

The Glory of God and the Life of the Mind

Christianity honors the life of the mind, not because it celebrates the power of human intellect, but because Christ himself instructed Christians to love God with heart, soul, and mind.

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To be human is to think, and to think is to operate within a worldview. Every individual operates out of a basic set of convictions about reality, truth, meaning, and how the world works. As thinking creatures, we create, perceive, absorb, and base our thinking upon certain intellectual assumptions that, in essence, allow the world to make sense to us.

There is nothing distinctively Christian about having a worldview. The very process of intellectual activity requires some framework, and no idea is independent of prior assumptions. As human beings, we can hardly begin each moment of intellectual activity without dependence upon assumptions that are, in essence, pre-philosophical. This is true for all human beings, regardless of the actual content and shape of their worldviews.



The great challenge for the Christian is to craft a worldview that is distinctively Christian in its shape, substance, and structure. This is no easy task, especially in an intellectually complex world that is marked by an incredible diversity of worldviews and ideologies.

In this generation, a growing number of Christians understand the responsibility for developing a Christian worldview. Nevertheless, for many of these Christians, the development of a Christian worldview is reduced to certain principles of conviction that are assumed to lead to certain pragmatic conclusions and practical applications. There is no shortage of seminars, books, courses, and curricula directed toward the development of the Christian worldview. There is good reason to be thankful for this recovery of interest in developing a Christian worldview, but there is an even greater need to advance toward a more comprehensive understanding of the Christian worldview that finds its beginning and end in the glory of God.

Christianity recognizes and affirms the importance of the intellect. The life of the mind is understood to be a central issue of Christian discipleship. The Christian is not only to live in obedience to Christ, but is also to serve Christ through the development of a distinctively Christian mind.

All too many Christians ignore the intellectual component of discipleship. This tragic reality betrays a misunderstanding of the gospel, for the gospel of Jesus Christ requires cognitive understanding. In other words, there is a knowledge that is central to the Christian faith. As the apostle Paul makes clear in Romans 10, faith comes by hearing, and that faith is established upon truth claims that are nonnegotiable and necessary for salvation.

Christian faithfulness requires the development of the believer's intellectual capacities in order that we may understand the Christian faith, develop habits of Christian thought, form intuitions that are based upon biblical truth, and live in faithfulness to all that Christ teaches. This is no easy task, to be sure. Just as Christian discipleship requires growth and development, intellectual faithfulness requires a lifetime of devoted study, consecrated thinking, and analytical reflection.

As Anselm of Canterbury, a leading Christian theologian of the 11th century, classically affirmed, the Christian task is well defined as “faith seeking understanding.” In other words, the Christian faith honors intellectual responsibility and the life of the mind. The faith that justifies sinners is a faith that requires a certain knowledge and then leads to a responsibility to advance in knowledge and understanding in order to move “from milk to meat” in terms of intellectual substance.

All this is necessary in order that the disciple would grow in grace and in understanding, but it is also necessary in order that Christians will grow in intellectual discernment. This intellectual discernment is a necessary component of the Christian’s responsibility to know the truth, to love what is true, to discern the difference between truth and error, and to defend the faith “once for all delivered to the saints.”

The Christian affirmation of the life of the mind has produced schools, colleges, universities, seminaries, and a host of other centers of intellectual activity. The rise of the university can be traced directly to the intellectual vigor of medieval Christianity. Christianity honors the life of the mind and has made literacy a central issue of the church’s concern. Christianity is a religion of the book – the Bible – and it is a faith that takes the tasks of reading and writing with profound seriousness.

In the end, Christianity honors the life of the mind, not because it celebrates the power of human intellect, but because Christ himself instructed Christians to love God with heart, soul, and mind.

The fact that God would command that we love him with our minds indicates in a most profound and unmistakable sense that our Creator has made us to know him in order that we would love him and to seek his glory above all else. Understood in this light, our intellectual capacity and the discipleship of the mind are to culminate in the development of a Christian worldview that begins and ends in the glory of the self-revealing God of the Bible.

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