

Os Guinness, *Fit Bodies, Fat Minds:*
Why Evangelicals Don't Think and What To Do About It

Part One: A Ghost Mind

Introduction: the demise of the Puritan mind

- These trends did not undermine the Puritan mind directly, but confirmed its collapse.
- Most of these trends have a positive side to them.
- Almost none of these trends can be blamed on hostile outside malevolence; the real damage to evangelicals was self-inflicted.
- Though emphasis is on trends that existed before the Civil War, all of them endure today in one form or another.

1. Polarization

The hallmark characteristic of the Puritan mind was its commitment to the unity of truth and to the integration of faith and life, worship and discipleship, faith and learning. All of these elements were under the lordship of Christ, each with its own sphere and calling, none isolated or treated as a favorite part of truth. Yet, there has developed a false antagonism between the heart and mind, theory and practice, intellect and emotion, faith and learning, etc. These antagonisms must be overcome so as to embrace a vision of truth that displays wholeness and integration. There are three marks to a great, whole person: thinker, lover, doer!

2. Pietism

While polarization is always wrong, piety is always right. Piety is heart religion in which personal devotion to Christ and the things of God are at the heart of the faith. It has always stood against the abuses of sacramentalism, doctrinalism, ritualism, legalism, and intellectualism. However, when piety becomes pietism, things break down, for it is the reductionism of Christian faith to personal spiritual disciplines and practices (P, BS, F, E) most often in a sentimental, anti-intellectual context. Piety becomes deformed pietism when there is shift from the objective to the subjective, from the covenantal to the communal to the individual, from election to voluntarism, from Calvinism to Arminianism, from the liturgical to the informal, from theology to experience. It is spiritual heat without intellectual light, pietas minus doctrina.

3. Primitivism

Primitivism (also called restorationism and restitutionism) is the impulse to restore the primitive or original order of life as revealed in Scripture, to renew first or primordial times, as if they were a golden age (American beginnings, the Enlightenment and progress, the Reformational recovery of first century Christianity). However, as embraced by evangelicals, primitivism has entailed (1) a bias toward the simplistic and a rejection of the developed, institutionalized, and the settled; (2) a bias against history as a matter of corruption and decline. Yet, there is a need for some sophistication in a complex day, and also for a sense of history in a rootless era.

4. Populism

Populism, which is committed to the rights, wisdom, virtues, and experiences of the common person, has led to the popularization of Christianity. Populism both Christianized American and democratized Christians. An anti-intellectual legacy arises out of the popularization and democratization of Christianity and engenders these characteristics: unpretentious leaders, self-evident doctrines, lively popular music and worship, vernacular communication, locally run churches, depreciation of education (even of the seminary variety; hence, boy preachers), suspicion of theology, etc. Three things resulted from populism: (1) it contributed to naiveté, especially in causing people and leaders to think they were free of all bias and pre-theoretical frameworks; (2) it led to an excessive leveling of the churches, democracy run riot; (3) it contributed to an evangelical lack of respect for theology and a disengagement from serious discussion of truth (say, the Great Conversation, etc.) as too elitist.

5. Pluralism

Pluralism is a social condition in which numerous different religious, ethnic, and cultural groups live together in one nation under one government (liberty and justice for all). First, pluralism is not in itself relativism and need not even entail it (as used today, pluralism is a social reality, not a philosophical doctrine). Two, in historical terms, recognize that religious liberty makes pluralism more likely, and pluralism makes religious liberty more necessary. Three, pluralism reinforces particularism, a belief in the importance and distinctives of particular faiths and their particular doctrines, just as much as relativism (many groups in a pluralistic society are far from relativists--Christians, Jews, Muslims, etc.). Four, capitalism, pluralism, and freedom go together and may be the last best hope for tradition rather than its destroyer (because capitalism esp. leaves room for the development of ideas, institutions, and ways of life). Pluralism has made two

contributions to evangelical anti-intellectualism: (1) it has promoted a religion of civility where truth does not really count and where excessive tolerance is prized; (2) It reinforced Protestant indifference to truth, and shifted the accent from belief to behavior--deeds not creeds--a nation of behavers, religiously speaking. Hence, modern evangelicalism is riddled with relativism, but only part of this can be blamed on pluralism and secularism.

6. Pragmatism

Pragmatism holds that beliefs are true if they work and have cash value, and can be successfully applied to daily life (Wm. James). Pragmatism is the distinctively American philosophy that is bound up with hard work, common sense, ingenuity, know-how, and achievement. Pragmatism entered evangelicalism via the Second Great Awakening (J. Edwards) and via the explosion of Jacksonian populism that has been a vital part of evangelicalism ever since. Several factors are noticed. One, the influence of Benjamin Franklin on the American psyche and his theme of doing well by doing good. Two, the long stream of self-help and positive thinking tradition, optimistic thinking carries beneficial results (N. V. Peale; R. Schuller). Three, the expression of pragmatism in mission, evangelism, and revivalism (Finney, Moody, Sunday, Graham, church growth movement, focus on techniques). The result has been trends such as prosperity piety (health and wealth gospel of success, positive thinking and servicing the self, engineered revivalism seeking results, etc.). The question is not: is it true? but will it work?

7. Philistinism

Named after the biblical Philistines of which Goliath was the most notable, the term refers to those who are deliberately ignorant and who are openly disdainful of intellectual, cultural, or artistic values. While the charge of philistinism can be elitist, it may be justified even if a snob levels it. At the same time, philistines often practice a "reverse snobbery" in their own pride over being uninformed and anti-cultural. Evangelical philistinism is rooted in a Christ against Culture attitude, and is the result of the other seven "Ps" that have been enunciated: polarization, pietism, primitivism, populism, pluralism, pragmatism, and premillennialism. Philistinism is embodied in the likes of Billy Sunday, Jonathan Blanchard (novels are "well told lies."), and C. G. Finney. Philistinism reinforces the prejudice against the so-called media elite, and blocks evangelicals from truly appreciating culture Christianly.

8. Premillennialism (esp. in its dispensational form)

Premillennialism is the belief that at the return of Christ, He will reign upon the earth for a 1000 years (Rev. 20). Premillennialism is of two kinds: covenant premillennialism and dispensational premillennialism. Many premills place a high value on the life of the mind, especially covenant premills (F. A. Schaeffer), and progressive dispensational premills are considerably different from classic dispensationalists in their attitudes toward culture and learning. Yet, old school dispensationalism has had an adverse impact on evangelical thinking for several reasons. First, dispensational premillennialism reinforces the previous seven trends (esp. populism). Second, there is a careless crossover from the Bible to the historical events of the day, esp. when it comes to eschatological matters (“this is that” mentality). Third, the dispensational movement reinforces anti-intellectual tendencies by its general indifference to serious engagement with the culture (Israel is the earthly people of God, the Church is heavenly) due to its apocalypticism and pietism and negation of creation. Fourth, in fleeing the world, dispensationalists embraced aspects of it unconsciously, especially a nineteenth century objectivism.