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# A Note from the Editor

Warm greetings from *Evangelical Review of Theology*. This is the second and final issue of the year, and I have enjoyed the process of stepping into the role of Executive Editor that Dr. Bruce Barron performed splendidly for seven years. He continues to serve as a copy editor for *ERT*, so I am grateful that his many contributions remain a part of the journal.

*ERT* has sought to be a steady, learned, and trustworthy presence for evangelical Christians to be theologically informed and culturally engaged. As with past issues, issue 49.2 brings together voices around the world to point the way toward Christian obedience in our polarized world. My aim is that Christians of every stripe will consider carefully the potpourri of what they share, especially where our views on contested issues might diverge.

Within these pages, Richard Cardew explores various models of leadership, paying special attention to how the intersection of scriptural and secular models can inform our practices within the modern world. Jonathan Corrado examines the significance of wine's absence in the original Passover account of Exodus, showing that this gap in the ritual is an imaginative act that anticipates the new covenant. Elmer Thiessen reflects on the philosophical trend of deconstruction, especially since some Christians find such an approach to be more honest and biblical than traditional views.

Richard Smith offers a reexamination of Jesus' own intellectual orientation and posture toward the life of the mind. Aristo Purboadji offers the outlines of an evangelical theology of technology stewardship, an urgent topic in an era of both accelerating cultural change and increasing ambivalence among Christians on the use of technology. Victor Umaru gives an overview of the Old Testament foundations for the Great Commission, correcting the common misunderstanding that mission is a theme that is confined to the New Testament.

Finally, *ERT* is reprinting an important article by Yohanna Katanacho, an Israeli Palestinian Christian theologian, previously published as 'Christ Is the Owner of Haaretz', *Christian Scholars Review* 34 (Summer 2005): 425–41. He writes as an evangelical scholar of the Old Testament who highlights oft-neglected features of the OT's theology of land. In the process, he also shows us how a beleaguered Christian community in the Middle East strives to be faithful both to their own history as a people and their witness to the Muslim majority around them.

I hope you enjoy this issue's journey with Christian scholars who showcase the riches of the global church!

— Jerry Hwang, Executive Editor

# One Thing Necessary

Richard L. Smith

Is it important whether Jesus was literate or illiterate, educated or uneducated? Was he merely a clever peasant with a talent for improvisation, or was he also an astute theologian and rhetorician? Is his intellectuality relevant to the church today? I argue that the answer to each of these questions is an emphatic ‘yes!’

This article outlines the debate about Jesus’ understanding and sketches his epistemic orientation during his earthly lifetime. It also describes a model of how Jesus’ followers can love God with their mind. I provide suggestions for developing mental piety based on our ministry in Buenos Aires, the Kuyper Centre for Christian Studies.

## The great debate

From the beginning, Jesus’ knowledge has been a point of contention. Doubts about his intellectual acumen appeared when he first preached in his hometown, Nazareth. The listeners wondered out loud, ‘Where did this man get these things? What is the wisdom given to him?’ (Mk 6:2). Very quickly, they determined that his educational pedigree was lacking and concluded, ‘Is not this the carpenter ...? And they took offense at him’ (v. 3). John records a similar skeptical query, ‘How is it that this man has learning, when he has never studied?’ (7:15).<sup>1</sup>

The controversy did not end with Jesus’ death and resurrection. In Acts 4, when the apostles testified about the Lord in the public square, the theological elite was outraged. They castigated the apostles over their supposed ignorance and their lower social status. Their interlocutors inquired, ‘By what power or by what name did you do this?’ (4:7). Then, with disdain, they dismissed the heralds as ‘common’ people and ‘uneducated’ (v. 13).

As the church gained converts among the upper and educated classes within the non-Jewish world, the charge of ignorance and anti-intellectualism was heard again. The pagan philosopher Celsus produced an influential critique of Christians as foolish and unworthy of consideration. John Avery Dulles described Celsus’ criticism in this way:

The Christians, he argues, demand a faith not based on examination, and this can only be an irrational commitment. Further, they shun open debate with the

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1 All Scripture citations are from the English Standard Version.

learned. They operate as a secret society and, despising wisdom, seduce the ignorant and the credulous. The Bible is full of childish legends and far below the finest achievements of classical history.<sup>2</sup>

In our day, as well, Jesus appears often as an intellectual wannabe among critical scholars. Author Chris Keith, argues that Jesus was not educated but could make others think he was, observes candidly, ‘In terms of topic, and to be blunt, many scholars considered (and still consider) the issue of Jesus’ literacy and education to be a joke of a topic.’<sup>3</sup>

Indeed, the image of Jesus as a brilliant thinker and intellectual model has frequently been a major item of dispute. Even among Christian academics, an illiterate Jesus is often the default image. New Testament scholar Kenneth Bailey confessed, ‘I discovered that I had been unconsciously trained to admire everything about Jesus except his intellectual astuteness.’<sup>4</sup>

Clearly, the neglect of Jesus’ ‘intellectual astuteness’ impacts the church. He is not often described as an exceptional thinker or intellectual exemplar in the Gospels. For this reason, we do not usually connect the dots between Jesus’ mental profile on earth and our obligation to love God with the mind (Mk 12:30), for which he is the paradigm.<sup>5</sup>

Two well-known Christian thinkers explain that minimizing biblical intellectuality, especially Jesus’ mental outlook, impacts followers of Christ. Paul Gould, a philosopher, writes:

While experts within their own particular fields of study, Christian professors often possess a Sunday school level of education when it comes to matters theological and philosophical ... and the result is a patchwork attempt to integrate one’s faith with one’s scholarly work and an inability to fit the pieces of one’s life into God’s larger story.<sup>6</sup>

John Frame, a theologian, says that Christians have a God-given ‘stewardship of the mind and intellect’, adding:

It is remarkable that Christians so readily identify the lordship of Christ in matters of worship, salvation, and ethics, but not in thinking. But ... God in Scripture over and over demands obedience of his people in matters of wisdom, thinking, knowledge, understanding, and so forth.<sup>7</sup>

Connecting Jesus’ mental posture as a human being with the demand to love God with the mind, therefore, is very important and quite relevant. He commissions his followers to imitate his thought life—the what, why, and how—though we are finite

2 Avery Cardinal Dulles, *A History of Apologetics* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 1999), 43.

3 Chris Keith, ‘Jesus Against the Scribal Elite’, <https://syndicate.network/?p=3216>.

4 Kenneth Bailey, as cited in Peter J. Williams, *The Surprising Genius of Jesus: What the Gospels Reveal about the Greatest Teacher* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2023), 1.

5 Jesus’ mission to ‘fulfil’ (enact and embody) the ‘Law and the Prophets’ (Mt 5:17) included the creedal nucleus of the Old Testament, the Shema (Deut 6:4–5). For more information, see my article ‘Such a Heart as This’, *Evangelical Review of Theology* 46, no. 1 (February 2022): 24–37.

6 Paul M. Gould, *The Outrageous Idea of the Missional Professor* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2014), 7.

7 John Frame, *A History of Western Philosophy and Theology* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 2015), 5.

and fallen. And we should train disciples to do the same (Mt 28:19).

## Jesus' intellectual profile

Below, I outline briefly nine themes regarding Jesus' epistemic profile in the Gospels, in accord with the Shema (Deut 6:4–5) and the command to love God with our mind (Mk 12:28–31).

First, Jesus demonstrated the supreme importance of listening to and learning from God. He said, 'I can do nothing on my own. As I hear, I judge, and my judgment is just, because I seek not my own will but the will of him who sent me' (Jn 5:13). He confessed, 'Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing' (Jn 5:19). For this reason, Jesus often withdrew 'by himself' (Mt 14:23) to 'desolate' locations (Mk 1:35) to pray, usually at night. In moments of decision or at pivotal points in his ministry, he sought his Father's counsel and consolation: before calling the apostles (Mk 3:13), when his countymen sought to make him king (Jn 6:15), after times of intense ministry (Mk 6:44–46), as people speculated about his identity (Lk 9:18), when God spoke of him in affirmation (Mt 17:1–5), and in his moment of great apprehension (Lk 22:41–43). Jesus' prayers also demonstrated his theocentric focus—for instance, when teaching about prayer (Mt 6:9–10), praying for his followers (Jn 17), and giving thanks (Lk 22:17; Jn 11:41b–42).

Second, Jesus acknowledged the intellectual primacy of Scripture. When tempted by the devil, he cited passages from Deuteronomy (Lk 4:1–13). When he was dying on the cross, he referred to the Psalms (Mt 27:46). He continually referenced the Old Testament and reasoned from its precepts (Mt 12:3; Lk 4:21). In short, Jesus presupposed the biblical worldview. Everything he thought, spoke, desired, and performed was conditioned by God's law, the Torah, and wisdom. For this reason, he possessed both biblical literacy and fluency, which he acquired from his Jewish upbringing, synagogue, and culture.

Third, Jesus modelled the fear of God intellectually and ethically. He embraced Proverbs 1:7, 'The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge.' He embodied Proverbs 3:5–7, 'Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths. Be not wise in your own eyes; fear the Lord, and turn away from evil.' In this way, Jesus replicated the wisdom of the sons of Issachar, 'who had understanding of the times, to know what Israel ought to do' (1 Chr 12:32).

Indeed, Jesus was utterly wise, and he embodied Old Testament wisdom.<sup>8</sup> He knew what was truly important and what to do about it in the most fruitful manner.

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8 Ryan O'Dowd comments, 'The wisdom tradition was at its peak at the time of Jesus' earthly ministry.' See O'Dowd, *Proverbs* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2017), 44. See also Cornelis Bennema, 'Strands of Wisdom Tradition in Intertestamental Judaism: Origins, Developments, and Characteristics', *Tyndale Bulletin* 51, no. 1 (2002): 61–82; Fred W. Burnett and Cornelis Bennema, 'Wisdom', in *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, ed. Joel B. Green, Jeannine K. Brown and Nicholas Perrin (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2013), 995–1000; Dianne Jacobson, 'Jesus as Wisdom in the New Testament', *Word and World*, Supp. Series 3 (1997): 72–93; Ben Witherington III, *Jesus the Sage: The Pilgrimage of Wisdom* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2000); Ben Witherington III, *Matthew* (Macon, GA: Smith & Helwys, 2006), 16–21.



He could not be distracted or manipulated by folly. He could not be deterred from his Father's mission to pursue a fool's errand, such as when the crowds sought to 'make him king' and thereby reframe his calling. Even as a child, Jesus was 'filled with wisdom' (Lk 2:40) and 'increased in wisdom' as he matured (2:52). When he was 12 years old, Temple scholars were 'amazed at his understanding' (2:47), as were many in the crowds who heard his teaching (Mt 13:54).

Fourth, Jesus was supremely knowledgeable, unlike his peers from the same social class. Evidence indicates that he spoke Aramaic and Hebrew. He communicated, as well, in Greek and spoke at least some Latin.<sup>9</sup> He could read and write, as most well-trained scribes could.<sup>10</sup> He understood the ethnic and religious distinctives of Palestine. He possessed a thorough knowledge of Jewish history and Scripture, as well as familiarity with the concepts of the Second Temple period. He manifested keen spiritual awareness and astute theological reasoning.<sup>11</sup>

Fifth, Jesus knew how to communicate with whomever he interacted with. He understood how to keep every interchange on point, how to refute and critique false reasoning, and how to guide each seeker towards the truth. He was also an extraordinarily gifted teacher and communicator. Listeners were often astounded. The Gospels reveal that the theological elite forsook attempts to entrap him intellectually (Mk 12:34; Lk 20:40).<sup>12</sup>

Sixth, Jesus thoroughly comprehended human depravity and the intellectual impact of sin, individually and corporately (Mk 7:20–22; Jn 2:25). He discerned our twisted reasoning and foolish mindset.<sup>13</sup> He understood that sin and the supernatural impact what and how we think (Jn 13:2). He recognized the antithetical agenda

9 Ken M. Campbell, 'What was Jesus' Occupation?' *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 48, no. 3 (September 2005): 501–19; Ken Dark, *Archeology of Jesus' Nazareth* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2023); Craig K. Evans, 'Context, Family and Formation', in *The Cambridge Companion to Jesus*, ed. Markus Bockmuehl (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001); Craig K. Evans, 'The Misplaced Jesus: Interpreting Jesus in a Judaic Context', in *The Missing Jesus: Rabbinic Judaism and the New Testament*, ed. Bruce Chilton, Craig K. Evans, and Jacob Neusner (Boston: Brill, 2002), 11–44.

10 Chris Keith, *Jesus' Literacy: Scribal Culture and the Teacher from Galilee* (New York: T&T Clark, 2011); Sanghwan Lee, 'Defending Multilingual Galilee from Its Literary and Archeological Objections', *Journal of Greco-Roman Christianity and Judaism* 16 (2020): 183–99; Brian J. Wright, *Communal Reading in the Time of Jesus: A Window into Early Christian Reading Practices* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2016).

11 See Williams, *The Surprising Genius of Jesus*; Hughson T. Ong, *The Multilingual Jesus and the Sociolinguistic World of the New Testament* (Boston: Brill, 2016).

12 Consider the dialogues with Nicodemus in John 3, the Samaritan woman in John 4, and the man born blind in John 9, as well as the rich young man (Mk 10) and the disciples traveling to Emmaus (Lk 24). See Michal Beth Dinkler, 'Silence as Rhetorical Technique in Luke 14:1–6', *Perspectives in Religious Studies* (Winter 2013): 337–48; Douglas Estes, *The Questions of Jesus in John: Logic, Rhetoric and Persuasive Discourse* (Boston: Brill, 2013); Chris Keith, *Jesus against the Scribal Elite: The Origins of the Conflict* (New York: T&T Clark, 2020); Joshua Paul Smith, 'I Will Also Ask You a Question' (Luke 20:3): The Social and Rhetorical Function of Opposing-Turn Questions in the Gospel of Luke', *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 52, no. 3 (2022): 172–81; Tom Thatcher, *Jesus the Riddler: The Power of Ambiguity in the Gospels* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006).

13 John M. Frame, *The Doctrine of the Knowledge of God* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1987), 49–61; Glenn D. Pemberton, 'It's a Fool's Life: The Deformation of Character in Proverbs', *Restoration Quarterly* 50 (2008): 213–24; Richard L. Smith, *Such a Mind as This: A Biblical-Theological Study of Thinking in the Old Testament* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2021).

of the devil and his dominion. He perceived the distorted nature of sinful ideology, groupthink, and oppressive institutions (Mt 11:8; 20:25; Lk 13:31–32). He realized that what and whom we listen to informs our thinking, for good or bad.

Seventh, Jesus' knowing was eschatologically conditioned. He defined his earthly existence in terms of God's redemptive plan from creation, through Israel and the church, to restoration.<sup>14</sup> He knew exactly where he came from, his historical context in first-century Palestine (with its social, spiritual, and political complexity), and to where (or to whom) he would return. His thinking was aligned with the 'age to come' (Mk 10:30) and not with 'this evil generation' (Mt 12:45) or the 'present evil age' (Gal 1:4), as Paul described.

Eighth, Jesus' intellectuality was situated by both his divine nature *and* the incarnation, for the divine 'Word became flesh' (Jn 1:14). Jesus expressed ideas commensurate with omniscience (Jn 8:58). He possessed mental powers eschatologically endowed by the Holy Spirit in fulfilment of Simeon's prophecy (Luke 2:34–35). For this reason, the Council of Chalcedon (451 CE) taught that he was 'fully God'.<sup>15</sup> Yet the ancient creed also explained that he was 'fully man'. His epistemic profile manifested both divine and human aspects (though without sin). Mike Riccardi comments:

So when Scripture affirms seemingly contradictory realities concerning the incarnate Christ—that He is eternal God, yet born in time; Creator, yet possessor of a created body; sustaining the universe while being sustained by Mary; omniscient God, yet ignorant and increasing in wisdom; omnipotent Lord, yet exhausted and sleeping—it is affirming nothing other than the hypostatic union, that Christ is one person subsisting in two distinct yet inseparable natures. He is eternal, omniscient, omnipotent, Creator, and Sustainer according to His deity, and yet temporal, ignorant, weak, created, and sustained according to His humanity.<sup>16</sup>

Ninth, because of his humanity, Jesus became our example in all things (Phil 2:5; Heb 4:15). Bruce A. Ware asks, 'What dimensions of the life, ministry, mission, and work of Jesus Christ can be accounted for fully and understood rightly only when seen through the lens of his humanity?'<sup>17</sup> Jesus modelled the mindset that God expected from Adam and Israel. He 'fulfilled' the Law by obeying the Shema (Deut 6:4–5) and Great Commandment (Mk 12:29–31), including the command to love

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14 Geerhardus Vos wrote, 'Jesus being consciously the Messiah, his whole manner of thinking and feeling could not otherwise be steeped in this atmosphere. ... The consummate expression of this principle is seen in the eschatological outlook, both backward and forward, which accompanied Christianity from its very birth. ... It is the mother-soil out of which the tree of the whole redemptive organism has sprung.' Vos, *The Self-Disclosure of Jesus: The Modern Debate about the Messianic Consciousness* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Eerdmans, 1953, 21–22). Jesus spoke at length about the end of this age (Mt 24; Mk 13; Lk 21). He referred to the world to come in Matthew 19:28: 'Truly, I say to you, in the new world (*paliggenesia*), when the Son of Man will sit on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.'

15 These reasons included, obviously, his omnipotent deeds and Trinitarian teaching.

16 Mike Riccardi, 'Veiled in Flesh the Godhead See: A Study of the Kenosis of Christ', *The Master's Seminary Journal* 30, no. 1 (Spring 2019): 26.

17 Bruce A. Ware, *The Man Christ Jesus: Theological Reflections on the Humanity of Christ* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013), 30.

God 'with all the mind'. Jesus assumed 'the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men' and 'humbled himself by becoming obedient' (Phil 2:7–8). He learned as a devout Hebrew should—from his family, Scripture, synagogue, and Temple. Thus, Jesus modelled intellectual piety and showed what, why, and how to think as creatures made in God's image. In effect, Jesus told us, 'Follow me! Steward your minds in ways that honor God and bless others.'

In short, the man Jesus was brilliant, a savant, a true sage, even a scholar. Jesus loved God with all his mind, despite the chaotic, confusing, and demonic context in which he ministered. He manifested right thinking, pious motivation, wise application, and true love for others, according to the Shema and Great Commandment. He exhibited mental piety and sacred shrewdness in our twisted and deconstructive world (Mt 10:16). The obvious implication is that we should do likewise—that is, practice Shema spirituality and thereby learn to love God with all our minds.

### Mary of Bethany

Let us now consider an example of holistic spirituality among the disciples of Jesus, including intellectual piety—Mary of Bethany, Martha and Lazarus's sister. Her devotion is mentioned five times in the Gospels, which is significant.<sup>18</sup> Most scholars agree that each episode refers to the same person, though there are some variations in the text.

This is how John describes Mary's poignant encounter with Jesus:

Six days before the Passover, Jesus therefore came to Bethany, where Lazarus was, whom Jesus had raised from the dead. So they gave a dinner for him there. Martha served, and Lazarus was one of those reclining with him at table. Mary therefore took a pound of expensive ointment made from pure nard, and anointed the feet of Jesus and wiped his feet with her hair. The house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume. But Judas Iscariot ... having charge of the money-bag he used to help himself to what was put into it. Jesus said, 'Leave her alone, so that she may keep it for the day of my burial.' (12:1–7)

Matthew and Mark add Jesus' comment, 'Truly, I say to you, wherever this gospel is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will also be told in memory of her' (Mt 26:13; Mk 14:9).

I often wonder why she made such a great economic sacrifice. What did she know about Jesus that the others missed? And how did she know it? Why did Jesus say, 'Wherever the gospel is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will be told in memory of her'? Here we are today, thinking about her 2,000 years later. Why? I think the answers are found in Luke 10:38–42:

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18 Mary Ann Beavis, 'Reconsidering Mary of Bethany', *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 74, no. 2 (April 2012): 281–97; Santiago Guijarro and Ana Rodríguez, 'The 'Messianic' Anointing of Jesus (Mark 14:3–9)', *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 41, no. 3 (2011): 132–43; Dominika A. Kurek-Chomycz, 'The Fragrance of Her Perfume: The Significance of Sense Imagery in John's Account of the Anointing in Bethany', *Novum Testamentum* 52 (2010): 334–54; J. Lionel North, 'One Thing Is "Necessary"' (Luke 10:42): Text, Subtext and Context', *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 66 (1997): 3–13.

Now as they went on their way, Jesus entered a village. And a woman named Martha welcomed him into her house. And she had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet and listened to his teaching. But Martha was distracted with much serving. And she went up to him and said, 'Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Tell her then to help me.' But the Lord answered her, 'Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things, but one thing is necessary. Mary has chosen the good portion, which will not be taken away from her.'

I offer these observations. First, Martha was 'distracted'. Is that not the case with many of us? We are often sidetracked by life: our careers, research, projects, status, economic well-being, reputation, and even sometimes triviality.

Second, Mary 'sat at the Lord's feet', which is the posture of a disciple in antiquity. She 'listened to his teaching', for she was an avid student of Jesus. To her, he was supremely interesting, and she was curious. How different we often are, sometimes bored with the Bible. We often fail to discern its beauty, relevance, or brilliance, as Mary did as she listened to Jesus.

Third, Mary acknowledged his wisdom and understanding. She perceived something essential about the Lord. Mary understood who he was—the Messiah who would die for our sin.<sup>19</sup>

Fourth, Mary was a true disciple. Jesus' teaching and example transformed her mind, purified her desires, and inspired adoration, which is Shema-inspired, holistic spirituality. For this reason, Mary *chose* 'the good portion'. Her most profound hopes and concerns were aligned with the Lord's agenda.

Fifth, she did the 'one thing necessary', which is listening to the Lord, learning from him, and learning to love God with the mind. Just as Jesus practiced the 'one thing necessary' and listened to the Father, Mary listened to Jesus.

Mary demonstrated her true understanding and real priorities with an extraordinary sacrifice. Her mind (knowledge, curiosity, learning, imagination), soul (her deepest motives, true desires, and aspirations), and strength (her every capacity and asset)—all of her being was dedicated to knowing God and serving others.

Mary showed that a mind informed by revelation (that learns the divine Word) generates godly motivation (the fear of God) and fosters stewardship that demonstrates love in action. The mind, desire, and capacity should be dedicated to the Lord. To put it another way, holistic spirituality refers to an integrated piety of the head, heart, and hand.

Jesus modelled this Great Commandment and Mary imitated his example. And for this reason, she is still remembered. We should follow her example. The 'one thing necessary' begins with the mind but is expressed in who we are and what we do and say for the Lord and others.

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19 That Mary discerned Jesus as the Messiah *and* that he would die for our sin is reasonable, given John's placement of the event 'six days before the Passover', the linkage to Jesus' death ('for the day of my burial'), and the excessive value of her sacrifice and emotive conduct. In addition, Jesus expressed multiple times, explicitly and implicitly, that the Son of Man would be 'lifted up' (Jn 3:14; 6:62; 8:28; 12:23, 34; 13:31).

To express it another way, cultivating minds that love the Lord is an integral aspect of biblical spirituality. Disciples of Jesus Christ have no justification for wilful biblical-theological ignorance or anti-intellectualism.

## Suggestions

At the Kuyper Centre for Christian Studies in Buenos Aires, our motto is ‘cultivating the mind to love God fully’. We promote a model of holistic spirituality derived from the Shema, the Great Commandment, and the Great Commission, where loving God with the mind plays a central role.

However, we often encounter obstacles to embracing the ‘one thing necessary’. For instance, many of those who participate in our centre do not know how to read critically. Most are passive consumers of popular culture and do not possess criteria for evaluating and engaging the world for Christ. These are typical attitudes that we encounter:

*Ignorance:* Many know very little about the Bible and theology, worldview or the relevant biblical-theological thinkers. And they usually do not perceive the need or relevance of such knowledge.

*Anti-intellectualism:* Some resist study and reflection because their religious tradition minimizes the need for theology or intellectual effort.

*Curiosity without commitment:* Some enjoy intellectual entertainment but are unwilling to discipline their minds or submit to programmatic learning.<sup>20</sup>

*Consumer approach:* Some ‘shop’ for knowledge, learning formats, and instructors that conform to their ‘buying’ preferences. When study becomes difficult or boring, they take their ‘business’ elsewhere.

*Triviality:* Most are conditioned by modern technology and inconsequential chatter through social media, so they are not prepared to read or reflect deeply.

*Passivity:* Some fulfil the role assigned to them by society—intellectual simplicity and subjective spirituality.

*Social obstacles:* Many are distracted by the demands of culture (sports, social life, entertainment).

With these challenges in mind, our educational objectives are to stimulate intellectual curiosity and encourage further study. We design activities that foster biblical literacy and critical thinking together. When we identify committed learners, we broaden and deepen their knowledge. We stress, for instance:

*Informal discussion:* Participants at our centre meet to watch biblical or theological lectures and discuss their implications. In this way, we learn to think together, using our biblical assumptions. We also share a meal and pray. Basically, these meetings are little learning communities.

*Communal reading:* We read together Charles Cotherman’s *To Think Christianly*, my book *Such a Mind as This*, John Murray’s *Redemption Accomplished and Ap-*

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20 See Acts 17:21 for a similar attitude.

plied, and Daniel Strange's *Making Faith Magnetic*.<sup>21</sup> Groups also read articles and chapters online. We provide, as well, in-person and online seminars about presuppositional apologetics, Old Testament wisdom, public theology, and neo-Calvinism.

*Movie discussions:* Films are saturated with implicit and explicit theology and worldview. Analyzing movies is an asymmetrical way to teach the biblical outlook and foster critical thinking.<sup>22</sup> To facilitate thoughtful discussion, we prepare questions and provide them to the participants.<sup>23</sup>

At the Kuyper Centre, we foster minds that discern the 'one thing necessary'. We stress the obligation, beauty, and relevance of loving God with 'all the mind' as a key aspect of biblical spirituality.

## Conclusion

This article suggests that Christians should celebrate Jesus' 'intellectual astuteness' in the Gospels and learn to think like him. He is our epistemic paradigm. We should obey the command to love God with the mind, as he did. For this reason, biblical literacy, worldview reasoning, and intellectual virtue are essential for followers of Jesus Christ.<sup>24</sup>

Mary of Bethany imitated Jesus' example. She recognized the 'one thing necessary'—listening to the Lord. She modelled intellectual piety as a critical aspect of Christian spirituality. She demonstrated Shema-inspired discipleship for everyday believers like us. For this reason, we should also embrace the 'good portion', as she did.

To state the matter negatively, followers of Jesus Christ need more than a mere 'Sunday school level of education'. We must recognize that God demands 'obedience of his people in matters of wisdom, thinking, and knowledge'. Christian disciples have no excuse for wilful biblical-theological ignorance or anti-intellectualism.

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21 Charles E. Cotherman, *To Think Christianly: A History of L'Abri, Regent College, and the Christian Study Center Movement* (Lisle, IL: IVP Academic, 2021); John Murray, *Redemption Accomplished and Applied* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015); Daniel Strange, *Making Faith Magnetic: Five Hidden Themes Our Culture Can't Stop Talking About and How to Connect them to Christ* (Surrey, England: The Good Book Company, 2022).

22 We have watched *The Matrix*, *The Truman Show*, *The Mission*, *Soul*, *Barbie*, *Amazing Grace*, *The Hidden Life*, *Spider-Man: Across the Spider-Verse*, and *Inside-Out 1 and 2*.

23 For example, our list of questions for *Barbie* includes the following: (1) What is Barbie Land? (2) What happened to Barbie that changed her perception of reality? (3) What does Weird Barbie represent? (4) Why did Barbie choose to become human instead of staying in Barbie Land? (5) Does the movie correctly represent the relationship between men and women? (6) How does our biblical worldview impact how we evaluate the movie?

24 See Elmer John Thiessen, *Healthy Christian Minds: A Biblical, Practical, and Sometimes Philosophical Exploration of Intellectual Virtues and Vices* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2024).