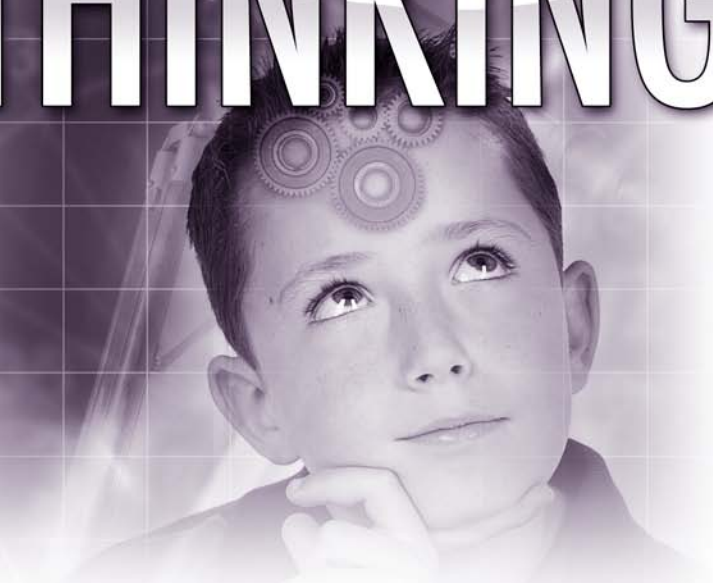




CRITICAL THINKING



In pursuit of the very best and most effective Christian school education, we at the Association of Christian Schools International focus on a series of core values that we believe are crucial to the delivery of Christian schooling. The matter of the nurture and development of thinking students is vital.

Critical Thinking: Students should learn how to process information and think critically in the context of a biblical worldview.

According to *Collier's Dictionary* (Macmillan Publishers, 1986), the first definition for the term *think* is “to exercise the mind, as in forming opinions, drawing inferences, or using judgment.” How well educated would we consider a student who simply provided rote responses to questions? Our view is that well-educated persons are those who exercise their mind, form opinions, draw inferences, and use judgment by calling on both the things they learned formally and the things they discovered because the school taught them how to research and discover.

“Nor could anyone doubt that the Bible asks us to think. Who could read the first ten chapters of the Epistle to the Romans, or the first four chapters of the Epistle to the Galatians, not to mention the Epistle to the Hebrews, without being made to follow analogies, deduce, and make comparisons as well as logical and historical connections?”

— Richard A. Riesen, *Piety and Philosophy*

The unique perspective that Christian schooling brings to the lives of students is the goal that they will be able to think critically within the framework of a biblical worldview. This goal is based on the premise that God's Word can and should form the foundation and the framework upon which we engage our thoughts and decisions. Charles Colson and Nancy Pearcey in *How Now Shall We Live?* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 1999) define worldview as “simply the sum total of our beliefs about the world, the ‘big picture’ that directs our daily decisions and actions.”

It is our intent in Christian schooling that this “big picture” be formed by clear and engaging biblical understanding—not biblical understanding that is separate and apart from what we so often consider “the secular” but rather an understanding that impacts every aspect of our knowledge and learning.

Too often, some in Christendom have linked critical thinking with cynicism and doubt, even to the point of suggesting that to engage critical thinking is to engage questions that dampen and darken spiritual growth and nurture. In some instances this misunderstanding of the development of the mind has resulted in the notion that, in educating our children, we ought to be more concerned with creating for them a *refuge* from a rapidly changing and scary world. I suggest rather that the purpose of effective Christian schooling should be to create a learning environment that develops young men and women who are a *resource* for a rapidly changing and scary world.

In his book *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 1996), Mark Noll writes the following:

By an evangelical “life of the mind” I mean more the effort to think like a Christian—to think within a specifically Christian framework—across the whole spectrum of modern learning, including economics and political science, literary criticism and imaginative writing, historical inquiry and philosophical studies, linguistics and the history of science, social theory and the arts. Academic disciplines provide modern categories for the life of the mind, but the point is not simply whether evangelicals can learn how to succeed in the modern academy. The much more important matter is what it means to think like a Christian about the nature and workings of the physical world, the character of human social structures like government and the economy, the meaning of the past, the nature of artistic creation, and the circumstances attending our perception of the world outside ourselves. Failure to exercise the mind for Christ in these areas has become acute.

And so it is within the context of the effective Christian school that we see the phenomenal opportunity for the development of young men and women with the mind of Christ—the result of teaching them to think critically—and to set that thinking within the context of a “big picture” that is framed in correct biblical understanding.

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