

**Dichotomy between Faith and Scholarship:
A Reflection from Pakistan**

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Introduction

The very first advice I got from many elderly and wise people when I was going to England to pursue theological studies was, “Do not let your higher studies murder your faith in God.” They also added that “the intellectual life can be a graveyard to your devotional life. So, guard yourself.” One can discern the fear, concern, and apprehension in these advices given to me. Many Christians in Pakistan strongly believe that the pursuit of Christian intellectual life can cause great damage to one’s faith. Faith and Christian scholarship are seen as the two clashing entities. Majority of clergymen believe that faith is directly related to one’s heart, whereas scholarship is related to one’s intellectual faculties. For them, these two things are two different masters; a believer can either serve the one or the other.

Now, it would be wrong to say that their fear and concern is trivial. Of course, they have seen people whose pride in their intellect and education has caused them to fall away from the community of believers as well as their faith. So, the question one must ask is that: Should one simply abandon the pursuit of Christian scholarship and intellectual life because of this fear?¹

To answer the question posed above, this paper will argue that, in the Christian context, those who seriously recognize the call of pursuing intellectual life ought not to bring dichotomy between the life of mind and life of faith. Applying this discussion to the Pakistani context, this paper will suggest that in order to bring Christian maturity among believers and leaders and proper contextual theology, Pakistani leadership and churches need to bring this false dichotomy between faith and scholarship to an end. After defining the terms of faith and scholarship, the paper will examine why faith and scholarship (in the past as well as in the present) have been viewed as two opposing entities? What causes anti-intellectuals to hold negative views about intellectualism? Furthermore, the relationship between faith and scholarship will be explored in the light of the Scripture.

What is meant by Faith and Scholarship?

Before setting on a journey of exploring the relationship between faith and scholarship, it will be helpful to define what is meant by faith and scholarship in the Christian context. In the light of scriptures, one ought not to define or understand faith merely as cognitive commodity. Although cognitive aspect is a part of it, but it is not the whole thing. The bible passages demonstrate the fact vividly that putting faith in Jesus Christ affects the way we live. In other words, Christian faith does not dwell in one’s head, but also fleshes out itself in the way one’s lives his/her life (his/her behavior, attitude, thinking-patterns, desires, etc.). Ephesians 4: 17-32 teaches how when someone puts his faith in Jesus Christ as his Lord (4:20), that faith in Jesus

¹ By the pursuit of Intellectual life, I mean realizing in one’s life a call to rigorous thinking and studying.

manifests itself in spiritual, moral, social and psychological transformation (4:22-32). So, Christian faith is not passive, rather active and living.

Now, how about Christian scholarship? Does Christian scholarship simply mark the journey in which one learns how to read laboriously, think critically, and write stylistically? According to A. G. Sertillanges, Christian scholarship or intellectual life is a calling.² This calling of Christian scholarship entails the task of rigorous thinking, reading, writing; it further involves dedicating one's life to studying the Word of God. To put it differently, John Piper sees Christian scholarship as "a plea to see thinking as a necessary, God-ordained means of knowing God."³ Also, the task of thinking is not an end in itself. Rather it aims, firstly and primarily, to glorify God, and secondly, to benefit the world outside.⁴

The position and concerns of Anti-Intellectualism

In the year of 1994, a survey was conducted by a man called Douglas Sloan in the modern universities. He published the survey by the title "Faith and Knowledge," and disclosed the results of the survey by stating that people in the modern universities treated faith and knowledge "as two entirely separate spheres of activity." Not only that, he further explained in his results that over the past two hundred years, people have inclined themselves to believe that "faith as essentially a private matter, leaving Christianity's truth claims inaccessible to, or impenetrable by, rational knowledge."⁵ In the secular realm of education, people widely hold the view that knowledge is purely a reasoning, cognitive matter, while faith is subjective and the absence of reasoning.⁶ Interestingly, this dichotomy between faith and intellect is not only found in secular Universities alone. Rather, sadly, one can also recognize its existence among Christian people, churches and institutions. In his book, *Think*, John Piper mentions Charles Finney's mourning over the fact that ministers of the Word were coming "out of college with hearts as hard as the college walls."⁷

Thinking along the same lines is a man named George Ripley. He claimed that in his experience he has always witnessed God using simple, weak, and earnest people for the extension of his kingdom. By acknowledging that there is a place for reasoning, however, he adds, it is not the instrument God uses for His people to demonstrate His power. According to him, "sound logic" is not capable of breaking down the strongholds of sin, not capable of producing the virtue of holiness, and not capable of experiencing the glory of God. He emphasizes that God's great ministers who genuinely serve humanity have never been critical thinkers.⁸

It would be hasty to reach and claim that above concerns and accusations are groundless. Unfortunately, the pursuit of intellectual life or scholarship has led some to deny their faith since they prioritized their mental faculties over faith. However, does the solution lie in abandoning the call of intellectual life altogether? The abrupt answer to this question is No! The rest of the paper will argue that to reach at this conclusion is not only impractical, but also unbiblical.

² A. G. Sertillanges, *The Intellectual Life: Its Spirit, Conditions, Methods*, trans. Mary Ryan (Washington: The Catholic University of American Press, 1987), 3.

³ John Piper, *Think: The Life of the Mind and the Love of God* (Illinois: Crossway, 2010), 16.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 15-26.

⁵ David S. Dockery and Timothy George, *The Great Tradition of Christian Thinking: A Student's Guide* (Illinois: Crossway, 2012), 21.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 22.

⁷ Richard Hofstadter, *Anti-Intellectualism in American Life* (New York: Knopf, 1963), 94.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 108.

Relationship between Faith and scholarship in the Light of Scripture

In exploring the relationship between faith and scholarship, one must know that life of faith is not contradictory to life of critical thinking. The Christian scholarship which is not deeply rooted in faith (that manifests itself in holy life) is not a scholarship at all. There exists no dichotomy between faith and scholarship. In their book, *The Great Tradition of Christian Thinking*, Dockery and Timothy, claim, “We need not be forced to choose between head, heart and hand while recognizing the important role of Christian higher education in engaging the great thinkers and ideas of history in order to frame our thoughts and responses to the issues of our day.”⁹ The church history makes this fact evident that pioneers of Christians intellectualism never thought of intellectualism as separate entity from the life of faith. In fact, we observe the early church fathers laying the foundation of Christian intellectual tradition in their battles against heretics.¹⁰

As scholarship without faith is shallow, empty and fruitless, faith without discernment, understanding, and thinking is equally dangerous and ineffective. For instance, in Pakistan particularly, one can witness many church-going people who lead their lives in faith without understanding, and the consequences are not good. Often, they are misled by people who are foxes among sheep. In addition, people merely believe what they hear and thus do not understand how they can apply the Word of God to different areas of their lives. Because of the lack of Christian thinkers, scholars and intellectuals in their countries, those people end up being abused religiously in many ways. Sadly, they lack in Christian fruitfulness and maturity.

Alarming those believers who try to bring dichotomy between the life of faith and life of mind and explaining the intimate relationship between the two entities, James Sire splendidly quotes:

There is a unity of knowing-doing, believing-obeying, orthodoxy-orthopraxy, theory-practice. Thinking Christians who do not do as they say are not *Christian intellectuals* at all. A Christian intellectual cannot escape the burden. Christian intellectuals are those whose intellectual lives are lived to the glory of God. They will *do* what they claim to *know*.¹¹

In the above passage, Sire eliminates the element of dichotomization between faith and Christian intellectual. He perceives of Christian intellectual as someone whose personality is a blend of *thinking* and *doing*. The Christian scholarship ultimately aims to glorify God.¹² Ultimately, what Jesus desires is not high-tech, efficient thinking machines, but disciples who follow and imitate him while they pursue the life of mind.¹³

Despite their validity, anti-intellectuals’ view-point of abandoning Christian scholarship as a solution to escape the danger is groundless. Finding the solution of the problem is better than leaving it altogether. One of the arguments which anti-intellectuals make against the Christian scholarship is that what is the point of being an intellectual while all of Jesus’ disciples were uneducated people who never went to the seminaries or universities to be trained. This argument is utterly inauthentic for two main reasons. First, the reason God’s ministers in general (and

⁹ Dockery and George, *The Great Tradition of Christian Thinking: A Student’s Guide*, 21.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 25-26.

¹¹ W. Sire, *Habits of the Mind: Intellectual Life as a Christian Calling*, 105.

¹² Piper, *Think: The Life of the Mind and the Love of God*, 168.

¹³ Witherington III, *Is There a Doctor in the House? An Insider’s Story and Advice on Becoming a Bible Scholar* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 125.

particularly those who are called to be Christian scholars) go to formal institutions so that they could be fully equipped to faithfully teach and preach the Word of God. So, the point is that why Jesus' disciples did not need to do this, firstly, because there was not any opportunity like this, and secondly, they got the privilege of being trained by the world's best teacher Jesus himself. Second, why do the proponents of Christian anti-intellectualism forget about Paul whom God used tremendously, and Bible vividly validates that he was a Christian intellectual whose life of mind made huge difference in the spread of the gospel. It is true that not all called to be the Apostle Paul, but one cannot deny that Christianity has always needed people like him.

Reflection and Application

Based on the above discussion, instead of suggesting that Christians should abandon the Christian scholarship, it is wiser to find out the reasons due to which Christian scholarship is tempted to leave behind the life of faith, and then avoid those ambushes. Currently, Christians in Pakistan are lacking in mature and solid foundations of biblical truths because of the negative effects of prosperity gospel, lack of discipleship and spiritual emotionality. Thus, the Pakistani church is in dire need and urgency of having its own scholarship which can deal with its own contextual issues. The church needs to grow to learn about the false dichotomy that has been created between faith and scholarship.

This paper suggests three main reasons that cause divorce between the Christian scholarship and faith. Firstly, When the presence, supremacy and significance of Divine being is subtracted from the reasoning; it becomes the cause of the death of faith. Secondly, when an intellectual life becomes an end and does not intend or desire to know, understand and glorify God; it murders the life of faith. Thirdly and lastly, when pride engulfs an intellectual and persuades and deceives him to believe that he is wiser than God; it destroys the role of faith in his life. Therefore, those who recognize the call to Christian scholarship, they must keep the above things in mind in order to glorify God and help other believers with their God-given mental capabilities.

Conclusion

After defining what faith and scholarship in the Christian context mean, this paper has traced some objections made against Christian intellectualism. Acknowledging the concerns of anti-intellectualism, it has been argued that leaving the vocation of scholarship for avoiding the dangers of it is not the wisest thing to do. An attempt has been made to develop a deep and intimate relationship between Christian faith and scholarship. Throughout the paper, we have upheld the view that those who seriously recognize the call of pursuing intellectual life to glorify God and help other believers ought not to bring dichotomy between the life of mind and life of faith. The paper has also discussed briefly the reasons that cause death to one's faith and advised the Christian intellectuals not to be the victim of those ensnares.