

Coaching Students to Think Critically According to a Biblical Worldview

Background remarks

African Protestant seminaries prepare the next generation of church leaders and professors to face the task of **coaching students to think critically from a biblical worldview**. This entails more than imparting biblical knowledge; it requires forming an intellectual culture where faith and rigorous analysis work in harmony. In an age of pluralism and competing ideologies, seminary graduates must be equipped to discern truth, critique false worldviews, and apply Scripture to every aspect of life. The goal should be to encourage a biblically grounded intellectual culture in which students learn to take every thought captive to obey Christ (2 Cor. 10:5) and serve the church and society with both mind and heart.

- Christ's sovereignty extends to every aspect of life – “*not a square inch*” of creation falls outside His claim. (Abraham Kuyper)
- The Bible tells the true story of the world in four great acts – Creation, Fall, Redemption, and Restoration – and this redemptive narrative shapes a Christian's understanding of reality, knowledge, and ethics. Salvation in Jesus Christ means a reclaiming of the entire length and breadth of Creation with all of its cultural domains”. No sphere of thought is exempt from the Creator's claim or the effects of sin. (Herman Bavinck)
- Every worldview has governing presuppositions. There is no area of neutrality between the believer and the unbeliever. Always challenge the non-Christian's underlying assumptions. (Cornelius Van Til)
- Christians in all disciplines should develop lines of inquiry that take their start from biblical truths (e.g. humanity made in God's image) rather than secular premises. Christian scholars must not be afraid to let their faith shape their scholarship. (Alvin Plantinga)
- Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your mind (Matt. 22:37).

Christian critical thinking should be the careful evaluation of ideas, arguments, and cultural trends in the light of Scripture. Faculty should encourage students to ask probing questions, analyze assumptions, and seek truth, while doing so from the standpoint of a regenerate mind submitted to God's Word (Rom. 12:2; 2 Cor. 10:5). Cultivating such critical thinking begins with shaping students' presuppositions. They must grasp the foundational truths of a Christian worldview before they can rightly critique error. A solid grounding in biblical theology – creation, the fall, redemption in Christ, the authority of Scripture – provides the criteria against which all claims are measured. From this foundation, teachers can then coach students in skills like logical reasoning, identifying biases, and testing arguments. Every thought must be made obedient to Christ (2 Cor. 10:5).

Practically, seminary instructors should create an environment that models and stimulates critical inquiry under biblical authority. Effective African church leadership requires not only spiritual maturity but also “keen biblical insight and analytical and critical discernment.” Seminary training thus seeks to produce pastors and theologians who are both faithful *and* thoughtful – able to “discern the thoughts and intentions of the heart” (Heb. 4:12) and to apply biblical wisdom to complex, real-world challenges.

In an act of loving God with all our minds, seminaries should anchor students in a strong biblical worldview, challenging them to question and reason, and equipping them to critique unbiblical ideas, seminary faculty coach students toward intellectual excellence for the sake of the truth.

Biblical examples:

- Genesis 23:1-9 Living dead
- 2 Samuel 12:1-7a Sexual immorality (Rom.1:18-27; Mat.19:1-8; 1Tim.2:11-14)
- 1 Kings 20:37-42 Disobedience
- Isaiah 44:13-17 Idolatry
- Matthew 12:9-11 Legalism
- Mark 10:17-21 Justification through works
- Mark 12:13-17 Dishonesty
- John 8:7-11 Self-righteousness
- Luke 10:29-36 Bias / Tribalism
- Luke 18:9-14 Judgemental
- Luke 24:13-26 Lack understanding
- Acts 17:16-34 Presuppositions

To ponder on:

- Addressing Abrahamic Religions: Islam, Judaism
- Addressing Nature Religions: Hinduism, Buddhism, Paganism, ATR, Atheism

More remarks:

- Teach students how to think and reason from a biblical worldview, not just what to think.
- African educational cultures often esteem teachers as authorities; seminaries can leverage that respect while gradually inviting students into a more dialogical learning mode, showing that true authority is not threatened by questions.
- Just as we want faculty to coach students, the seminary leadership should coach the coaches. An example could be a faculty colloquium where one instructor presents a particularly tough question a student asked, and colleagues brainstorm how to answer it or turn it into a learning moment.
- Encouraging faculty to produce research and writing on African worldview and theological issues is vital. When professors publish articles or books addressing, say, Christianity and ancestral culture, or a Christian analysis of corruption in Nigeria.
- The Bible is not a textbook to be misused for proof-texts, but the living Word that shapes paradigms and priorities.

The task of coaching seminary students to think critically from a biblical worldview is both challenging and immensely rewarding. In Africa today, where the church is maturing amid a complex blend of traditional beliefs, modern secularism, and religious pluralism, the need for Christian leaders who possess a renewed mind (Rom. 12:2) is paramount. Cultivate critical thinking skills in our students not only as an academic exercise, but also as a form of discipleship – training them to take every thought captive to obey Christ and demolish arguments against the knowledge of God (2 Cor. 10:5) while speaking the truth in love.

The explosive growth of Christianity in Africa presents a providential opportunity to influence a vast segment of the global church toward a mature faith that loves God with heart and mind. One cannot overstate the importance of educators as role models. When students observe their professors skillfully navigating complex questions with biblical wisdom, it leaves a lasting imprint. A classroom discussion where a teacher gently dismantles a popular but unbiblical cultural saying, or where a lecturer humbly admits a tough question and together with students searches the Scriptures for answers, teaches by example that the Christian faith can withstand scrutiny and indeed requires our best thinking.