

THE TRINITY REVIEW

For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh, for the weapons of our warfare [are] not fleshly but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ. And they will be ready to punish all disobedience, when your obedience is fulfilled. (2 Corinthians 10:3-6)

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Thinking Biblically Part 1

by John W. Robbins

Editor's Note: With the recent Supreme Court decision rejecting the Creator's definition of marriage – the calling of good evil and evil good, and with Biblical Truth and morality rejected, scorned, and mocked, it appears that our society has gone mad. Unfortunately things aren't much better in the church, which has rejected "the more sure prophetic word" (2 Peter 1:19) for a host of pitiful substitutes. The need of the moment is that we think Biblically. Dr. Robbins addressed this in "The Church Irrational":

The Bible provides several answers to the question: Why do people lack discernment? The fundamental answer, the will of God, is an unpopular and an unpalatable answer, and modern men will not hear it. The pagan Greeks and Romans had several similar proverbs: "Whom the gods would destroy, they first make mad." Publius Syrius (42 BC) wrote: "Whom Fortune wishes to destroy she first makes mad." Lycurgus (820 BC) wrote: "When falls on man the anger of the gods/First from his mind they banish understanding." The seventeenth-century English poet John Dryden echoed these proverbs in The Hind and the Panther (1687): "For those whom God to ruin has designed/He fits for fate, and first destroys their mind." Removing the pagan meanings from the sayings, we arrive at some pretty sound theology: "Whom God wishes to destroy he first makes foolish." Or to put it another way, "Whom God wishes to destroy, he first makes undiscerning."

This Review and Part 2 are taken from Dr. Robbins' lectures on Thinking Biblically, specifically Lectures

1-3: "What Is Thinking?" "The Attack on Thinking," and "Why Think Biblically?" The lectures have been transcribed and edited for print.

What Is Thinking?

Why should we think? Does the Scripture command us to think? The Bible has much to say about thinking.

First, a quotation from Bertrand Russell who was not a Christian, but was nonetheless a very clever man. He wrote, "Many people would sooner die than think. In fact, they do." That is actually the case. Many people spend their entire lives avoiding thought. There are many distractions of the world, and many amuse themselves to death with entertainment, movies, and so forth, just to avoid thought. People engage in these things just to avoid a serious thought their whole lives.

The Definition of Thinking

How does the dictionary define thinking? Merriam-Webster's 7th edition, which is the last edition one can recommend, defines the verb "to think" as,

1. To form or have in mind.
2. To intend or plan.
3. To have an opinion or to regard as.
4. To reflect on, to ponder.

The list goes on until definition nine which is,

9. To subject to the processes of logical thought.

The intransitive verb is defined as, “To exercise the powers of judgment, conception, or inference, *i.e.* reason, to have the mind engaged in reflection, to meditate.” It is mostly that form of the verb “to think” that concerns us.

The Bible uses the word “think” many times. In the *King James Version*, the English words “think” or “thought” (and their cognates) occur 209 times. However, there are many words in Scripture with similar meaning. For example, cognates of the word “understand” occur 291 times, “judge” 674 times, and “know” 1,454 times. There are also words such as: *consider, reason, reckon, meditate*, and others. All of these words convey the general meaning to make judgments, to reason, to subject to the processes of logical thought. Meditation will be discussed later, and Biblical meditation will be distinguished from Eastern meditation.

Animals Do Not Think

With a working definition of *thinking* as “to make judgments, to reason, to subject to the processes of logical thought,” it is clear that thinking is not equivalent to being conscious. Thinking is not mere awareness. A dog is conscious. A dog is not a machine as the French philosopher thought. In fact, the Bible describes animals as having souls. They are conscious. They are aware. They have what philosophers call “sentience.” However, animals do not think. They are conscious, they are aware, but they do not think. A dog does not plan what he is going to do tomorrow. A dog cannot add $2 + 2$. A dog cannot come up with a theorem in geometry. A dog does not think.

In recent years, we have heard a great deal about people who allege that animals do think and they stomp their foot when they say it, much like Clever Hans did. At the turn of the last century there was a German fellow who owned a horse and the horse could do arithmetic. He could add, subtract, multiply, and divide. He could even answer questions about music. He learned all these things because his master had developed a table in which he gave a numeric equivalent of every letter in the alphabet. So, in addition to mathematical calculations, he could spell out words by stomping with his foot. This created quite a sensation in the early part of the 20th century and he earned the nickname of “Clever Hans.” Obviously, he did not have the apparatus in his throat to speak, but he could stomp his foot and answer questions. It is doubtful if there are any clever horses

around, but today there are dolphins, gorillas, apes, *etc.*, which are alleged to understand, to think, to reason, and to give correct answers. That these animals can do this is a very common theory among some zoologists, but animals do not think.

Look at a description of animals in *Jude 10*, “But these speak evil of whatever they do not know; and whatever they know naturally, *like brute beasts*, in these things they corrupt themselves.” In the English translations it is usually translated as “brute animals” or “brute beasts.” The Greek word behind the English word “brute” is *αλογία* and means “without speech” or “without reason” or “without logic.” There are many other verses that teach the same thing.

Returning to human beings, thinking is not daydreaming. Daydreaming is not thinking; it may be imagining things, remembering things, or wishing things, but it is not planning, calculating, or subjecting thoughts to logical processes. Thinking involves understanding.

There is a Far Side cartoon of what a dog hears when his master is talking to him... “Blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, *Fido*, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah.” That is what the dog hears. However, the dog does not even hear that much. The dog hears a sound that he recognizes. It may be *Rover*, or *Fido*, or some other sound, but he does not understand. He does not have a concept of himself. He does not have a concept of the idea of name, that things have names. He does not rise to the level of understanding. He hears a sound that he has heard before, and he knows that if he does certain things when he hears that sound, like wag his tail, or come running, or whatever it might be, he is going to be patted on the head, or given a treat, or something of that sort. So the dog hears a sound in the middle of “Blah, blah, blah, blah” and he responds to that sound by wagging his tail, and that is it. He does not have understanding.

The Scripture says in many verses that the animals do not understand, and that is a clue to what the image of God is. Certainly, they do not analyze. Thinking involves analysis, not simply understanding the words. A speaker speaks English and the audience understands the words. They analyze what is being said. They may analyze the speaker’s words and think, “That is not right because of such and such.” The audience is trying to come up with answers why, or reasons why what the speaker is saying is right or wrong. Notice that the word *reason* keeps surfacing. They are analyzing these things. They are making connections between one idea and another idea. They

are drawing inferences. If a person does these things for any length of time, he is thinking.

Most basic of all, thinking involves words. Words tag thoughts. We use words to refer to ideas. We have an idea of a domestic animal with a long tail at one end and a meow at the other end and we use the word “cat” to tag that thought. If we have an idea of an object in the front yard that is vertical and is brown on the bottom and green on the top, we use the word “tree” to tag that thought. Thinking involves words. It is impossible for us to think without words. Words are expressions of thought.

Animals do not know words. They do not understand. They do not analyze. They do not draw inferences. They do not subject what they hear to logical analysis because, as the Scripture says, they are without logic. They are without reason.

The Westminster Confession and the *Larger Catechism*, echoing Scripture, refers to the animals as having souls. However, animals do not have rational souls, but men do. Animals do not. Man is not an animal. There is quite a difference between them.

Some other verses in Scripture teaching that man is a thinking being in contrast to animals are *Psalms* 32:9, *Psalms* 73:22, *Proverbs* 26:3, and *2 Peter* 2:16.

God Thinks

Who thinks? Persons think. It is thinking that makes a person. God thinks. Look at *Jeremiah* 29:11, “For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the LORD, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope.” For I know the thoughts that I think toward you.... God not only thinks, He knows what He thinks. Another verse about God thinking is *Psalms* 40:17, “But I am poor and needy; Yet the LORD thinks upon me. You are my help and my deliverer; Do not delay, O my God.”

Some verses that use the word “remember” instead of “think” are *Nehemiah* 5:19, “My God, remember Tobiah and Sanballat, according to these their works, and the prophetess Noadiah and the rest of the prophets who would have made me afraid.” Also *Nehemiah* 6:14, “Remember me, my God, for good, according to all that I have done for this people.”

Man Thinks

Man thinks. There are many verses that demonstrate this. *Proverbs* 23:6-7a, “Do not eat the bread of a miser, Nor desire his delicacies; For as he thinks in his heart, so is he.” Notice here that it is the *heart* that thinks. *Second Samuel* 18:27, “So the watchman said,

‘I think the running of the first is like the running of Ahimaaz the son of Zadok.’ And the king said, ‘He is a good man, and comes with good news.’” Here the watchman expresses an opinion. He knows how Ahimaaz runs. He sees a figure running in the distance that has the same gate, and he reaches the conclusion that this is Ahimaaz running. The king also reaches a conclusion that good news is coming.

The New Testament gives some commands pertaining to thinking. John the Baptist commands the Pharisees not to think, not to think a certain thought. In *Matthew* 3:9 he says, “and do not think to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father.’ For I say to you that God is able to raise up children to Abraham from these stones.” See also *Matthew* 9:1, 2: “So He got into a boat, crossed over, and came to His own city. Then behold, they brought to Him a paralytic lying on a bed. When Jesus saw their faith, He said to the paralytic, ‘Son, be of good cheer; your sins are forgiven you.’ And at once some of the scribes said within themselves, ‘This Man blasphemes!’” Christ says “Son, be of good cheer; your sins are forgiven you.” Then some of the scribes conclude, “This Man blasphemes!” The Scribes had made a judgment. They concluded that Christ had blasphemed. The unstated argument that they used to arrive at this conclusion can be constructed. It involves the unstated premise that Jesus Christ is only a mere man. This premise denies Christ’s deity. Their argument goes like this: Because only God can forgive sins, and this is a mere man, therefore this man blasphemes.

Notice the response of Jesus in verse 4, “But Jesus, knowing their thoughts, said, ‘Why do you think evil in your hearts?’” Jesus knows their thoughts. He knows their conclusion. He knows the argument by which they arrived at that conclusion. Just for the record, this argument is logically valid. Only God can forgive sins, and this is a mere man, therefore this man blasphemes. The conclusion is false because one of the premises is false. The premise, this is a mere man, is false. There is a false conclusion, because there is a false premise.

Also, notice the phrase, “they said within themselves.” Frequently in Scripture, thinking is described as saying within oneself. *They said within themselves, this man blasphemes. And Jesus knowing their thoughts....* Jesus is the second Person of the Trinity. He is omniscient. He knows all things, including the thoughts of the scribes. He says, *Why do you think evil in your hearts?* Besides learning that it

is the *heart* that thinks, we should also learn that it is possible to think *evil* thoughts. There are many philosophers today, as well as many who are not philosophers, who deny that it is possible to have an evil thought. In their minds, evil can only be some outward action. That is not true. It is clear from Scripture that there is such a thing as evil thoughts and here Christ refers to them.

Matthew 17:24, 25 states, “When they had come to Capernaum, those who received the temple tax came to Peter and said, ‘Does your Teacher not pay the temple tax?’ He said, ‘Yes.’ And when he had come into the house, Jesus anticipated him, saying, ‘What do you think, Simon? From whom do the kings of the earth take customs or taxes, from their sons or from strangers?’” Jesus is asking a question that is requiring Simon to think. What do you think? Who is required to pay taxes? Simon has to give it some thought and then he answers. There are many other questions like that in Scripture.

In *John* 5:39, 40, Christ is reprimanding the Pharisees again. He says, “You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me. But you are not willing to come to Me that you may have life.” In this case they are holding an opinion, which they think they have derived from the Scriptures—that they have eternal life. However, they do not understand the Scriptures so Jesus tells them to search the Scriptures and clues them on what they should find in them.

In *Matthew* 16:15, *Mark* 8:29, and *Luke* 9:20, Jesus asks the disciples, “Who do you think I am?” There are many questions like that in Scripture. For example, in *Luke* 10:36, after telling the parable of the Good Samaritan, Jesus asks His hearers, “So which of these three do you think was neighbor to him who fell among the thieves?”

In *Matthew* 6:7 Jesus comments on a heathen misconception about prayer, “And when you pray, do not use vain repetitions as the heathen do. For they think that they will be heard for their many words.”

In *Acts* 17:29 Paul tells the pagan philosophers that they ought not to think certain things about God, “Therefore, since we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Divine Nature is like gold or silver or stone, something shaped by art and man’s devising.”

Some verses use words that are synonymous for “think,” like “reason” or “meditate” as in *Psalms* 1:1, 2: “Blessed is the man Who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, Nor stands in the path of sinners, Nor

sits in the seat of the scornful; But his delight is in the law of the LORD, And in His law he *meditates* day and night.

Here is a contrast between the godly man and the ungodly man. The counsel of the ungodly is the philosophy, the advice, the ideas of the ungodly. The godly man does not walk according to those. He does not stand in the path of sinners. He does not sit in the seat of the scornful. But his delight is in the Law (the revelation) of the Lord. The Law refers to the entire Scriptures and not simply the Ten Commandments or the case law of Old Testament Israel. His delight is in the Law of the Lord, and in His Law he meditates day and night. He studies it.

Meditation

Meditation in Scripture is not Eastern meditation. A popular, best-selling book in the 1970s was *How to Meditate: A Guide to Self-Discovery*¹ by Lawrence Leshan, who was a psychotherapist in New York City. What he suggests as meditation has nothing to do with the meditation described in Scripture. He says that meditation is primarily an emptying of the mind. One of the exercises he recommends for meditation is counting breaths. As one breathes, he counts, and if he gets really good at it, he does not think about his counting. The goal is to not think about the counting. Sit there, close your eyes, get comfortable, empty your mind of everything except an awareness of your breathing, and then count each breath. If you work at it for years, you will reach the point where you do not think about counting.

That is the complete opposite of what Scripture says in *Psalms* 1: “His delight is in the Law of the LORD, and in His Law He meditates day and night.” The goal in Biblical meditation, in Biblical thinking, is to fill the mind with the revealed propositions, not to empty the mind, not to seek for the spirit that is beyond the spirit, as Dr. Leshan recommends, which is all very mystical. Biblical meditation is to pick up the Scriptures, read them, and think about what one is reading. The godly man does that.

There are many other things involved with Eastern meditation. Leshan stresses pantheism as well, teaching that we are one with the universe and using language such as, “*We cannot fall out of the universe.*” In the past, during the Middle Ages Roman Catholic mystics practiced asceticism. There is also the matter of contradictions. To show how thoroughly anti-thinking Eastern meditation is, Leshan says, “If we

¹ Published by Little, Brown and Company, 1974.

have learned one thing from modern physics, it is that there may be two viewpoints about something which are mutually contradictory and yet both viewpoints are equally correct.” In a sense, (and he does not mean it in this sense) they are equally correct: they are both wrong. However, he means that they are equally correct, and when one arrives at the point when he can affirm contradictions, then he is making it up the scale toward the goal of denying the mind, the reason. Leshan also defends drug use, saying that drugs can give this insight that people are seeking through meditation much more quickly, but the only danger is that they will not be as prepared as they would have been had they practiced meditation. But if a person really wants the insight rapidly, sort of an instant insight, then take LSD or whatever. That will give spiritual insight as well.

Eastern Thought

Regarding Eastern thought, Carl Jung, one of the most famous psychologists of the 20th century, probably second only to Freud, had this to say about the mentality of the East and of Hindus in particular, “...the Hindus are notoriously weak in rational exposition. They think for the most part in parables or images.”² Jung says that for the most part they think in parables and images. Why did Christ teach in parables? To make people think? No. He did it to obscure. Christ explains this himself when his disciples ask him why he teaches in parables. *Matthew* 13:10, 11 states, “And the disciples came and said to Him, ‘Why do You speak to them in parables?’ He answered and said to them, ‘Because it has been given to you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given.’” He says that it is given to *you* to know, but it is not given to *them* to know. He teaches in parables to confuse people. He uses figures of speech to confuse people. However, to the disciples he speaks plainly. He takes them aside and explains in plain language what the parables mean.

Jung further says, “...They are not interested in appealing to reason. That, of course, is a basic condition of the Orient as a whole....”³ Further he says, “So far as I can see, an Indian, so long as he remains an Indian, doesn't think....”⁴ Indians are very

intelligent. This is not a matter of intelligence. It is a matter of subjecting thought to logical processes, to analysis. Jung states it thus, “Rather, he perceives a thought. In this way, the Indian approximates primitive ways of thinking” (396).

No one is denying that Orientals are human beings. They are. They are made in the image of God. And despite their best efforts, they still think the laws of logic. But if they are asked, they will deny those laws. But in their denial, they have to use those laws.

God, angels, and human individuals think. Animals do not think. Plants do not think.

Groups Do Not Think

At the other end of the spectrum, groups do not think either. Only persons think, and a group is not a person. Psychologists, sociologists, and some political scientists will talk about *the group mind*. However, groups do not think. Persons think. Individuals think. Groups do not think, and neither do nations or churches. Here is a point that is very helpful when dealing with bureaucracies. If one is unsuccessful because someone in a bureaucracy tells him, “That’s the policy! I can’t change the policy.” Somewhere, some person made that policy. To get satisfaction from a bureaucracy (which loves to hide behind the group) find the person who made the policy and get him to change it. That can work with governments. That can work with a local store. If a sales clerk says, “This is store policy.” Then ask to speak to the manager. If the store manager says, “This is store policy, and I don’t make it,” then ask to speak to the person who makes the policy. Groups do not think. Groups do not make policies. When dealing with a conglomeration such as the United States Congress, look at the voting records. Find the persons who made the decision to raise taxes. Individual persons made these decisions.

At one end of the spectrum, rocks, plants, and animals do not think. At the other end groups, churches, and nations do not think. The church has one head, and that is Christ. He thinks, and what he thinks is written in Scripture. We as individuals are called to believe it, but the Church as a group does not think.

The Attack on Thinking

Moving on from the subject of what thinking is, the next subject is the attack on thinking. Not everybody thinks that thinking is a good thing. This view is called misology, the hatred of logic, or the hatred of

² C. G. Jung *Speaking: Interviews and Encounters*, William McGuire and R. F. C. Hull editors, Princeton University Press, 1977, 394.

³ C. G. Jung *Speaking*, 394.

⁴ C. G. Jung *Speaking*, 396.

thought. There have been both religious and irreligious attacks on thinking.

Romanticism

The first movement to consider is Romanticism. Romanticism is not candlelit dinners and shiny knights on white horses. That is romance not Romanticism. Romanticism was primarily a movement in literature, but also in philosophy as well, at the end of the 18th and beginning of the 19th century.

Goethe

The German poet Goethe was one of its major figures, and his most famous work is *Faust*. In that long, epic poem, the character is struggling with the first verse of John's *Gospel*, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God...." He dislikes intensely that translation, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God...." What he dislikes is, "the Word" and he says what we have to do is come up with a different translation. Goethe knew Greek. He knew what the Greek says, so it is not a problem of translation. What he hates is the philosophy represented by the first verse of John's *Gospel*, "In the beginning was the Word...." So Goethe, after some struggle, translates it, "In the beginning was the deed...." Deed—it is action.

Sometimes this Romantic idea is expressed in the phrase, "Life is deeper than logic." Sometimes the Romantics say things like, "Life is green, but theory is grey." Life is green (that is alive); but theory (that is thought) is grey. Life is green, but thought or theory is dead. There is a contrast here. Life is deeper than logic. That is to say, thought cannot penetrate to the really important things. Sometimes the poet said things like we murder to dissect. A biology class takes apart a grasshopper, later in the week an earthworm, after that a starfish. But in order to do that, first, they must kill those things. We murder to dissect, and we are missing the life. We are missing the real thing.

This Romantic kind of thought is aimed at destroying the idea of thought and analysis—that we really cannot get to the important things through analysis, through logical thought, through understanding, through thinking. This stream of thought has been very influential, not only outside the church, but within the churches as well.

Charles Darwin

The second figure is Charles Darwin. Darwin authored a couple of very influential books, *The Origin of Species* and *The Descent of Man*. He did not invent, as many people think, the theory of evolution. The theory of evolution had been around long before Darwin. What Darwin did, or appeared to do, was to give a scientific basis for the theory of evolution. Many say that Darwin demonstrated, or gave a scientific foundation to, what the Romantic poets who predated Darwin had long suspected—that life is deeper than logic. In Darwin's theory, logic is a fairly recent phenomenon. Thought or thinking is a recent phenomenon that has developed in the last hundred thousand years when *homo sapiens* appeared. That is when logic appears. So life is, very literally in Darwinian evolutionary theory, deeper than logic. It predates logic by millions of years. Logic or thought or analysis or understanding is simply a tool of survival. It is something that certain animals evolved in order to enable them to survive. That is the role of thought or logic. Darwin appears to have given a sort of scientific basis for the Romantic idea that life is deeper than logic.

Karl Marx

The next major figure is Karl Marx, who wrote *The Communist Manifesto* in 1848, collaborating with Friedrich Engels. After that, he went on to write some much more boring books. *The Communist Manifesto*, however, is quite well written, and if one reads nothing else by Marx, *The Manifesto* should be read. It will show why we have a graduated income tax, a central bank (the Federal Reserve), free public education, and more. It is important to know these things. Marx was promoting these things over a hundred years ago.

Marx realized the significance of what Darwin had done in *The Origin of Species*. At one point he wanted to dedicate his major book, *Das Kapital*, to Darwin because he says Darwin has discovered the principles in nature that we have discovered operating in society, and our principles are an extrapolation of Darwin's. Engels said this of Marx at his funeral, "Just as Darwin discovered the law of development of organic nature, so Marx discovered the law of development of human history."⁵ As it turned out, the book was never dedicated to Darwin, which was probably good for Darwin. However, the same sort of theory was developing.

⁵ *The Marx-Engels Reader*, 2nd edition. R. C. Tucker, Editor, 681.

Marx's contribution to the attack on logic and thought was that there are many logics, not just one. The theory is called polylogism—many logics. Each class within society has its own logic. The reason the bourgeoisie cannot understand the proletariat is because they are bourgeoisie. The bourgeoisie has one logic, and the proletariat has a different logic. As the laws that control the development of history require, the proletariat will overthrow the bourgeoisie. The proletariat, being the fittest, will survive; the bourgeoisie will disappear. This attack on logic took the form of denying that there is one logic, teaching instead that there are many logics, many different systems of thought.

Behaviorism

In the 20th century an irreligious attack on thinking came in the form of Behaviorism. Two major figures in this school of thought are William James and John Dewey. They denied, for example, that there is such a thing as a mind. James wrote a very famous essay, "Does Consciousness Exist?" to which his answer was, No. They say there is no such thing as a mind; it is a myth. Behavior is all there is.

Behavior is defined in a very complicated fashion. A crude behaviorist might say that thought is motions of the larynx when one is speaking to oneself. A more sophisticated behaviorist might say that it is much more complicated than that—the whole person is involved. The whole body is involved and how it interacts with the environment. That is what thought is. There is no mind, no intellect, and no consciousness. Knowledge lives in the muscles according to Dewey. To develop certain habits, one actually has to do things. This whole train of thought is opposed to "book learning." One learns by actually doing. A person has to have experiences. This anti-intellectual, anti-logic, anti-thought movement is still in popular culture. Think of all the derogatory terms for people who excel in thinking. They used to be called "Eggheads." Back in the 1950s, Adlai Stevenson ran for president against Dwight Eisenhower. Stevenson ran on the Democrat ticket and Eisenhower ran on the Republican ticket. Adlai Stevenson was dismissed as an "Egghead." General Eisenhower was the man who got things done. He was the general who won World War II. Stevenson was a useless academic and "Egghead."

Today that term is not heard very often; instead there are different terms. People are called "Nerds." If they are in college, they are called "Grinds," because

they are grinding away at their studies. We have all these derogatory terms for people who actually put some effort into thinking. People seem to resent that for some reason. This is completely opposite to what Paul tells Timothy to do and the advice he gives him in his *First Epistle to Timothy*.

Existentialism

In addition to the Behaviorism of James and Dewey and their outright denial that there is such a thing as a mind, one of the most influential philosophies of the 20th century was existentialism. Existentialism denies that there is a human nature. In existentialism, each man makes himself, and all are confronted with an irrational universe. The titles of their books and essays give some understanding of existentialist thought, such as *Nausea*, and *No Exit*, which indicate that it is a philosophy of despair. Yet this very anti-rational philosophy has been very influential in the 20th century.

Those are some of the irreligious attacks on thinking in the modern era. Of course, attacks on thinking did not begin in the modern era. Throughout history people have been opposing thought and reason, not just in modern times, but in the Middle Ages, and in the ancient world as well. Opposition to thought and reason was not something invented in the 19th or 20th century; nonetheless, it is much more prevalent today.

Friedrich Schleiermacher

In theology, Friedrich Schleiermacher, a German who lived at the end of the 18th and beginning of the 19th century, actually thought he was defending Christianity with his ideas. Schleiermacher wrote, *On Religion*, in which he says, "I ask, therefore, that you turn from everything usually reckoned religion, and fix your regard on the inward emotions and dispositions as all utterances and acts of inspired men direct."⁶ Schleiermacher does not say who these inspired men are, but the men who wrote the Scriptures direct no such thing. The Scriptures tell us repeatedly to think and consider, but not to feel, emote, look at your inward dispositions, or contemplate your navel; rather, there are hundreds of injunctions to think, to consider, or to reckon. Whoever Schleiermacher has in mind when he refers to these inspired men, he is not referring to the apostles and prophets who wrote the Scriptures. The

⁶ *On Religion: Speeches to Its Cultured Despisers*, 1893, 18.

apostles and prophets do not direct us to focus on our emotions and inward dispositions.

A few pages later he writes, “Feelings are exclusively the elements of religion and none are excluded” (46). Notice the universal term, *exclusively*. “The feelings are exclusively the elements of religion...” Also notice the universal term, *none*: “...and none are excluded.” The feelings are *exclusively* the elements of religion and *none* are excluded. This includes anger, lust, and despair. No feeling is excluded.

Schleiermacher also says, “Ideas and principles are all foreign to religion...” Ideas are usually reckoned as religion, but he says to turn away from those things. Turn away from doctrine. Turn away from ideas. Focus on feelings. In one place, he says, “Ideas belong to knowledge which is a different department of life from religion.”

Though most have probably never read any Schleiermacher, most have probably heard the name, John Wesley. He was influential in America and in Great Britain. He is called the founder of Methodism. Wesley expressed a similar view before Schleiermacher. Wesley said, “[W]e do not lay the main stress of our religion on any opinions, right or wrong; ... [O]rthodoxy, or right opinion, is at best but a very slender part of religion; if it can be allowed to be any part of it at all.”⁷ Compare that to Schleiermacher, who said, “[religion] knows nothing of deducing and connecting” (*On Religion*, 53). Remember that in our working definition, thinking was connecting one idea with another. Seeing connections between ideas and drawing inferences is involved in thinking. Schleiermacher says religion knows absolutely nothing of deducing and connecting. Schleiermacher thought he was defending Christianity in all of this. He says the reason the churches have been so blood thirsty in the past (and he must be thinking of the Roman Church-State) is because they have been concerned with ideas and opinions. If you rid religion of ideas and opinions and concentrate on what is real, that is the feelings, then you will do away with persecution, too. These are Schleiermacher’s words, “How unjustly do you reproach religion with loving persecution, with being malignant, with overturning society, and making blood flow like water. Blame those who corrupt religion, who flood it with an army of formulas and definitions and seek to cast it into the fetters of a so-called system” (*On*

Religion, 54-55). He says it is not religion’s fault; it is those who have corrupted religion by introducing ideas and opinions into it. If they would simply concentrate on the feelings, which are the *exclusive* elements of religion, then there would not be any persecution. It would not matter whether one believed that Christ is the same substance with the Father, or of a different substance from the Father. It would not matter if Christ is God incarnate, the Second Person of the Trinity manifested in the flesh, or not. The focus is to be on love, on brotherhood, on the feelings, especially the religious feelings like awe. Focus on the feeling, as Reinhardt described it, of smallness when you walk into a cathedral in Europe. They make a person feel small, and that is the essence of religion—feeling small.

Schleiermacher says it was a feeling of absolute dependence that is the essence of religion. It is not such a shallow thing as knowing that God is one, or that Jesus Christ is the Second Person of the Trinity come in the flesh, or that Christ died for the sins of his people. They cannot get to the real reality. The real reality is the feeling of absolute dependence. These other things are just ideas and opinions over which people have killed others over the centuries. They are not religion.

Part 2 will conclude in the November-December Trinity Review.

⁷ *The Works of the Reverend John Wesley, A. M.*, edited by John Emory, 1831, 172, 449.