

THE PURSUIT OF
KNOWLEDGE AND TRUTH:
**The Key to a
New Reformation**

by Vishal Mangalwadi

When the pioneers of Western Protestant missions arrived in India they established a college (1813), which grew into Serampore University. Their leader William Carey, a cobbler turned Bible translator, taught the Bible as well as languages, botany, horticulture, forestry and astronomy.¹

These Baptist missionaries had come to save souls: Why did they establish a university? Were they trying to soften the soil for converting Hindus and Muslims?

The missionaries were following the tradition set by the Protestant Reformers who were university professors and graduates. Martin Luther, the pioneer of the 16th Century Reformation, was a professor at the University of Wittenberg. He insisted that next to the reform of the Church, the second most important need was to reform the university. He became the father of universal education—a key ideal of the modern era.

Following Luther and Calvin, the Scottish Reformers put enormous money and effort into making Scotland Europe's first educated nation. Soon, the Church turned Europe into history's first educated continent. This achievement became possible also because of the educational mission of the Roman Catholic Church led by the Jesuits. Were the Roman Catholics merely competing with their Protestant rivals?

Not at all!

The Roman Catholic Church is the mother of Western education (Christian and secular). Before the Reformation practically all schools and universities were Roman Catholic.² They had no one to compete with and since Europe was already "Christian," there was no need to soften Europe's soil for conversions. The educators were simply pursuing their religious calling to seek and impart knowl-

edge. Most of them did not even know that they were laying the foundations of the modern world.

Why did the Western Church think that the pursuit of knowledge was a divine calling?

The idea came from the Bible via St. Augustine (AD 354-430). He taught that God was a rational being and the human mind (not just the human "soul") was made in God's image. Therefore, our rationality was qualitatively different from the brain in other animals. God gave us a mind like His own so that we might know Him and understand and govern his creation as his children. For Augustine this meant that, according to the Bible, to be godly required us to cultivate our minds—the instrument of knowing God and his creation.

This Augustinian theological assumption enabled the West to put confidence in human logic, language and rational knowledge (all the way from intuition and empirical observation to doctrines and creeds). Much before the birth of the modern age, the medieval (Augustinian) monasteries began doing something that became unique to Christianity. When a young man devoted his life to seek and to serve God, the monastery required him to spend years studying the Bible, languages, literature, logic, rhetoric, mathematics, music, theology, philosophy, and practical arts such as agriculture, animal husbandry, medicine, metallurgy or technology. Thus, the monastery—which was an institution for cultivating religious life—began producing a peculiarly rational person, capable of thinking, researching, developing technology, writing books, developing capitalism, science and complex, rational legal and political systems. In my country, the centers of Hindu and Buddhist

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learning were founded by great philosophers, but they believed neither in a rational God, nor in the validity of human reason. Therefore, they did not labor to produce such rational religious persons.³ The Bible (as we shall see below) became the ladder on which the West climbed the heights of its educational, technical, economic, political, and scientific excellence.⁴

Tragically, during the 18th and 19th centuries an intellectual movement known as the Enlightenment separated the West's confidence in reason from its biblical foundations. The result was tragic: the 20th century intellectuals awoke to a realization that the West no longer had any foundations for its peculiar confidence in human reason. Secular rationalism collapsed into skepticism, cynicism, mysticism and occult. Universities that were built to help students find truth and become servants of God and neighbors,

turned into factories producing workers for a technocratic age. Public education became incapable of training civilized citizens.

At the end of the modern era the university appeared like an electrician whose city had plunged into darkness. He climbed up a ladder to fix the high-voltage

cable that supplied power. Since everyone was looking to him as a savior, he became so confident that he kicked away the ladder, placing his feet firmly in midair. . . Such a scenario may be hard to imagine but that is how academia is dangling. It is imparting knowledge but it knows that it does not know the truth and will never know the truth.

The West progressed beyond other civilizations because it did with its mind what most of us did with our muscles. (I have never seen an American woman carry water on her head.) But sadly, now it has kicked away the very source of its confidence in the human mind—the biblical worldview that birthed and nurtured universities and made the West a uniquely thinking civilization.

This is not the place to discuss the reason for the collapse of faith in reason or how anti-intellectualism took over the Church and the culture.⁵ The fact is that the West is changing. Rational cynicism has become the hallmark of its universities. Therefore, the popular culture is defined either by unsatisfying crass materialism or a non-rational, non-moral, non-creedal spirituality of mysticism, UFOs, spirits and occult which includes myths and meditation,

drugs and divination, yoga and tantra, astrology and witchcraft, voodoo and gnosticism. This has happened because the West has exchanged its Bible-shaped worldview for a lie that the human mind is an accident of blind chance, no more valid than the animal brain.

When a culture concludes that the human mind cannot know the truth it does not merely have an intellectual problem. It is on its way to all round corruption and degeneration for it has declared that it is incapable of knowing right from wrong or even if right differed from wrong. (An animal is not equipped to make a distinction between eating and stealing.) It should not surprise the world that American middle schools are now confessing to their 11–14 year old students that their worldview makes them incapable of knowing if fornication is wrong. (Monkeys can't make moral distinctions between friendship, fornication, love, sex and adultery. Since they have no spirit they are driven only by chemistry—the flesh.) The best that some schools can do is to educate their 11-year olds how to use free contraceptives.

In India, a result of Christian anti-intellectualism was that William Carey's successors at Serampore University handed over the faculties of arts and sciences to secular government. Christians confined themselves to teaching theology. The Christian mind disappeared from our intellectual landscape. Most of our information regarding history, philosophy, sociology, literature, politics, economy, law, psychology, and science started coming from secular, leftist, Hindu, and Neo-Buddhist interpreters. These biases were accepted as the truth. Therefore, young people growing up in Christian homes began to think that Christianity is a childish, Sunday-School level faith.

This is tragic because these man-centered ideologies have completely corrupted our national life. Two professors—a Chemist and a Geologist—from an Indian university told me that they guide doctoral research, but they tend not to trust the conclusions of Indian scientists. Why? "Because the data is usually fudged: manufactured to suit a desired result: partly because much of the time, many of the instruments in our research labs do not function properly."

Corruption has so permeated India's national (secular/Hindu/Christian) life that many have turned cynical. Cynicism is growing in spite of the economic growth of the last decade that began after India was forced to turn from socialism to free-market principles. There is no doubt that as the West catches up with India's (non-rational, non-creedal, non-moral, mystical) spirituality it will also catch up with

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our corruption and lose its freedoms. Corruption of morals flows from corrupted thoughts, and freedom requires inner self-government. People that cannot govern themselves have to be governed by others.

Be that as it may, India's economic up-turn is evidence that cynicism is wrong; decline is not inevitable. Like the partial healing of our economy, other facets of our national life can also be healed and regenerated. So can the West.

But what might trigger a new reformation?

The sixteenth century Reformation began when an Augustinian monk, Martin Luther, understood a little phrase in the Bible, "*the just shall live by faith*" (Roman 1:17, Galatians 3:11, Habakkuk 2:4). Those words⁶ transformed Luther, enabling him to reject a religious culture that promoted corruption as the way of salvation (e.g., selling of indulgences). Luther's theological transformation began a social revolution that created the modern world. It snatched cultural power from the custodians of the older view, transferring it to a people who sought truth.

Today, a global reformation will begin if we understand a phrase in Isaiah 53:11:

"After the suffering of his soul,
he will see the light of life and be satisfied;
by his *knowledge* my righteous servant will
justify many,
and he will bear their iniquities."

Given the fact that the Protestant anti-intellectualism predates secular anti-intellectualism by a century⁷, Isaiah 53:11 raises several questions.

What has knowledge got to do with our justification? Aren't we saved by faith alone?

To be saved means to know God. In John 17:3 the Lord Jesus said:

". . . this is eternal life: that they may *know* you,
the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom
you have sent."

Who is Jesus Christ?

The apostle Paul explains in Colossians 2:3 that the Lord Jesus is the one

"in whom are hidden all the treasures of *wisdom and knowledge*."

How can man know God?

In Matthew 11:27 the Lord Jesus said, ". . . no one *knows* the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him."

In 1 John 5:20 the apostle John explained that the Lord Jesus did not come to this earth merely to die for our sins:

"We know also that the Son of God has come and has given us *understanding*, so that we may *know* him who is true . . . his Son Jesus Christ. He is the true God and eternal life."

Why is knowledge so necessary that God would incarnate as a man?

Adam and Eve were created to govern this earth. The kingdom of Satan began when they chose to doubt God and believe Satan. Just as the kingdom of Satan begins in our mind, so also the kingdom of God begins in our minds, when we choose to turn from our false ideas and believe God's word. Isaiah 1:2-4, Isaiah 44:18-19, Isaiah 56:10-11, Jeremiah 4:22, Jeremiah 5:4-5, Jeremiah 10:14, Luke 11:52.

The Apostle Paul powerfully summarized the Old Testament perspective on the source of pagan degeneration. In Romans 1:18-32 he explains that:

The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who *suppress the truth* by their wickedness. . .

What are the consequences of the lack of knowledge?

In the preceding verses Paul asserts the Old Testament view that the lack of knowledge and understanding result in a nation's destruction (see Isaiah 5:13).

Why does God want his servants to be baptized with the Spirit of knowledge, wisdom and understanding?

The Bible explains that while God plans to bless all the nations (Genesis 12:3; 18:18; 22:18 etc.), Satan is out to "deceive the nations of the earth" (Revelation 20:3, 7). The Lord Jesus came to set us free by giving us the knowledge of the truth: John 8:31-32.

Anti-intellectualism spread in Evangelical churches partly because Reformation slogans such as "by faith alone" and "by Scripture alone" were misunderstood.

"By faith alone" the Reformers meant that salvation could not be earned by human religiosity. They did not mean that knowledge and understanding were not essential ingredients of faith.

Likewise, "by Scripture alone" they meant that when tradition conflicted with the Scriptures we were to abide by the Scriptures. The Reformer asserted the necessity of cultivating the mind and using reason in our search for truth. In his trial before the Diet of Worms (1522), Luther stated that he could not

recant unless he was convinced “by the Scriptures and plain reason.”

Salvation is not by faith alone. Jesus asked people to “Repent and believe” (Mark 1:15). Repentance involves turning from what is false (e.g., idols) to what is true (1 Thessalonians 1:9). Jesus calls humanity to worship God in spirit as well as in *truth* (John 4:23-24). Paul asked Timothy to instruct his opponents gently “in the hope that God will grant them repentance leading them to a *knowledge of the truth*” (2 Timothy 2:25).

Anti-intellectualism became acceptable because many Protestants forgot that Jesus did not come simply to take our souls to heaven but also to give us the knowledge of the truth (1 Timothy 2:4, 1 Timothy 4:3, 6).

The postmodern world is reaping the result of our error which focused on faith and other gifts of the Spirit and left the field of knowledge in the hands of the unbelievers. This happened partly because some Christians were deceived by the secular idea that the human mind was a part of “the flesh.” Therefore, they assumed that the mind had to be crucified. The apostle Paul claimed “I know whom I have believed” (2 Timothy 1:12). He declared that he was “an apostle of Jesus Christ for the faith of God’s elect and the knowledge of the truth.” The Letter to the Hebrews says, Christians are those who “have received the knowledge of the truth” (Hebrews 10:26). James commands us to ask God for wisdom (James 1:5). Peter says that knowledge is the source of grace, peace, godliness and effectiveness (2 Peter 1:2-8).

The Renaissance and the Reformation created the modern world of inquiry, discovery, and knowledge because the Word of God taught Medieval Christians (including the Reformers) that both our salvation and godliness required growing in knowledge (Ephesians 1:7-8, Colossians 1:9, Colossians 2:2, Philemon 1:6, Ephesians 4:11-13, Philippians 1:9, Colossians 1:9-10, Colossians 3:10).

So, what does this imply?

Isaiah 53:11 says that by his *knowledge* God’s righteous servant will justify many. For a hundred years now the Church has been growing in many nations (including America), yet the same nations are degenerating in many critical ways. This is because the Church has been offering justification without the knowledge of truth. We have turned “Salvation” into a shallow religious “experience” that “converts” but does not “make disciples” of all nations (Matthew 28:28).

The Lord Jesus, however, calls us to make people His apprentices, those who would learn from him and the Father (Matthew 11:29, John 6:45).

The Reformation transformed the West because it

made Europeans learners, the Bible their textbook, and Jesus their supreme teacher. The choice before our generation is to either seek the knowledge of God once again or to slide into an abyss of ignorance, corruption and slavery. The Word of God commands us in Proverbs 5:5-8 to: Get *wisdom*, get *understanding*

Recovery and pursuit of wisdom, understanding, and the knowledge of truth is the key to a new reformation because the postmodern intelligentsia knows that it does not know and cannot know the truth. Deception has to rely on force. It has to enslave, destroy. Intellectual and moral slavery is now called “Political Correctness”. This moral and semantic jugglery is similar to what Pagans always do. They try to make prostitution sacred by calling male and female prostitutes “gods” and “goddesses”. While deceptive words enslave, the truth liberates. It empowers people by giving them genuine reasons to live and act in ways that true, good and beautiful.⁸ 🌐

Endnotes

- 1 For information see *The Legacy of William Carey: A Model for Transforming a Culture* by Vishal and Ruth Mangalwadi (Crossway Books).
- 2 Back then there was no such thing as secular education. Luther was the first to urge the state and merchants to support church’s educational efforts.
- 3 Mahatma Gandhi, who studied law in England, became India’s first socio-spiritual leader to insist that his followers learn practical arts such as spinning. Prior to Gandhi, India did not have biblical models such as Moses, Joshua, Samuel and David who became political leaders because they were deeply spiritual men who received divine calling to pursue a political career.
- 4 This is elaborated in my forthcoming book, *Must the Sun Set on the West? An Indian Explores the Soul of Western Civilization*. Some of the content is available on CD. Visit www.vishalmangalwadi.com
- 5 A good introduction is Francis Schaeffer’s *Escape From Reason* (Crossway Books)
- 6 Postmodernism has lost confidence in words because the West has rejected its logo-centric worldview. Yet, the fact is that human beings create culture and history because we speak. Words are creative because they presuppose imagination and freedom. Freedom means that our words can be true or false, liberating or deceiving, constructive or destructive. Our words can capture the invisible laws that regulate cosmos because behind the cosmos are words—the Creator’s words. Words create and transform.
- 7 This article is intended for Christian readers. Therefore, it is addressing their concerns. In a lecture “From Da Vinci to Dan Brown: The Decline from Reason to Mysticism” I explain to a secular university how the Bible was the ladder which created intellectual giants such as Leonardo da Vinci and why myth makers such as Dan Brown (the author of *The Da Vinci Code*) are sinking into the perversion of sexual mysticism. For more info please See the 11-part lecture series, “Must the Sun Set on the West?” available from www.vishalmangalwadi.com.
- 8 This article is taken from a chapter in *Truth and Social Reform* due to be released in Transform World USA conference in Houston, TX in November 2008.