

Getting to the Big Picture Stewardship of the Intellect

Every day we are confronted by myriad reasonable-sounding and highly-articulate voices competing for our attention, our assent, and our support – each with its own purpose in attempting to do so. There is always someone to tell us what to think and how to behave. This can make the stewardship of our reason and intellect the most challenging aspect of a balanced and faithful life.

For our faith calls us to exercise the God-given ability to think things through and to base our decisions upon our own core values. In the end, every real choice we make reveals what we hold to be true and good. Yes, this can make life feel far more complicated than it actually is, but only up until the point that we have examined our faith and our values and have determined a method by which we can reach consistent and congruent decisions. For example, if we have accepted “Love God with all your heart and your neighbor as yourself” as a core value, and have done the demanding work of examining what that means, we will experience internal conflict when our actions are less than loving.

Such conflict should not paralyze us, however. It should call us to a deeper examination of our beliefs; along with an awareness of the difficulties of being faithful, and the humility to realize that because we are not perfect, our decisions will not be either. It comes down to a matter of intentionality of heart and mind. And even then we may run up against the rule of unintended consequences. We cannot always know what will happen as a result of our best intentions; but that does not free us from the obligation to make informed choices.

Ultimately, appropriate stewardship of our intellect requires awareness of these facts:

- Each decision is a reflection of what we want and what we believe. There is no getting around this truth.
- Our faith provides us with a framework for decision-making, not a rulebook for what to do in each circumstance; our intellect helps us in discerning the difference, and in acting appropriately.
- Moral autonomy means taking responsibility for our decisions. We are accountable to others and our decisions are not made in a vacuum.
- An unexamined decision is an incomplete decision. Even if it turns out to have been the correct one, short-cuts in decision making do not fully honor God’s gift of human reason.

Thank God for the gift of reason. May God grant us the grace to faithfully exercise it.