

## *The Dying Art of Thinking*

By Ravi Zacharias

The 17th-century French philosopher Rene Descartes (pronounced Day-Kart) is best known for his dictum, "I think, therefore, I am." A cynic may well quip that Descartes actually put *des cart* before *des horse*, because all he could have legitimately deduced was, "I think, therefore, thinking exists." I do not intend to defend or counter Cartesian philosophy; I only wish to underscore that thinking has much to do with life and certainty.

One of the tragic casualties of our age has been that of the contemplative life—a life that thinks, thinks things through, and more particularly, thinks God's thoughts after Him.

A person sitting at his desk and staring out of the window would never be assumed to be working. No! Thinking is not equated with work. Yet, had Newton under his tree, or Archimedes in his bathtub bought into that prejudice, some natural laws would still be up in the air, or buried under an immovable rock. Pascal's *Pensees*, a work that has inspired millions, would have never been penned.

The Bible places supreme value in the thought life. "As a man thinketh in his heart, so is he," Solomon wrote. Jesus asserted that sin's gravity lay in the idea itself, not just the act. Paul admonished the church at Philippi to have the mind of Christ, and to the same people he wrote, "Whatever is true . . . pure . . . if there be any virtue . . . think on these things."

The follower of Christ must demonstrate to the world what it is not just to think, but to think justly. But how does one manage this in a culture where progress is determined by pace and defined by quantity?

What is even more destructive is that the greatest demand comes from neither speed nor quantity, but rather from the assumption that silence is inimical to life.

The radio in the car, Muzak in the elevator, and the symphony entertaining the "on hold" callers add up as impediments to personal reflection. In effect, the mind is denied

the privilege of living with itself even briefly, and is crowded with outside impulses to cope with aloneness.

Aldous Huxley's indictment, "Most of one's life . . . is one prolonged effort to prevent thinking", seems frightfully true. The price paid for this scenario has been devastating. T. S. Eliot observed:

"Where is the life we have lost in the living?  
Where is the wisdom we have lost in knowledge?  
Where is the knowledge we have lost in information ?  
The cycles of heaven in twenty centuries  
bring us farther from God and nearer to dust."

Is there a remedy? May I make some suggestions for personal and corporate benefit?

### **Study God's Word**

Nothing ranks higher for mental discipline than a planned and systematic study of God's Word, from whence life's parameters and values are planted in the mind. Paul, who loved his books and parchments, affirmed the priority of Scripture: "Do not go beyond what is written." Psalm 119 promises that God's statutes keep us from being double-minded.

### **Read Great Books**

The English-speaking world is endowed with a wealth of books. But much contemporary literature comes perilously close to a promiscuous religion with an appeal for the "feel better" syndrome, rather than the impetus to "go deeper."

Read authors who stretch you and introduce you to other writings as well. Great writers stimulate your capacity to think beyond their ideas, spawning fresh insights and extensions of your own. Good reading is indispensable to impartation of truth. An expenditure of words without the income of ideas leads to conceptual bankruptcy.

## **Challenge the Mind**

The church as a whole, and the pulpit in particular, must challenge the mind of this generation, else we betray our trust. The average young person today actually surrenders the intellect to the world, presuming Christianity to be bereft of it. Many a pulpit has succumbed to the lie that anything intellectual cannot be spiritual or exciting.

Thankfully there are exceptions. When living in England, our family attended a church pastored by Roy Clements, one of the finest preachers in the western world. Every Sunday at two morning services he preached a one-hour sermon to a packed auditorium. Cambridge, being rife with skepticism, demanded a meticulous defense of each sermon text from the assaults of liberalism. An introduction of a technical nature would take up to 15 minutes of his time before he entered into the heart of his message.

I mention this to say one thing. When we were leaving Cambridge, Nathan, who was nine years old, declared the preaching of Roy Clements to be one of his fondest memories. Even as a little boy he had learned that when the mind is rightly approached, it filters down to the heart. The matter I share here has far-reaching implications. We do a disservice to our youth by not crediting them with the capacity to think. We cannot leave this uncorrected.

This is our first issue of Just Thinking. It is our hope that this newsletter will challenge your mind and stir your heart. After all, it is not that I think, therefore, I am, but rather, the Great I Am has asked us to think, and therefore, we must. And we must serve Him with all our minds.