

**Mark A. Noll**

The Scandal  
*of the*  
**Evangelical Mind**



MILES J. STANFORD

Mark Noll

The Journal

of the

"Your letter to Mark Noll is a classic, in my opinion." --Zane Hodges

Evangelical Alliance



MILES J. STANFORD  
CHRISTIAN CORRESPONDENCE  
Colorado Springs, CO

5 November 1993

Dr. Mark A. Noll  
Wheaton College  
Wheaton, Illinois 60187

Dear Dr. Noll

This letter concerns the abridgement of your February address, titled "The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind" (Christianity Today, Oct. 25, 1993, pp. 29-32).

Herewith a little informal information, before addressing your thoughtful address. I'll address you as Mark, if I may--being elderly enough to be your grampa.

Your appreciation of the intellectual is appreciated; although you will soon rightly deduce that I am anything but. Just 60 years ago I barely escaped from Wheaton Hi, and have not experienced a day of formal education since, theological or otherwise. I was not brought to the Lord ('40) by intellectual means.

Evan Welsh influenced me, a poor old Wheaton-area drunk, with Sunday School or church background. Evan confronted me often, with heart in his hand, tears in his eyes, and the Gospel in his mouth. In His time the Spirit convicted me of sin, whereby I by faith carried out my responsibility of turning from myself to Himself--no Lordship, and no regeneration prior to.

From the very outset, my primary burden was for the believer. That bothered me, especially with John R. Rice insisting that I get hold of the lost today, in that they might drop into hell on the morrow. Sigh. Later I questioned Torrey Johnson concerning my being more burdened for the saved, than the lost. Without hesitation, he settled it for me once and for all. "Red, what would people like me (evangelist) do without people like you?" I have never turned back, lo, these 50 years.

While on the subject of Wheaton, I will mention your esteemed colleague, Walter Elwell. Zondervan, without consulting this author, had Dr. Elwell write a three and one-half-page *Introduction* for one of my books. Not fully understanding the material, he was not able to be very positive about it. So much for Zondervan's choice. Nevertheless, the volume continues to be in demand by those who do understand and appreciate it. What with a number of other publishers, including foreign, the first section of the book has broken the one-million barrier. Now, that is grace!

I function within the conservative, evangelical/ fundamental, Bible Church spectrum, with Pauline dispensational convictions. We still frens? I am neither a contemporary nor a progressive--such as espoused by Dallas. Nor am I ashamed of the appellation, Pauline dispensationalist.

Dr. Swindoll, new Dallas president in absentia, seems to have a somewhat different attitude toward the subject, as expressed in this current CT, p.14: "Dispensations is a scare word. I'm not sure we're going to make dispensationalism a big part of our marquee. But in the progress of revelation, there is need to fit terms so they make sense, to use words that do not frighten or create misunderstanding." I understand.

Let me congratulate you, Mark, on your recent appointment as Professor of Christian Thought, there at Wheaton. Also on the recent publication of your scholarly tome, A History of Christianity in the United States and Canada-- which certainly establishes you as an authority on the subject.

From several inferences in your address I surmise that you may be somewhat on the Covenant side of things. You may be in Wheaton Bible, where most of the profs went back in the days of dear Dr. McCauley. Surely you don't

drive up to Barrington! At any rate, I might appeal to your historical sense in sharing something of a dispensational evaluation of sections of your impressive address.

One can concur with your burden for the development of the evangelical mind, for a higher level of Christian thinking. "The general impact of Christian thinking on the evangelical of this country ...is slight" (p. 29). Also, your sharing of Malik: "For the sake of greater effectiveness in witnessing to Jesus Christ Himself, as well as for their own sake, the Evangelicals cannot afford to keep living on the periphery of responsible intellectual existence" (p. 29).

It is heartening to note your insistence that the primary aspect of Christian thinking is spiritual. "To be sure, scholarship is not the most important thing in the Christian life" (p. 30). "Finally, and ultimately, the question of Christian thinking is a spiritual question" (p. 32).

It is too bad that you denigrate Fundamentalism, Mark, as is so commonly done. "If fundamentalism eviscerated thinking, by the same token, the fundamentalist devotion to Scripture points us to a better way" (p. 32). You somewhat make up for the slur by admitting to their scriptural priority as pointing to a better way than the intellectual.

You even make up for it all by stating that "the questions with greatest intellectual moment for those of us who are fundamentalists and evangelicals are the questions with greatest moment, period"--referring to the Cross, the incarnation, death, resurrection, etc. The fundamentalist who develops his intellect to a high degree in the spiritual realm is certainly not eviscerating thinking.

Despite the fact of your being scandalized by the slight impact of Christian thinking upon the evangelical, you say that "the problem is not primarily formal theology as such" (p. 29). We agree that the spiritual is primary in the evangelical life, and we probably also agree that one is no better spiritually than the theology, the doctrine, by which he is held.

Your reason for the evangelical problem not being theological is that "with the likes of Tom Odin, J.I. Packer, Gabriel Fackre, David Wells, John Stott, Ronald Sider, Donald Bloesch, Clark Pinnock, and others, evangelicals enjoy steady guidance in academic theology" ( p . 29).

While the Neo-Evangelical realm may enjoy the theological guidance of these men, be assured, Mark, that there are multitudinous members of the Body of Christ, including evangelicals and fundamentalists, who would never think of acceding to their guidance in academic theology, or any other type of theology. Nor would they consider subjecting themselves to the left-wing thinking, the questioning of scriptural inspiration, or the law as the rule of life, as represented among these leaders.

You go on to state that there is a greater evangelical lack than the theological. "The larger difficulty concerns Christian thinking across the whole spectrum of learning--economics, politics, literary criticism, imaginative writing, historical inquiry, philosophical studies, linguistics, history of science, social theory, and so forth. The harvest in these areas remains small" (p. 29).

In that the spiritual is primary, the above spectrum of intellectual development must be controlled by, and utilized for, the spiritual maturity and ministry of the evangelical. You concede that "hard intellectual labor has not always led to a healthy church. Sometimes, in fact, the pursuit of learning has been the means to escape the claims of the gospel or the requirements of God's law" (p. 30).

But, Mark, you proceed beyond the intellectual benefits of the evangelical, and hence the Church, to benefits for the world. "Learning matters because the world matters--the world both as a material object and as the accumulated networks of human institutions" (p. 30). In this same vein you previously mentioned "the nation's academic culture" (p. 29).

Further, "The Christian doctrine of the atonement tells us that God redeemed a people for life in the world, as well as for life in the world to come" (p. 32). It is true that God will redeem a people for life in this world, but that pertains to the earthly nation of Israel, not the heavenly Body of Christ--the Church.

The incarnate Lord Jesus said to His disciples (although not yet Christians, members of His Body), "If the world hate you, ye know that it hated Me before it hated you.... If ye were of the world, the world

would love its own; but because ye are not of this world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you" (John 15:18,19).

Although the evangelical is in this world, he is not of it. He is an exotic, with his spiritual roots and Life-Source in heaven. His citizenship is in heaven; his Christian life is hidden with Christ in God, and he is positionally seated together with (in) Christ at the right hand of the Father.

It is there that all of his spiritual blessings are. He is to abide, fellowship, and worship there, in spirit by the Spirit, while he sojourns here as a pilgrim and stranger. The purer the Gospel he shares with the world, the purer the hatred of the world toward him and his Gospel.

"The knowledge that the physical bodies of believers are 'members of Christ' (1 Cor. 6:15) tells us something of how God values the material realm. And the fact that the gospel goes out as a universal offer to all humanity suggests something about the dignity in this world of all human beings and the potential value in this world of all that they do" (p. 32).

To consider your second thought first--the human beings of this world possess no dignity before God. They are already condemned lost sinners, at undignified enmity toward their Creator. They are in the rejected Adam. Those who are not redeemed, not of His elect, will face, by their own choice, eternal doom at the Great White Throne.

As for your first thought, our dying bodies do not give value to the material realm--at least not in comparison to the delight of our Father in having us there with Him in spirit. I, for one, enjoy my heavenly position now, while waiting, day by day, for the Rapture, or release from this disintegrating near-80-year-old frame, and from this doomed and dying world. But then, you are yet young.

Your final statement, Mark, at least in this abridgement, is: "To know that Word, evangelicals must know both Christ and the world He has made" (p. 32). One must remember that wondrous as this world is, it is in a fallen and judged state--an infinite cry from what it was Edenically, what it will be Millennially, to say nothing of Eternally. New Age "Mother Earth"--of all things!

Surely it is time to consider Paul concerning these matters of intellectuality--Paul, the greatest and most profound intellect the world has ever known, save One. As regenerate, he primarily used his mind, in dependence upon the Spirit, to form the Pentecost-spawned Church on earth, and to reveal her position in heaven. And he, via the Spirit, exercised his mind to produce his unparalleled Epistles, constituting the highest spiritual truth of all Scripture.

As for Paul's witness to Israel and the world, he avoided the exploitation of his unequalled intellect in presenting his Gospel. "Christ sent me ...to preach the Gospel; not with wisdom of words, lest the Cross of Christ should be made of no effect." "God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise" (1 Cor. 1:17,27).

Paul did not preach Jesus' kingdom Gospel, but rather His heavenly Gospel (1 Cor. 15:3,4). That comprised, without compromise, the Cross and the glorified Saviour. And what was the price he paid in the hands of religion (Israel) and the lost world? Broken bones, splattered blood, and ultimately, his head. "For I [Christ] will show him [Paul] how great things he must suffer for My name's sake" (Acts 9:16).

I am not promulgating the erroneous "ultra" concept when I say that the great preponderance of Paul's ministry, both verbal and enscriptured, was to and for the Church. Bypass Paul and you all but eliminate the Church. "If ye have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which is given me toward you" (Eph. 3:2). Neglect Paul (characteristic of contemporary church leadership), and you have earth-bound, law-bound, kingdom-bound members of the heavenly Body of Christ. Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Peter, James, cannot make the difference. For the grace-environed, heaven-positioned Body of Christ, it must be primarily Paul and his Church Epistles.

The Church is to be edified by her own, in order to edify herself. "Speaking the truth in love [that the Church] may grow up into Him in all things, who is the Head, even Christ; from whom the whole Body fitly joined together... maketh increase of the Body unto the edifying of itself in love." "He gave some,

apostles... for the perfecting of the saints for the work of the ministry for the edifying of the Body of Christ” (Eph. 4:15,16; 11,12).

The primary purpose of all this scriptural focus upon the Church is to establish her constituency in their heavenly position, that they may grow in grace, and in the knowledge of Christ, thereby making the Body invulnerable to the baneful influence of the world. She is to realize that she has been crucified unto the world, and the world crucified unto her.

On this spiritual basis and level, the Church is qualified, in the hands of the Spirit, to evangelize the lost world--not "Christianize" it, nor woo it, nor win it. And this evangelization of the entire world (each generation) is simply to draw out of it each elect individual (known only to God) for re-creation into the Body of Christ--until that heavenly Body is completed, at the Rapture. “Even so, come, Lord Jesus” (Rev. 22:20).

Paul, the epitome of intellect, had this overriding goal throughout his Christian life and ministry, i.e., “That I may know Him, and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being made conformable unto His death. Brethren ...this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus” (Phil. 3:10-14).

You mention the principle: “If you want to understand something, you look at that something” (p. 32). It is a Pauline principle for spiritual growth. “If ye, then, be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth” (Col. 3:1,2).

The evangelical's Life, his Object, is above. “Looking unto Jesus, the Author and Finisher of our faith” (Heb. 12:2). “But we all, with unveiled face beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord” (2 Cor. 3:18).

Now, Mark, in the face of these Pauline spiritual privileges and responsibilities--that of becoming like Him, edifying His Body, and evangelizing the entire world now--if your evangelical has any time, energy, and Spirit-motivation left for the whole spectrum of intellectual achievement, let him have at it!

In some ways you remind me of Carl Henry. He, in abhorrence of Fundamentalism, called for an intellectual stand and approach to the liberal denominations and the world, that would gain their respect and admiration--thereby obtaining a hearing for the Gospel.

His cranial cadre consisted of such “evangelicals” as Ockenga, Lindsell, Carnell, Graham, Van Kampen, Taylor, Grounds, Hitt, Walker, Edman, Clark, Stott, Hubbard, Gaebelein, Glasser, Mackay, Fuller, Reese, Ladd, Pierce, Ramm, Ford, Wirt, Bell, Kirk, Kantzer, and others. Some of his accouterments were in the form of *Christianity Today*, NAE, Fuller, Graham Evangelistic Association, National Religious Broadcasters, Evangelical Press Association, etc.

After 40 years, Newsweek declared 1976 as “The Year of the Evangelical.” For whatever the poor lost world's evaluation is worth, Evangelicalism had arrived, procuring the standing and attention they so diligently coveted.

But then, ten years later, Dr. Henry confessed in his Confessions of a Theologian (Word, 1986): “Fifty years ago I had, as a young Christian, grand visions of the world impact of evangelical Christianity; today [1985], as a timeworn believer, I still dream at times of the movement's profound potential. Admittedly it is difficult, especially in the latter years, to distinguish dreams from hallucinations.

“I remain profoundly convinced that evangelicals are now facing their biggest opportunity since the Reformation, and yet are forfeiting it; unless soon enlarged, the present opening, at least in the U. S., may not long remain. Some say that larger evangelical expectations are in any case visionary and beyond the bounds of sober analysis.

“Given the movement's present disarray some say, any implementation of larger possibilities would require an evangelical pope, or a massive religious bureaucracy. There is too little spiritual desire for epoxy to mend the broken parts. Several high-visibility evangelicals, gifted and creative leaders, have

told me that American evangelicals have already run past their opportunity without recognizing it, and that what can now be rescued may not be worth the effort.

“The coming decade [90s] of decision will be marked either by evangelical penetration of the world, or by the world's penetration of the evangelical movement. The Year of the Evangelical was not annually self-renewing.

“Some already lost opportunities are irretrievable. The theological instability of some educational institutions and approaching retrenchment of evangelical colleges, the unending proliferation of evangelical independency, the decline of formative cultural impact, are eventualities which evangelicals must now accept in the absence of any comprehensively compelling alternatives.

“Yet I have wondered whether evangelicals might not during these next few years still cooperatively marshal their available resources of prayer and projection in order to initiate in 1990 a national impact to climax the twentieth century in its final decade” (pp. 401,402) [emphases mine].

Despite his futile hope for Evangelicalism's penetration of the world, Dr. Henry simply will not give up! He offers two full pages of suppositions, the first, and last, being:

“Suppose the Billy Graham Center provided leadership to integrate a nationwide decade of evangelism....

“Suppose 35 million evangelicals in the U.S. were encouraged to write tax-deductible checks for \$10 to the Decade of Decision, providing funds to launch the effort in 1990” (pp. 403-405).

Historian Mark, let not this sad history repeat itself via your professorship! Rather, go ye unto all the Body and share the Lord Jesus Christ, who is our Life!

Thank you for your Christian patience, dear brother. I am already watching for your next tome, on the subject of Christian thought among evangelicals.

Resting in Him,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Mark', written in a cursive style.

cc: Various friends

History Department  
Wheaton College  
Wheaton, IL 60187-5593

Nov. 9, 1993

Dear Mr. Stanford:

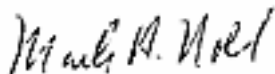
Thank you for your kind, considerate letter. If all communication among Christians with disagreements could be carried on as you have written me, we would begin to taste more of heaven in this life than we usually do. I appreciate very much your spirit, and I agree with much that you say. I do not think believers should ever put ultimate trust in anything except God's grace and the Hope of Glory. You are also entirely right, I feel, to look to Paul as a model of Christian purposes as well as simply for his teaching. I also agree that there is more than any of us can ever comprehend, especially with our minds, even if we used them continually, in the spiritual truths that ground Christian faith.

On Carl Henry, I affirm much that he tried to do, but I have never been one for big schemes such as he favored. Each person doing his or her bit, as the Lord has called to do it, seems to me to be the way to make progress in sanctification, and in most everything else.

Where we obviously differ is in how to view the world. I think that because God made it, it has a certain dignity worth pondering. I believe that sinners are lost in this world and that all of us, saved or not, distort our lives in this world (by worshiping the creature rather than the creator). But I also think that the Incarnation itself shows us how much God valued the world. He accomplished the redemption of his people by entering the world of humanity, and thereby he dignified that human world far beyond any dignity any merely human being could bestow upon it. (You are right to see me as believing in something like Covenant Theology. I am a member of a congregation in the Evangelical Presbyterian denomination and so take my cues, very self-consciously, from Luther and Calvin.)

I appreciate your comments also on how I describe fundamentalists and dispensationalists. Fundamentalists and dispensationalists brought me to faith in Christ, and so I have an eternal gratitude to them. But, on questions of using the mind for Christ, I feel that fundamentalists and dispensationalists have acted with less than Christian motives and with less than Christian results. I may be wrong on this judgment. But it is a historical judgment, not a slur. In the book to come on this same subject I try to spell out as carefully as I can why fundamentalism was a "disaster" for the mind, from a specifically Christian point of view. I doubt if I'll convince you of my argument, but please do believe me when I close with indication of my respect for the spirit in which you wrote to me. God be with you.

Sincerely,



Mark A. Noll

P.S. Dr. Tom Kay, our department chairman and long-time member of the College Church remembers you well.