

Mark A. Noll. *Jesus Christ and the Life of the Mind*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011. 196 pages. \$25.

Mark Noll, the well-known evangelical scholar is undertaking in this book an argument for doing what he is so well known for doing: using the tools of evangelical faith to look deeply and seriously at important subjects. His field is history, but here he addresses all academic disciplines generally and science, biblical studies, and history in particular. His thesis is straightforward: The scriptures and the creeds that articulate theological summaries of biblical doctrine provide rich resources for fostering serious academic inquiry. His key theological emphasis is on Christology that allows Christians to believe that being “attached to Christ inspires the confidence that God can be attached to anything we might study” (33).

Noll is arguing in two directions. On one front, he seeks to indicate, if not to prove, to the various disciplines within the university academy that faith is not irrelevant in the process of scholarship; rather, it offers superlative tools for undertaking the highest order of academic investigation. To the academy he boldly proposes that Christian scholarship is not an oxymoron. Grounding research in an understanding of the nature of Christ can result in a conviction to “study the world, the human experiences of the world, and the humans who experience the world” (41) to produce first-rate scholarship. Knowledge of Christ does not limit an approach to scholarship, but can drive Christians toward it. Those who undertake objective research do not have to check their faith at the laboratory door.

On the second front, Noll is arguing for Christian evangelicals to see in their own theological commitments a foundation for vigorous study. Since his book, *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind* (1994), Noll has been concerned that the habits of evangelical thinking have created barriers to serious and faithful scholarship. While he is more hopeful now (and gives ten reasons for this hope in the final chapter), he still argues vigorously throughout the book that a commitment to the ecumenical creeds and biblical doctrines can and should yield an eagerness among evangelicals to examine the world that Christ created (John 1:2-3) and continues, with the Father and through the Spirit, to superintend.

While it appears likely that Noll’s splendid weaving of scriptural interpretation, historical analysis, and doctrinal summation may achieve the goal of convincing evangelical Christians to take their theology and their world seriously (at least in those places where the habits of the evangelical church have not erected barriers of intolerance to reasoned argument), he is less likely to persuade atheist members of the scientific community. Though thinkers such as Richard Dawkins may be involved in what Noll calls a biblical methodology for scientific inquiry, “come and see” (from the Samaritan woman at the well in John 4:29), they are unlikely to find themselves suddenly converted by the argument of this fervent evangelical. Nonetheless, if Noll succeeds in gaining a hearing and a renewal of academic vigor among his fellow evangelicals (including many of us in the Academy of Homiletics), he will have served the academy well and done a service to the church that is filled with scientists, doctors, engineers, teachers, researchers, and others who struggle to find congruity between their confession of Christ on Sunday and their advancement of knowledge from Monday to Friday.

Clayton J. Schmit, Lutheran Theological Southern Seminary, Columbia, SC