It’s not what you say but what you do. It’s how you live your life, whether it’s picking up a piece of trash in the studio even though you didn’t throw it down, to helping someone in need. Those kinds of issues are integral parts of our classroom everyday.”

Benson’s daughter-in-law, Allison Benson (’07) has taken that instruction to heart. Allison and her husband, Aaron, served as interns over the summer at the Anderson Ranch Arts Center in Snowmass Village, Colo. Anderson Ranch is a prestigious learning community that provides artists with the opportunity to study under professional and world-renowned artists.

The atmosphere is far from what could be considered “Christian,” as Allison said she and Aaron were probably the only Christians working there. So Allison said she did her best to demonstrate the difference Jesus Christ had made in her life by the way she conducted herself. That involved displaying a genuine love for her husband, not gossiping when others in the office were insulting the boss, staying positive, encouraging her coworkers and being friendly at all times, even when it wasn’t easy.

It also involved speaking with people about Jesus Christ when the conversations veered that way.

“We just really seized every opportunity to talk about our faith,” she said. “This summer really opened my eyes to how much it comes down to relationships with these people.”

Union University political science professor Micah Watson points to civil rights activist Martin Luther

King Jr. and Human Genome Project leader Francis Collins as examples that Christians can follow when it comes to living a Christian life in the public sphere.

King wasn’t embarrassed about his role as a minister, Watson said, and he wasn’t concerned only with the welfare of other Christians – but with society as a whole.

Collins, meanwhile, though controversial because he’s a theistic evolutionist, is an unapologetic evangelical.

“He is someone who has unquestioned excellence in his science, and sees no contradiction or problem with that affecting his faith,” Watson said. “He thinks that science actually enhances his faith and they work together.”

To be effective in the culture, Watson said Christians can learn much from following the Apostle Paul’s address to the Athenians.

“He finds a point of common ground, and then he uses that to build to his argument,” Watson said.

For J. Mark Bertrand (’91), author of the new book “Rethinking Worldview: Learning to Think, Live, and Speak in This World,” Christians who withdraw from the culture to build their own institutions that run by their own rules are showing that they really don’t love the culture to begin with.

“It’s not about withdrawing from the culture, tooling up and then going back to assault the culture,” Bertrand said. “It’s really about being within the culture and building things that contribute positively to the culture.”

Bertrand said that evangelical Christians need to rediscover the truth of the dignity of labor – that a job done honestly and with skill brings honor and glory to God. He added that it’s important for Christians to realize they don’t bear the responsibility for single-handedly redeeming the culture.

“Each of us in a very small way is a part of something larger that God is doing in the culture,” Bertrand said. “It really is God working in the culture, not us coming up with a way to allow God to work in the culture. Cultural engagement is not waiting on us to evolve the right theology of culture.” ✦

