

Lordship of the Mind

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When I began at Fresno State University in California as an undergraduate in the early 1970s, one of my first courses was Introduction to Philosophy. The class was taught by an ardently anti-Christian man I will call Dr. K., part of whose job description seemed to be to disabuse Christians of their silly beliefs. This, by the way, is no reflection on my good friends in the Philosophy Department here at Hope.

When I entered his course in the fall semester of my freshman year I had only *been* a Christian for about eighteen months. Liking to talk as I do, I made the mistake of speaking up in his class and identifying myself as a Christian. Now, Dr. K was not above implying to the class that my views were ridiculous. Nevertheless, he and I actually got along pretty well.

One day after class Dr. K. and I were talking about Christianity. He eventually asked me what I meant when I said that I had “become a Christian.” Naively I said that I had turned my entire life over to Jesus Christ. Dr. K. looked at me with disbelief and replied, “You turned your whole life over to Jesus Christ. Does that mean your mind as well?” “Yes, I guess it does” I said. “OK,” he said, “let’s assume for the sake of argument that this Jesus you are talking about is a real, living spiritual being.” And then Dr. K. looked me directly in the eye and said something I have never forgotten. He said, “Isn’t it quite dangerous to allow another entity to have control of your mind?”

Dr. K’s comment was, I think, perceptive. All other things being equal it *is* dangerous to let another entity have control of your mind. Not long ago I caught a glimpse of a talk show on what is allegedly a Christian television network. Several women were telling the show’s host with great enthusiasm that they were actively involved in receiving messages directly from angels. One of the women said she received these messages by sitting quietly in a dark room and asking the angels to direct her thoughts, which she then wrote down. My jaw dropped in disbelief, and I found myself practically quoting Dr. K: “Isn’t it quite dangerous to allow another entity to have control of your mind?”

A close friend’s step-son is involved in a west-coast group that I will call a cult. “It’s kind of scary,” my friend said during a recent visit. “Michael turns everything over to the group’s leaders—his time, his money. Sometimes I think he has turned his mind over to them. They told him who he was supposed to marry, and that’s who he married.” And again, Dr. K’s words came back to me: “Isn’t it quite dangerous to allow another entity to have control of your mind,” in this case a human entity.

The topic that I was asked to address today is Lordship of the Mind, and it is indeed a dangerous idea. What does the phrase even mean? Lordship of the Mind to me means this: The disciplined yielding of our thoughts to Jesus Christ, and the purposeful use of our mental capacities to serve Christ in the expansion of His kingdom on earth.

Your mind is a gift from God. And, a mind is perhaps the riskiest gift God ever gives a person, for in a human mind is almost measureless potential for good, but also extravagant potential for evil. This means that practicing the Lordship of the Mind by Jesus Christ is perhaps the most important discipline any human being can attempt.

CNN reported on March 9 of this year that “An international group of fertility experts has announced details of their plans to be the first scientists to clone a human being.” The team says that they plan to carry out the first operation toward that goal in October of 2001, that is, next month. One of the team’s leaders has said, “Dolly [the cloned sheep] is here and we are next.” Where are the Christian minds that will shape and direct the incomprehensibly important discussion about human cloning? I believe that many of those Christian minds are present here in this room.

As we have just been so painfully reminded, world terrorism threatens the stability of every nation on earth, while governments wrestle with how to respond without plunging the entire world into a devastating war. Where are the Christian minds being shaped that will bring God’s eternal truths to bear on the vital discussions about war and peace and justice that will continue from this moment on into the foreseeable future? I believe those minds are being shaped here, in the classrooms and chapel of Hope College.

The earth’s environment increasingly reveals the damage done by inexorable human expansion across our world’s surface and unchecked intrusion into the few remaining wildernesses. Who is God calling to combine biblical truth and relevant expertise to the resolution of the apparently impossible environmental issues that affect every resident of this planet? I believe He is calling some of you.

If you are serious about being a disciple of Jesus Christ, then practicing the Lordship of your mind *by* Jesus Christ is **not** one option among many—it is a biblical **command**. Let’s listen to the Apostle Paul as he speaks to us in Ephesians 4: 17-24 “Now this I affirm and testify in the Lord, that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their minds; they are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to the hardness of their heart; they have become callous and have given themselves up to licentiousness, greedy to practice every kind of uncleanness. You did not so learn Christ! — assuming that you have heard about him and were taught in him, as the truth is in Jesus. Put off your old nature which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful lusts and be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and put on the new nature, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.”

At this moment in your life you are part of a community of Christian learners. That is, Hope College is a place dedicated to the determined cultivation, the intentional practice, and the purposeful modeling of the Lordship of the mind by Jesus Christ. I cannot think of a better definition of a Christian college.

And why are we cultivating and practicing and modeling the Lordship of the mind? Because God has given us the responsibility to think and then to act on His behalf in this fallen world. Now **that** is, I think, a sobering responsibility. If our minds are not trained, if our thoughts are undisciplined, if we love ignorance, and if we cannot think our way through the difficult issues

that face the fallen world in which God has placed us, then we cannot obey Christ's call to think and then to act on his behalf in that fallen world.

"Do not be conformed to this world," the Apostle Paul writes in Romans chapter 12, "but be transformed by the renewing of your minds." The renewing of your mind means allowing your mind to be thoroughly and permanently changed by Jesus Christ. Each of us has a part to play in that process of being transformed by the renewing of our minds. Our part is to make the daily efforts Jesus Christ calls us to make toward disciplining our minds for his service.

But, do I really want Christ to be the Lord of my mind? "Isn't it kind of dangerous to allow another entity to have control of my mind?" What if Jesus says, "You are spending too much time entertaining yourself, and too little time allowing your mental faculties to be trained in righteousness"? What if Jesus says, "You are to take every thought captive to me, and these thoughts are clearly not being taken captive to me"?

You see, disciplining our minds, practicing the Lordship of Jesus Christ over our minds, takes effort. We must actively put off proud and sinful mental habits, diligently resist the intrusion of evil and idolatrous thoughts, and daily seek to acquire and to develop a mind that increasingly reflects Jesus Christ's own mind. This means growing in our personal understanding of the mind of Christ himself, the One who lived humility, submission and grace, and Who taught us that the twin pillars of our mental as well as our physical lives were to love God with all of our heart, and soul, and mind and strength, and to love our neighbor as ourself. Growth in our understanding of His mind comes through prayer, through careful study of the Word, and through disciplined, obedient thought and action in response to the vital moral issues with which Jesus Christ brings us face to face every day of our lives.

"Isn't it dangerous to allow another entity to have control of your mind?" Yes, it is, unless that entity is the God who created your mind and gave it to you as a gift, the Lord who made you and redeemed you, the One who has work for you to do for Him in this fallen world, work that requires you to allow Him to have Lordship over your mind.

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