

THE CHRISTIAN SCHOLAR IN THE 21ST CENTURY

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SUMMARY

McGrath lays out the importance of Christians engaging in modern scholarship. He also addresses the need for pastors to begin training their laity to live out the Gospel in their daily lives, offering five tips along the way.

ASSESSING THE TEXT

“In reflecting generally about evangelicalism and the academy, I find that evangelicalism has been suspicious of the academic world – and rightly so. There is much justified anxiety about the secularism, relativism, and pluralism which seems to be endemic in much of today’s American higher education. Evangelicals – and, increasingly, many others as well – have noted with growing concern the indications that the modern American academy seems to have more to do with elitism, ideological warfare and rampant antireligious propaganda than with learning.”

Do you agree with McGrath’s assessment of the academy’s attitude towards Christianity? Why or why not?

Do you agree that evangelicalism’s suspicion of the academy is justified? Why or why not?

“As John E. Smith points out in his major study of 1963, The Spirit of American Philosophy, “It is no exaggeration to say that in American intellectual life, irrelevant thinking has always been considered to be the cardinal sin?” Evangelicalism has always shown itself to be at its best in insisting that the Gospel is deeply relevant to the life of ordinary people. So why risk sidetracking evangelicalism from a seriously relevant activity by suggesting that it become more deeply involved in higher education?”

Why is higher education viewed as irrelevant to evangelical culture today?

If you were posed with this question about why graduate school is relevant to Christian living, how would you respond?

“...to win the long-term victories, you have to influence the way in which a rising generation thinks.”

As a graduate student, how are you involved in this mission? What impact can you make individually?

“There is a need for evangelicalism to see itself as going beyond a purely theological agenda, and to begin shaping discussion on a broader front... The success of this next stage depends on continuing excellence of evangelical theological education, but takes things further – and potentially, into some very significant territory.”

What is the danger in only seeing theology as a worthy intellectual pursuit?

How do you think Christians can most effectively shape broader discussions in our culture today? What must we do?

“Am I the only one to be slightly uneasy that evangelicalism seems to have concentrated so much of its resources in seminaries, concerned to educate future clergy? What about the large numbers of lay folk, who have a vision for what the Lord could do in and through them in their everyday work? ...Why is it that evangelicalism sometimes seems to focus its educational resources on pastors and clergy, rather than the laity?”

What problems arise when only our clergy are equipped to communicate the Gospel and not the laity in their everyday lives?

Do you feel that your local church does enough to equip you as a Christian and a graduate student? Why or why not?

“My point is simply that we need to make connections with what is going on in the real world, and allow the gospel to bear on the issues that are facing those who in live and work in our complex modern culture.”

How does the Gospel bear on your field of study? Does it contradict it? Compliment it? Better inform it?

“In his providence, God has placed us somewhere special – somewhere that he can use us. We all need to start asking questions like this: ‘Why has God placed me here?’”

Why do you think God gave you the passions and opportunities that drove you to graduate school?

How do you think he might want to use you?

“Second, we need to ask what special opportunities are open to us through the subject which we teach.”

What opportunities have you discovered for yourself in your field to make the Gospel known?

What holds you back from seizing those opportunities?

“We all need each other; together, we can do things for God which we could not possibly manage on our own. And we need to be reminded once more of our total dependence upon the grace of God, in case we begin to get big ideas of our own importance!”

How does Christian community keep us humble?

How can this group become stronger and better meet each other’s needs?