

Preface

William A. Dembski and Thomas Schirrmacher

There are rare thinkers who exhibit such intellectual vitality that they do not merely add to the thought of an age but radically transform it. John Warwick Montgomery is such a thinker. By the middle of the twentieth century, theological liberalism and scientific materialism had become so entrenched among Western intellectuals that a robust Christian theism no longer seemed tenable. Serious Christian thinkers saw themselves as needing to accommodate secular thought at every turn. Yet rather than preserve faith, this strategy of accommodation led to its steady erosion. By the 1960s, one would be hard-pressed to find a theologian at a mainstream seminary or divinity school who did not hide behind metaphor to deny the biblical miracles or invoke advances in philosophy to question core Christian doctrines. Intellectual integrity seemed to require abandoning Christian orthodoxy.

Enter John Warwick Montgomery. Bursting on the intellectual scene of the 1960s like a meteor, he was a theologian with an attitude. Christian orthodoxy was for him not just true. Nor was it merely defensible, as though it were but one among many credible intellectual options. For Montgomery, Christian orthodoxy could be and needed to be vindicated. And with unstoppable energy he was going to make that happen. Not only did he begin a furious publication schedule (see the bibliography at the end of this volume), but he also took his assault on secularism as well as the vindication of Christian orthodoxy right into the belly of the beast—to the highest levels of an academy that had spurned Christianity.

In our day, when debates in academic venues between evangelical Christians and secular thinkers are common fare, to characterize Montgomery's engagement of secularism in such revolutionary terms may sound overblown. But if we think that, we forget that such debates are now common fare precisely because of Montgomery. He blazed the trail. Things only seem easy in retrospect. It took Montgomery to get in there and mix it up with the theologians who

proclaimed that God is dead or with the philosophers who embraced situation ethics and its underlying moral relativism.

Montgomery, as a Lutheran theologian, enjoyed the plain speaking of Martin Luther. In debating situation ethics, for instance, he could analyze its philosophical problems as well as anyone. But in debating situation ethicists before a live audience, he would also point out that situation ethics places no premium on truth, with the result that situation ethicists are “morally obligated” to lie to their audience if the situation demands it. So why should the audience trust anything his interlocutor was saying at this moment?

Such in-your-face challenges by Montgomery did not endear him to the academy’s wine-and-cheese intellectuals who prefer collegiality to honesty and respectability to honor. But Montgomery decided early in his career that Dale Carnegie’s approach to winning friends and influencing people was inadequate for handling the theological disarray of his time. Stronger medicine was required.

Notwithstanding, anyone who knows Montgomery recognizes in him a lover of life and people. If he stepped on toes, it’s because toes needed stepping on. If people got angry with him, it’s because they were covering up things that he was rightly exposing. Montgomery epitomizes Terence’s dictum *homo sum humani a me nihil alienum puto*. Nothing human is alien to him. Moreover, for Montgomery, Christianity is the key to humanity’s full flowering. Thus, when people saw the tough side of Montgomery in vindicating Christianity, it was because he saw false ideologies as suffocating the human spirit and needing to be debunked. We might say that Montgomery’s apologetics consisted of opening windows in stuffy deoxygenated rooms.

Montgomery is a radical thinker in the true sense of the word—his program of cultural engagement cuts to the very *root* of what it means for evangelicals to be intellectually responsible. Yet to achieve the impact he did, Montgomery needed to be more than just radical. He needed to span an array of disciplines that had been infested with false ideology and then to work skillfully for their renewal. This required a long education, to which Montgomery’s long list of earned academic degrees attests. And yet Montgomery was never a

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dilettante. In whatever field he set his mind to master, he achieved world-class scholarship and recognition.

Thus we find that Montgomery is a world-renowned man of law and practices at some of the highest courts in the world. At the same time, he has a longstanding ministry of research, academic teaching, and writing. It's hard to believe that one and the same man could achieve in two worlds what others typically do not reach in one. But, as this volume demonstrates, at the heart is the same one person, who, with the mind of a lawyer and the faith of a theologian, has become one of the most brilliant thinkers in defending the Christian faith. For Montgomery, to act vigorously in the practical world and to think with logical precision in the intellectual world form a coherent whole, one that is necessary for affirming God as both creator and redeemer.

This volume celebrates John Warwick Montgomery's life and legacy. The chapter contributions are not merely by fans but by thinkers whose intellectual and spiritual journey Montgomery profoundly impacted. Indeed, some of us would have veered off the path of truth but for God's grace working through Montgomery. Although it is impossible to capture the full range and depths of Montgomery's thought in a single volume, here is as close an approximation as you will find. We offer this volume as tribute to a man mightily gifted and used by God.

We want to thank Broadman and Holman for their integrity and vision in publishing this work. We also want to thank Jim Lutzweiler, Ron Kubsch, Bill Youngmark, and Craig Freeman for their diligence in handling so many of the details required to bring a work like this from conception to birth. Finally, we want to thank John Warwick Montgomery himself for his wisdom and insights at all stages of this project. Thank you, John!

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