

Youth for Christ

By Pastor Christopher Seah

And he said to them, “Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father’s house?”
(Luke 2:49 ESV)

In a recent sermon, “Christ Jesus, the Filial Son” (Lk 2:41-51), we saw that the young Jesus is God’s vision for our childhood and youth. In the twelve-year old Jesus, we have a model of the Christian child and youth. The Christ-ruled young person is one who has set his heart on heaven while obeying those earthly authorities God has placed over him. The young person in the mold of Christ is one who goes about her earthly duties aware that she serves a greater King, the Lord God himself.

How would this Christ-centered ideal guide our vocation as students?

One of the challenges we Christian students face is that of relating our faith with our learning, our spiritual life with our academic life. This challenge is due in part to the secularized nature of our school system. Because we fear religious fundamentalism, we make sure that our schools do not become seed beds for religious indoctrination. But our fear of religiosity blinds us to another danger: The indoctrination of secularism.

Secularized education is a double-edged sword. While it protects our common space from religious intolerance (thus helping our nation building project), it also prevents us from seeing clearly the rule of Christ in our academic disciplines. After all, if Christ is only Lord of “religious” things, and religion is an extra-curricular activity, he cannot have much to say about academics, can he? And if he does not have much to do with academics (aside from granting our prayers for good grades!), what else is left to motivate the Christian student but the desire for personal achievement, upward mobility, and national glory?

We do well to recognize the dangers of an education that is driven mainly by secular and pragmatic interests. Such an education could nurture narrow people who are disinterested in things that do not seem to advance their careers (“Why study literature when you can make more money in clinical psychology?” “Why bother with music when accounting is more marketable?”). It could also form citizens who are apathetic about issues beyond the immediate concerns of their society. Worst of all, it could create amoral people who think themselves beyond good and evil. It matters whether or not you allow God to guide your life as a student.

How do we recover a more heavenly motivation for our studies? The answer rests in the young Messiah Jesus who linked his classroom discussion at the temple to serving in the Father’s house. In this episode in our Savior’s life, we see the divine exemplar for the Christian student. God in Christ shows us how to be a good student. *In the way of Christ, the Christian student studies as an expression of his or her*

holy service to God the Father. Thus, a consistently Christian student is first a child of God before he or she is even a student. The rule of God is the goal and the studies are means to that end.

To direct our studies toward God's service, *we must first remember that God himself is the context of all learning and of all knowledge.* "In him we live and move and have our being" (Acts 17:28) Because God is the sovereign creator and omnipresent Lord, there is no fact in this world that was not ordained and defined by God. There is no such thing as a "secular" fact, much less an "atheistic" universe. God's holy presence touches all things—even the seemingly mundane details covered in our textbooks. At every point, we are in touch with God.

That truth requires a response from us. If God is the context of all learning, *we must seek to be righteous users of the knowledge we have been given.* In a God-created universe, all knowledge comes with ethical responsibilities, with a demand for righteousness. The notion that you can keep knowledge and ethics separate is nonsense for both proceed from the same God! Therefore, God expects us to use our knowledge to serve his rule, which translates to serving our fellow human beings. Hence, the big question to keep in mind as students is this: "HOW CAN I USE WHAT I AM NOW STUDYING TO ENRICH THE IMAGE OF GOD IN MYSELF AND IN OTHERS?" How can I use these tools of knowledge to help myself become a better Christian? How can I help my fellow human beings grow in their mental, physical, and spiritual aspects? Keeping those questions in mind would lead us toward life-enriching vocations, not merely wealth-generating careers. Just as the Son of Man came to serve others (Mt 20:28), so too must we.

Third, *we trust that God is working in and through our studies.* Ephesians 2:10: "For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them." Since studying could be a good and morally wholesome work, it follows that studying could be one of the good works God has prepared for us. God is behind the scenes when we study, working in us "both to will and to work for his good pleasure" (Phil 2:13). A Christian who studies prayerfully brings a joyful holiness to his or her studies that the secularist cannot possibly know. When a Christian prays "Lord, teach me your word" before he does his homework, divine grace enters his soul and makes the work come alive. The act of studying need not be a dull routine, concerned only about passing exams. It can truly be a holy work that opens our eyes to the glory of God in all creation (Isa 6:3).

Fourth, *we remember that God's Word, the sacred Scripture, tells us what to ultimately believe about the world.* That ties us back to the first point, that God is the context of all that we do. It is important that we let Scripture be the foundation of our studies because Scripture alone gives us the ultimate truths that lie behind our world. Study is ultimately about the pursuit of truth—truth about the universe, about ourselves, and about God. But the only way to get truth is if we start with ultimate truth itself, the Bible. No matter how educated we become, we will never cease to be *creatures*. And as creatures, we will always need God's Word to tell us what to believe and do. Some of your teachers will scoff at this and call it circular reasoning. But the truth is, your unbelieving teachers also engage in a circular

reasoning of their own: They start with the belief that they can make sense of the universe without God's help; and somehow, they conclude that God is irrelevant! The Word of God is breathed out by God and judges all the words of men. Like the young Jesus, we must enthrone the Word of God in our hearts and not lean on our own understanding (Prov 3:5).

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Perhaps the greatest hindrance to our development as Christian students is our *lack of time*. There is so much to learn and so little time to bring our school work into dialogue with the Word of God. Our education system is not exactly geared toward the nurturing of the human spirit. Secular values run deep in our society's blood and we wonder why our society is getting more crass! There are strategies to help us *sacralize*—to make holy—our studies. But it would be helpful to start small. How about praying something like this before you head to school? “*Lord God, in whom all treasures of knowledge and wisdom are hidden, sanctify your Name in my studies. Help me to see you in my work. Help me to keep your Kingdom before me as I study. Speak to me through the words of my earthly teachers. Lord, have mercy on me. In Jesus' name I pray, amen.*” My younger brothers and sisters, may God give you grace to seek him in your youth.