

The Christian Mind

Harry Blamires 1963

Excerpted with comments by Dr. Jerry Nelson (GLN)

“To think secularly is to think within a frame of reference bounded by the limits of our life on earth: it is to keep one’s calculations rooted in this-worldly criteria. **To think Christianly is to accept all things with the mind as related, directly or indirectly, to man’s eternal destiny as the redeemed and chosen child of God.**” 44

An example of how much of former Christendom no longer thinks Christianly: There are many works critical of totalitarianism but they are not Christian in their worldview: 1984, The Plague, The Inquisitors, etc. This dialog “is almost wholly dominated by a concept of freedom whose roots are deep in pagan naturalism. The Christian concept of freedom rooted as it is in the notion of total self-surrender within the family of God, and accompanied as it is by a code of disciplines rigorous in their check upon self-indulgence or self-assertive individualism, is a virtually contradictory concept to that humanist notion of freedom as residing in an unfettered autonomous individualism, which plagues current thinking.” 12

A Christian worldview has been marginalized. Religion isn’t denied but it is so “departmentalized...that it is deprived of any overt influence on the community’s conscious purpose and activities. Christianity is emasculated of its intellectual relevance. It remains a vehicle of spirituality and moral guidance at the individual level perhaps; at the community level it is little more than an expression of sentimentalized togetherness.” 16

“Idealists are the most tortured people in our midst. We get along very nicely with cranks and foreigners. We are tolerant of rogues and criminals. But idealists – those people who insist on logically relating principle to practice, end to means, purpose to process, goal to route – we have no

time for them; literally no time. There is too much to do. Their misgivings would slow us up and prevent us even from making a start. Besides they would set us all at each other's throats in fierce controversy if once they were allowed a sober hearing. The best thing is to shut them up." 19

Illustrative of this is when Ronald Reagan was roundly criticized in the "civilized" press for calling The Soviet Union an "evil empire." GLN

"One of the reasons why we have no tradition of Christian thinking about contemporary affairs is that we have been thus taught to view with disfavor any earnest attachment to ideas and ideals such as would bring the heat of theoretical controversy into the arena of practical life." 21

"Man is a moral being. His actions are good or evil. And it *matters* whether they are good or evil. In the case of decisions committing thousands of human being to bloodshed, it matters enormously whether they are good or evil." 22

We stopped calling good "moral" or wrong "evil." "Christians first decided to stop thinking Christianly in the interests of national harmony, the day when Christians first felt that the only way out of endless public discussion was to limit the operation of acute Christian awareness to the sphere of personal morality and spirituality. From that point the sphere of political, cultural, social, and commercial life became dominated by pragmatic and utilitarian thinking. The Christian has believed – and still tries to believe – that he can enter these spheres of activity without yielding anything to the world; that he can enter trailing clouds of spirituality which will magically transform the atmosphere around him, that he can enter without accepting the pragmatic mode of discourse dominating thought and decision in these fields. He has erred. It cannot be done. As a Christian you may enter these spheres determined to be leaven. But your leavening influence is restricted to the narrow field of personal relations and moral attitudes. You cannot enter these spheres as a *thinking* Christian, for there is no one to communicate with Christianly. There is no field of discourse in which your presuppositions can be understood, let alone accepted or discussed." 26

GLN:

To be a part of the discussion we are forced (or we allow ourselves) to speak only from a secular framework – a naturalist worldview.

How does one be a banker Christianly? How does one be a politician Christianly?

Thinking Christianly is not simply thinking about Christian issues but to think about those issues (or any issues) from a Christian framework (worldview).

It is possible to think about Christian issues from a secular framework and to think about mundane issues from a Christian framework. The focus here is the “framework,” the worldview, by which we discuss any issues.

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We send our students to schools (elementary, secondary and higher) where they are taught to think secularly and expect that Sunday School, youth group and the family will sufficiently counter that to enable them to think Christianly. (GLN)

Our Christian leaders have become “past-masters at fence-sitting. Indeed many...devoted as they are to liberal notions of broad-mindedness and toleration, have rationalized their ignorance into the comforting conviction that fence-sitting is pre-eminently the posture of the charitable Christian leader.” 49

“The scholar and the thinker are in some ways mutually antithetical types. Scholarship cannot endure exaggeration. Thinking cannot thrive without it. There is no thinking without exaggeration.”

Blamires intention in the balance of the book: (p63)

- I. Note the principle marks of the Christian mind.
- II. Emphasize the marks of the Christian mind that are most ignored or neglected in the church.
- III. Avoided repetition of points on this subject made elsewhere.

“Mark” #1

It’s Supernatural Orientation.

“A prime mark of the Christian mind is that it cultivates the eternal (supernatural – GLN) perspective...It looks beyond this life to another one.... (bringing) to bear upon earthly considerations the fact of Heaven and the fact of Hell.” 67

“The Christian mind sees human life and human history held in the hands of God. It sees the whole universe sustained by his power and his love. It sees the natural order as dependent upon the supernatural order, time as contained within eternity. It sees this life as an inconclusive experience, preparing us for another; this world as a temporary place of refuge, not our true and final home.” 67

“Modern secular thought ignores the reality beyond this world. It treats this world as The Thing. Secularism is, by its very nature, rooted in the world, accounting it the only sure basis of knowledge, the only reliable source of meaning and value. Secularism puts its trust in this life and make earthly happiness and well-being its primary concern.” 67-68

Jesus said the kingdom of God has come, that the eternal has broken into the temporal and that the future impacts the present. GLN

“The Christian mind allowed itself to be subtly secularized by giving a purely chronological status to the eternal. That is to say, the Christian has relegated the significance of the eternal to the life that succeeds this one” (rather than understanding the relationship of the eternal to the temporal). 69 Rather the Christian mind should see that the larger story of God’s work impacts this world here and now as much as in the future.
GLN

The modern Christian, a schizophrenic type who hops in and out of his Christian mentality as the topic of conversation changes from the Bible to the day’s newspaper, or the field of action changes from Christian stewardship to commercial advertising, or the environment changes from the (church) to the office.

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“Mark” #2

It’s awareness of evil

“The Church sums up, in the doctrine of Original Sin, the fact that men and women are drawn towards evil by weaknesses in their fallen nature. The magnitude and variety of the evil forces waiting to ensnare the human soul are hinted at in the triple formulation, the World, the Flesh, and the Devil. If anyone needs to be convinced that the Church’s view of human nature and the human situation is neither a sentimental nor a rose-tinted one, let him read through the Book of Common Prayer, and note how often it refers to man’s desperate struggle against the powers of evil.” 86

But what is the “world?” “By the ‘world’ I mean what the church has always meant by the “world’ – and this surely includes the official and respectable earthly set-up, the thing ruled over by the Powers-that-be; indeed (there is no escaping the word) what we now call ‘the

Establishment.” This needs to be said, for we have now sufficiently secularized our minds to be in the habit of viewing the social and political set-up in which we are involved as something wholly, or largely good in the eyes of God. We have kept alive our Christian urge to discriminate between good and evil by the convenient device of labeling our own institutions good and those of our enemies, or potential enemies, as evil. We complacently absolve ourselves from passing judgment on the set-up which nourishes us so comfortably.” 87

“Both parties (Labor and Conservative in Great Britain) woo us by telling us, in different ways, that if we support them they will improve our material comfort... The church can never truly ally itself either with our materialistic Conservatism or our materialistic Socialism. For the church is up against the Establishment – inevitably, by the very nature of the church and the very nature of the Establishment. It always was. It was the Establishment that crucified our Lord. You can be quite sure that the first-Century equivalents of our respectable publicity organs were solidly behind that bit of tidying-up on Pontius Pilate’s part.” 87-88

“The Christian mind will bring to bear upon the human scene those specifically Christian moral criteria which by no means of casuistry can be equated with the generally accepted respectability-morality of our day. In the Christian moral system the key sin is pride- that perversion of the will by which the self is asserted as the center of the universe. That is the mark of the utterly lost soul; an established and constant habit of manipulating all people and all interests in the service of the self. Likewise the key virtue in the Christian moral system is obedience; the self-commitment in thought and act by which God is asserted as center of the universe. That is the hall-mark of the Christian moral life; a persisting and cheerful effort to make of all life’s activities and relationships a fit offering to God.” 89

“The discerning Christian knows that a cunning or intelligent man may lead a life of almost diabolical pride, in which he strives in every moment

to minister to the desires and vanities of his own inflated self – and yet may pass for a respectable, law-abiding citizen.” 90

“Since the predominant values of our secular society are materialistic, and its ideals this-worldly, in other words since our secular society remains generally untouched by the Christian leaven at work in it, it follows that any attempt to accommodate oneself wholly to the predominant notions and attitudes of that society will involve weakening that supernatural orientation which is fundamental to Christian thinking.” 94

Blamires gives examples of sin masquerading as good and how believers can be caught up in this. We accept divorce and remarriage under the rubric of grace. We accept the “crudifying” of our language and popular culture under the rubric of “authenticity.” We accept literature or other media promoting immorality under the rubric of a “serious” discussion of the issue. b(GLN)

“A particular quality of the Christian mind is that, knowing the weakness of human nature, it expects conflict in the moral sphere. It assumes that the powers of evil will exploit ever possible occasion for drawing men into the mental confusion of blurred concepts and twisted values. There is about the Christian mind a peculiar harness – a refusal to be surprised at evil and depravity; an inability to be overcome by shock; an expectation that evil will be at large where God is not. Hence its cultivated suspiciousness of that which currently passes muster, in any powerful worldly circle, as the right thing. Hence, in the moral sphere, its zealous attention to the thin edge of wedges. (sic) It knows how evil grows.” 102

The church comes with a judgment upon the modern world: but it is not the kind of judgment which enables the Christian to feel superior; not the kind which makes him say: “What a ghastly world this is that we Christians have to cope with” – not that at all. The church’s judgment upon the modern world is very different. It is properly expressed when

we turn to our contemporaries and say: “Look what we’ve done, you and I. luxury here and famine there; juvenile delinquency, prostitution, alcoholism, and revival of slavery, racial discrimination; look what we’ve done. Look what our human nature produces when it gets a free hand? Do you like it? Is that your idea of worth-while world?” In other words, the church would have us turn to the world in judgment, with the utmost clarity and power in our identification of evil, yet in full acceptance of our common guilt – and, finally with a deeply moving message of hope.”

“The Church sums up, in the doctrine of Original Sin, the fact that men and women are drawn towards evil by weaknesses in their fallen nature.”

“Mark” #3

Its conception of truth

“For the Christian, truth is supernaturally grounded; it is not manufactured within nature... One may say without exaggeration that failure to distinguish clearly between the Christian conception of truth and the conception of truth popularly cherished in the secular mind has been one of the most unfortunate neglects of our age... Briefly one may sum up the clash between the Christian mind and the secular mind thus: Secularism asserts the opinionated self as the only judge of truth (while) Christianity imposes the given divine revelation as the final touchstone of truth. The marks of truth as Christianly conceived, then, are: that it is supernaturally grounded, not developed within nature; that it is objective and not subjective; that it is a revelation and not a construction; that it is discovered by inquiry and not elected by a majority vote; that it is authoritative and not a matter of personal choice.” 106-107

Our penchant for polls, focus groups and popular opinion has led us to conceive of truth as relative and changing.

“There is not subtler perversion of the Christian Faith than to treat it as a mere means to a worldly end, however admirable that end in itself may be. The Christian Faith is important because it is **true**... For the secular mind, religion is essentially a matter of theory: for the Christian mind, Christianity is a matter of acts and facts. The acts and facts which are the basis of our faith are recorded in the Bible... Christianity has been called the most materialistic religion in history. That is an illuminating point. For Christianity is so much more than a mere moral code, a recipe for virtue, a system of comfortable idealistic thought. It is a religion of acts and facts. Its God is not an abstraction, but a Person – with a right arm and a voice. Its God has moved among us... Christianity is a religion of things that have happened – a Baby born in Bethlehem, a body nailed up on a cross. It is a religion of continuing daily action, centered around solid things like fonts and altars, bread and wine. 110-112

“The popular modern unwillingness to reckon with the authoritative, God-given nature of the Christian Faith is bred of the anti-supernaturalist bias which dominates contemporary thinking, and is indeed native and normal to secularism. It is also nourished by the popular misconception of the nature of truth. Our culture is bedeviled by the “it’s-all-a-matter-of-opinion code. In the sphere of religious and moral thinking we are rapidly heading for a state of intellectually anarchy in which the difference between truth and falsehood will not longer be recognized. Indeed it would seem possible that the words ‘true’ and ‘false’ will eventually (and logically) be replaced by the words ‘likeable’ and ‘dislikeable.’

Even many “Christians” begin to think like secularists, assuming that “the Christian Faith is something which men have manufactured and which they have the right to alter; the idea that the Christian heritage consists of a code and a set of beliefs fabricated by human brains and therefore able to be altered or improved by human brains... We are seduced into defending this or that particular article of faith against the secularist mental background which presupposes it alterable... Thus sometimes we find ourselves misguidedly defending by deductive

argument what ought to be presented by historical affirmation. Now here is not attempt to disparage the use of reason in relation to matters of faith. Christians must always be prepared to display, as far as they are able, the rational quality of the Faith they profess. But we must beware of defending primarily as theories doctrines which are essentially descriptions of facts. For instance, it is useful, satisfying – and for many of us perhaps necessary – to appreciate the logical coherence and inevitability of the Virgin Birth within the framework of Christian theolgy; but we must never forget that the virgin birth is a fact, not a theory, that its validity is by no means dependent upon the tidiness with which it fits into our intellectual synthesis.... We have accepted secularism's challenge to fight on secularist ground with secularist weapons and secularist umpire, before a secularists audience and according to the secularists book of rules. Having done so we look around in dismay at the discovery that our followers are few, our predicament misunderstood, (and) our cause misrepresented. Hastily we try to plug the gap by pouring our more and more sermons and books of instruction 'explaining' our cause, but doctored to the secularist mentality. It is high time to shift our ground." 115-117

We must think instead in two ways: First, we must move it out of the realm of personal opinion by reminding ourselves and others that we didn't invent the Christian Faith. Secondly, we must remind ourselves and others that it is God's idea. "We can accept it. We can reject it. But we can't tamper with it as though it were something put together by human hands or human brains." 118

"The Christian Faith has to be defended for the right reason. Too long we have been defending it for the wrong reason, trying to win a place for it in secular esteem by claiming that it ministers to ends serve by secular welfare, and that it can be turned into a personal philosophy adequate to give solace to a secular mentality through a secularist career. We have to insist that the Christian Faith is some solider, harder, and tougher than even Christians like to think. Christianity is not a nice comforting story that we make up as we go along, accommodating the demands of

a harsh earthly reality with the solace of a cherished reverie... We must stand (with unbelievers in agreeing with them on some points). ‘You think it is difficult? So do I. You find it awkward? So do I... In a way I quite agree with you. It is a nuisance at times, especially at Lent. But it’s *true*, you know.’” 120

“We have now said enough to show how contemporary secularism, heavily biased as it is towards individualism, subjectivism, and atomistic intellectualism, is quickly eroding what remains of the Christian mind. For the Christian mind is orientated towards a truth revealed, demanding, and divinely guaranteed, whose objective certitude and authoritativeness are alike distasteful to a secularism deeply committed to self-culture as opposed to self-discipline, and to a destiny of mastery as opposed to rigorous service.” 130

“For the Christian, truth is supernaturally grounded; it is not manufactured within nature...”

“Mark” #4

Its acceptance of authority

“That which is divinely established and divinely guaranteed calls forth from men, not an egalitarian attachment, but a bending submission. One cannot seriously contemplate the first elementary truths of Christianity – the doctrine of the divine creation of man and his world, the doctrine of redemption, and the doctrine of the church, without realizing that here is something which is either authoritative and binding or false; deserving of submission or of total neglect. Reason allows no place for a casual, one-man-to-another approach to God and his demands. It is either the bowed head or the turned back.” 132

But given the abuse of power that we have seen in history, it is no wonder that people are suspicious of authority. “Indeed the current rejection of authority is so intimately bound up in people’s minds with the worthwhile and noble efforts of our generation that one is staggered at the magnitude of the task of trying to rehabilitate the concept of authority

as something estimable... For the most part we move in a world in which thinking and feeling alike are colored with a distaste for authority unparalleled in history. (133) “In the context of the wholesale, and not unjustified, denigration of authority by the secular mind, one has to reassert Christianly the principle of authority. First, God’s authority; then the authority of his revelation, his commandments, and his church.” 136

But this is made doubly difficult not only by prejudice based on authoritarian excesses but by a misunderstanding of two attributes of God that many find contradictory. “So far is modern man from thinking Christianly that he has the acutest difficulty in trying to combine together in his mind the two vital concepts which we (must unite) in our picture of God – the concept of love and the concept of power-laden authority. As a result of historical developments and changes of psychological habit the idea of authority has been totally severed from the idea of love.” 137 The concept of ‘father’ has changed from loving authority to either unloving, authoritarian tyrant, or clumsy, sentimental fool providing everything I want. In the modern thinking, being under authority is something you grow out of. (139)

“Here is perhaps one of the Church’s hardest tasks in the pseudo-Christian climate of our country today. It has to deal with people who are quite ready to admit that there may be a God, but who have never felt the slightest impulse to abase themselves before him... God is not the bolsterer of our human wisdom, the buttress of our self-sufficiency. He is the despoiler of our human self-reliance. His name does not head the list of contributors to the fund for extending our empire of mastery; rather is Signature seals the death-warrant of our egotism.” 147

“That which is divinely established and divinely guaranteed calls forth from men, not an egalitarian attachment, but a bending submission.”

“Mark” #5

Its concern for the person

“Christian thinking is incarnational. The Christian mind surveys the human scene under the illumination of the fact that God became man, taking upon himself our nature, and thereby exalting that nature for all time and for eternity. Thus the Christian’s conception of the human person is a high one, his sense of the sacredness of human personality being deeply grounded in revealed theological truth. 156

We have evolved from beings who live to serve and enjoy one another and God into believing that “the daily use and enjoyment of the maximum number of gadgets and contrivances” is life at its best. 161

We have become less relational and more functional. “It has been suggest that men can be so engrossed in performing functions in contemporary society that they have neither the time nor the energy left for the business of merely being human.” 164

God calls us to relationship with himself, the Triune relational God, and to relationship with each other.