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It's Academic:
Liberty University helps raise intellectual tone of society

September 01, 2008 ¦ Karen Swallow Prior

In his “Charge to the Graduates” at Liberty University’s commencement ceremony in May, University Provost Dr. Boyd Rist exhorted the Class of 2008 to “raise the intellectual and moral tone of society.”

Because our culture’s roller coaster of morality has been declining for the past several decades, Christians have, understandably, stood on the forefront in attempting to raise the moral tone of society. But during that time, the church had largely neglected its call to raise the intellectual tone of society.

That seems to be changing.

In a recent article in “The Chronicle of Higher Education,” D. Michael Lindsay, author of “Faith in the Halls of Power: How Evangelicals Joined the American Elite,” reports that at the start of the 20th century, devout Christians dominated higher education, whereas at the end, in the closing decade, only 15 percent of evangelical Christians were college graduates. Lindsay points out that this “anti-intellectualism” that marks the 20th-century American church is the exception, not the rule, in the history of the church. He writes: “For most of Christianity’s history, faith and learning have been intertwined.

Over the centuries, intellectuals received religious sanction for their scholarly pursuits, and the church — in both Roman Catholic and Protestant traditions — supported a range of intellectual activity, from the scientific research of Newton to the literary contributions of Chesterton. History is on the side of evangelical intellectual strivings.”

The 21st century may herald a return of Christians, and Evangelicals in particular, to their rightful role in cultivating the mind. Not only is history on our side, but Scripture is as well. The Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke all record the words of Jesus exhorting his disciples to "love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind." Daniel and Paul are biblical examples of those who did exactly that — and through both their love for the Lord and their extensive intellectual knowledge, they glorified God and drew others to Him.

Not surprisingly, research on this issue confirms Scripture. According to "The Christian Post," researchers at The University of Texas at Austin found that college attendance actually helps prevent young adults from abandoning their faith. The study found that those who never attended college had the highest rates of decline in church attendance. Additionally, those who never attended college reported "diminished importance on religion" and "disaffiliation from religion" in greater numbers than students earning at least a bachelor's degree. "Simply put," the researchers wrote, "higher education is not the enemy of religiosity that so many have made it out to be."

The growth of Christian higher education in recent years is not so much something new as it is a return to our roots. Liberty University is certainly doing its part in reclaiming Christianity's heritage. Since its founding, Liberty — whose motto is, appropriately, "Knowledge Aflame"— has awarded nearly 30,000 bachelor's and more than 8,000 graduate degrees.

Dr. Karen Swallow Prior is Chair of the Department of English and Modern Languages at Liberty University.