

essentials – back to basics

Toni Saad reports on a week spent at Tyndale House in Cambridge





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Thanks to the generosity of the American Friends of Tyndale House, I recently spent a week in Cambridge hearing a series of 'Gospel Masterclasses' from Christian scholars such as Peter Williams, John Lennox and Gary Habermas. Subjects ranged from the historicity of the resurrection to the apocryphal gospels. It was all very much in the spirit of Tyndale House.

In 1944 Tyndale House was set up with the purpose of pursuing the best biblical scholarship without compromising on the inspiration and infallibility of Scripture. This endeavour aptly takes up the mantle of William Tyndale, who in the 15th century produced the most complete English translation of the Bible from its original languages to date. Tyndale intended to make God's Word, previously only available to the clergy, accessible to the laity. Tyndale House perpetuates this endeavour by producing excellent Christian scholarship for the benefit of the church.

What is simultaneously encouraging and challenging about Tyndale House is its commitment to the pursuit and defence of truth. It encourages us because it proves that Christianity and the academy can be friends, that faithful study can produce excellent scholarship. It also presents us with a challenge, for how many of us pursue truth so earnestly? How many of us can say with the apostle Paul that 'we demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ' (2 Corinthians 10:5)?

We might think that this is all well and good for scholars and theologians, but that medicine is an altogether more practical subject, one less 'spiritual' than those concerning Tyndale House. Logically, then, it is no great leap to think that God has nothing to do with our work, and that our work has nothing to do with God. These two errors need addressing if we are to be faithful disciples.

first error:

God has nothing to do with our work

Though few admit it, many Christians assume that God has nothing to do with their work. They pursue academic, professional, political or practical work, independent of their faith, and therefore absorb many sub-Christian ideas. They have perhaps forgotten the extent of the fall's corrupting influence on mankind, and hence fail to discern what the culture feeds them. All of us are guilty to some extent of doing this.

But restricting God's influence (and our obedience to it) in this way is absurd when we remember that God is the creator and owner of the universe,¹ and that he commands mankind to fill and subdue the whole earth.²

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The human race is called to steward creation faithfully, and work for its flourishing and preservation. Since the fall, which brought death and disease to mankind, medicine has become an important element in the preservation of creation. It is wrong, therefore, to presume to learn and practise medicine without reference to the creator. We are perhaps apathetic about this task because we fail to realise that it should not be left undone. But a moment's reflection makes it evident that Christ is not nearly as unconcerned with medicine as we are with his mastery over it. Much contemporary medical thought makes boldly secular assumptions about human behaviour, sexuality, the value and definition of life, the personal virtues of a doctor. Each of these needs

to be confronted and taken captive to Christ. Thinking otherwise is dangerously naïve because it jeopardises the whole Christian intellectual endeavour. If thoughts are to be taken captive to Christ, they must first be reckoned to not currently belong to him. This is the foundation of a Christian's intellectual witness.

Within healthcare, Christian doctors and nurses are to be salt and light, both illuminating erroneous beliefs, and preventing deterioration. This is no easy task. Sometimes the busyness of life prevents us from pursuing this end as we otherwise might. That is why the work of organisations like CMF and Tyndale House is so important, both to the witness of the church and the good of the world. Yet, we must all acknowledge that God has a great deal to do with our work.

second error:

our work has nothing to do with God

The second error is to think that our work has nothing to do with God. This view has an air of piety to it: work and study are necessary evils which are inferior to the 'spiritual' activities of church life and evangelism. Indeed, work is only good because of the opportunity for evangelism it provides. This is because God only cares about his spiritual bottom line, the saving of souls. He is not concerned with petty matters of human activity, and neither should we. So goes this mistaken thinking.

But work has everything to do with God. Christians are called to do all things to the glory of God, even the most prosaic tasks,³ and to offer the sum total of their lives as a spiritual act of worship.⁴ This is well-known, yet many Christians remain tempted to minimise the value of the supposed 'non-spiritual' aspects of their lives. This leads to much half-heartedness, and even guilt. This dichotomy, however, between the 'spiritual' and 'non-spiritual' or 'worldly' is misguided. Though God is indeed most concerned with church life and the fulfilment of Christ's great commission, this is not to the exclusion of everything else. God cares for the whole of life, for he created it all. And he

created in such a way that the spiritual and the material are interdependent and co-inhering. He creates body and soul, spirit and matter, and one day he will renew and redeem the entire cosmos through Christ.⁵ The theologian Hans Rookmaaker puts it well: 'Our Christianity is not only for the pious moments'.⁶ We are not Christians in the church only, but also in the world. The triune God reigns over the whole of life, and the whole of our lives are to be lived to his glory.

conclusion

Christ commands us to love God with our entire mind.⁷ If we are to obey him, we must listen to God's word, in which Paul tells us to take every thought captive to Christ, to redeem worldly thought, and make it an offering fit for King Jesus. We cannot renounce our Christian intellectual duty under the pretext that God does not matter to our work, or that our work does not matter to God. Both of these postures come from a common error: the failure to grasp the glory, might and claim of Christ as ruler of the universe. For Christ is not just Lord of spirit, but also the Lord of matter; not just Lord of the church, but Lord of life. Tyndale House is a visible reminder of these truths. In the healthcare professions, we could do worse than taking a leaf out of Tyndale House's book. Doing so will remind us that our work has everything to do with God because we are his servants and stewards, body and soul, at work, in the family, in the church and in the world. ■

REFERENCES

1. Revelation 4:11
2. Genesis 1:28-31
3. 1 Corinthians 10:31
4. Romans 12:1
5. Colossians 1:20; Matthew 19:28; Revelation 21:5
6. Rookmaaker H. *Art needs no Justification*. Vancouver: Regent College Publication, 1978
7. Mark 12:30