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# Luke 2:52 as a Basis for How We “Do” Christian Education

Christian Education Journal:  
Research on Educational Ministry  
1–15

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DOI: 10.1177/0739891319874364

journals.sagepub.com/home/cej



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## Abstract

Luke 2:52 is used to support the acceptance of integration of social sciences into Christian education; however, Luke 2:52 is taken out of context to defend developmental goals. Topics include the sufficiency of Scripture, comparison of humanistic philosophy to biblical theology, an overview of Christian education's acceptance of developmental theories, and an examination of the authorial meaning of the text. Conclusions consist of an exhortation for Christian education professors to be diligent in exploring theories founded by secularists.

## Keywords

Integration, human growth and development, teaching and learning, social sciences, developmental theories, all-sufficiency of Scripture

“And Jesus kept increasing in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men.”  
(NASB)

## Introduction

Christian education literature displays pages upon pages describing how to meet the developmental needs of children, teens, and adults as if developmental needs were the crux of a sound Christian education; however, very few pages are devoted to teach what it looks like to progress towards Christlikeness. Christians should be

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uniquely different in their approach, especially when considering the purpose for growing up and for human life. No doubt, the interpretation of Luke 2:52 is important to one's perceptions of the why, how, and what of Christian education, since it provides the only glimpse of Jesus' development from age 12 until His ministry began at age 30.

In the past as well as presently, Christian educators used this verse as a model for training and developing their curriculum (content: *what you know*) and instruction (methods and strategies used to teach content: *how you learn it*). Cultural interpretations of Luke 2:52 (or any Scripture for that matter) support current social theories but often do not reflect God's intended meaning; the consequence of text-proofing results in emphasizing a faulty approach to Christian education thus hindering sanctification within an individual. Historical interpretations of Luke 2:52 include verifying Jesus as fully man and fully God (*Christianity Today*, 1996), focusing on a spiritual training model based on becoming wise, and support for integration of social sciences into biblical content for "successful" Christian education practices. Success in this case is measured in worldly terms with attention to "normal" behaviors judged by empirical evidence related to cultural norms that can be controlled through education (Lioni, 1993). Each interpretation is tied to philosophical beliefs within the construct of theology, epistemology, and anthropology.

The author is most concerned with the current application of this verse. Luke 2:52 is used to justify using developmental theories as a foundation along with the Bible of Christian education. Does the integration of developmental theories by Christian educators faithfully address what is needed to raise a child? From God's economy, do Christian educators need to accept the theories as foundational in teaching someone to become a mature individual who is conformed to the image of Christ and who glorifies God in his life?

It is the author's premise that Luke 2:52 is taken out of context and used to defend developmental goals conceived by man, thus misrepresenting the word *Christian* in Christian education. The underpinnings of developmental theories that promote man's ideas of humanity are first examined to demonstrate that developmental theories are grounded in a false view of man. The theories also uphold a false epistemology by fostering subjective truths that do not align with biblical thinking. Instead of focusing on God and His word to define the why and how of Christian education, the integrationist's view focuses on self by emphasizing a stage in life rather than facilitating the learner's transformation into the image of Christ. Finally, an examination of the authorial meaning of Luke 2:52 discloses the biblical view of development resulting in a purpose and goal for Christian education; it gives a glimpse of the why of Christian education as well as what should be taught in order to reach God-focused goals and help restore believers to a full relationship with God, himself, and man. The article concludes with suggestions for further study and application to Christian education.

## Assumptions Relevant to Examining Developmental Theories: Biblical Sufficiency

Clarifying the author's position on the authority of Scriptures is important to understand her position. The underlying presupposition of this essay is that the Scriptures are true for all times, places, and circumstances. McQuilkin points out that "The basic assumption about the Bible that distinguishes believers from unbelievers is that the Bible is God's revelation of Himself and His will for humans" (1983, p. 21). Most Christians agree that the word of God does not change but few believe Scripture is all-sufficient and contains total truth. They would argue that the Bible does not give sufficient information for daily situations including child-rearing, educational practices, and day-to-day living (Frame, 2010, p. 163). Such thinking leads to the social constructions of God's word to make Scripture relevant to the current cultural context. Interpretation, thus, makes biblical concepts subject to clarification according to man's reason and experience; the culture, rather than God's written word, becomes the standard for judging the validity of knowledge, and the Bible is searched to support man's understanding rather than the other way around. In other words, man uses reason to determine a cultural interpretation that can distort God's intended meaning.

God asked holy men to write His words (see Exod. 17:14; 34:27; Isa. 8:1; Jer. 30:20; 36:2, Ezek. 37; 16; 2 Pet. 1:21). When an individual reads a book, whether the Bible or a fictitious novel, there are two meanings: (1) *Authorial intent* is the intended meaning of the text by the author; the question is: "What does the author mean?" (2) *Reader response* is when either a community of readers (i.e., the culture or group) or the individual reader constructs the meaning (Duvall and Hays, 2012). The author of Scripture is God Almighty, the omnipotent, omniscient Creator of the universe. His word never changes and is, therefore, the truth for all ages, societies, and circumstances. Scriptural support sets the authorial intent: "God is not a man, that He should lie, Nor a son of man, that He should repent; Has He said, and will He not do it? Or has He spoken, and will He not make it good?" (Num. 23:19). Other verses supporting the concept that God's word is all-inclusive include Isa. 40:8, Matt. 24:35, and Heb. 13:5. In defending the reliance of Scripture alone, Chaffey (2011) wrote, "God is capable of accurately relaying His word to us in a way that we can understand. It is crucial that we interpret properly to determine the intended meaning rather than forcing ideas into the text." Scripture gives us several warnings reiterating the fact that God's people should not adapt to the world's cultural norms. Believing the Bible is the ultimate authority and understanding the contextual meaning of what is written in the Bible are paramount to obeying and surrendering to Christ.

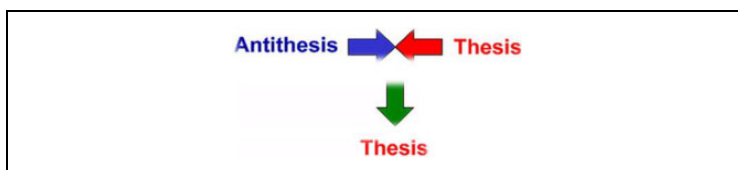
Scriptural sufficiency cannot be separated from the doctrines of inspiration, inerrancy, and authority of Scripture (Deut. 20:16-19; Ps. 106:35; Jer. 10:2-3, Col. 2:8; 2 Tim. 3:15-17). The purpose of scripture is redemptive in every aspect of human life. In appealing to other answers for challenges in life as

well as day-to-day living, Christians are proclaiming that God did not give us all we need to live a successful life. It relays the concept that what God did provide to us is not sufficient in all areas of life—in this case, education (Grudem, 1994, p. 127).

In cultures that do not view God's word as the total truth, the reader's response or the interpretation of the text is based on logic, experiences, feelings, and assumptions relying on cultural norms. Socially constructing the meaning of words makes those concepts subjective. Chaos ensues because everyone's beliefs are truth and there is no consensus in how to live or what rules to follow. If definitions change according to human reason, social norms, traditions, and individual experiences, there is no absolute truth—not even God's word. However, cultural understanding does not surpass God's truth. If the thesis is that God's word is total truth, the antithesis is that God's word is NOT truth. Simply put, there can be no synthesis if the thesis is true. Furthermore, God did not give us His perspective to plug into cultural norms but He revealed truth to us to provide the standard for understanding the way the world operates and to develop a culture based on what God proclaims as truth (Schaeffer, 1990, ch. 1).

The Bible is not to be worshiped—the author of the Bible *is* the object of worship. Understanding it requires the work of the Holy Spirit in the Christian's life. The original text was God-breathed and is without error (2 Tim. 3:16), is divine authority (Matt. 5:17-18), and is sharper than a two-edged sword (Heb. 4:12). It tells the story of Creation, Fall, Redemption, and Glorification from God's perspective. Because the original meaning is often lost as translators try to make the Bible more palatable and understandable to individuals in today's culture, one must study the original text and God's meaning of the words to get an accurate understanding of the truth. It is important that one examines the context of the Scripture. When studied properly, the Scriptures provide God's standard for how we live and how we scrutinize the circumstances and ideas that confront our daily lives (Ryken, 2002, pp. 124–137) (Figure 1).

Therefore, in this essay the standard for interpreting all things, especially in reference to philosophical ideologies, is the Bible. The following section examines the theological underpinnings of developmental theories as they relate to biblical truths.



**Figure 1.** Synthesis of Thesis and Antithesis.

## Humanism: The Theological Underpinnings of Developmental Theories

This section presents a broad review of the theological foundation for developmental theories. The specific theories are not addressed; instead, groundwork for all non-biblical approaches is laid, especially humanism and scientism. Ideas and theories are based on presuppositions (Overman, 2006). The developmental theorists utilized empirical evidence (observations) to create and support their claims. Instead of using Scripture to interpret the data and define the why of Christian education, the social scientist prescribed a norm developed by what he observed, and interpreted the data from man's perspective. Such a standard utilizes many truths and a false perspective of man; it ends up promoting a humanistic view of man leading him to focus on himself rather than God. Rather than redemption and growth towards a relationship with God, himself, and others, going through the developmental stages becomes the norm as well as the goal of Christian education. Scientific theories are based on observations of the physical world and are analyzed based on worldly assumptions; they often ignore the spiritual. Observing behaviors may predict and allow one to interpret and control behavior to a certain degree (Skinner, 1971, ch. 1), but it is unable to save humanity from total depravity in a continuously corrupt world.

Social scientists such as Jean Piaget, Lev Vygotsky, Erik Erikson, Lawrence Kohlberg, Abraham Maslow, and James Fowler formed developmental theories based on their observations of humans and interpreted the data from a humanistic worldview to describe a norm. Each theory provides insights into at least one of the developmental processes. Theorists in social sciences, although using a descriptive approach to gather data and form their ideas, developed a prescriptive method generalized for all people; however, often the empirical evidence is applicable only to a particular culture, time, or situation. Thus, implications for application of secularization of the social sciences have been at odds with some in Christian education (Smith & Smith, 2011, p. 144). The assumption is that we can look at a theory to assess growth in all areas despite the fact that we are each unique individuals who learn and come into adulthood and hopefully into the fullness of Christ at different paces. To try to put humans into a box—to teach babies to be babies and children to be children as the focus of Christian education—is not what God intended. God's desire is for Christians to be restored to the image of His Son (Rom. 12:28-30).

In his book *A Theology of Christian Education*, Richards (1980, p. 180) explains “it should be no wonder at all if men's cognitive structure (described by Piaget and Kohlberg) should have a distinctive fit with the moral order of creation . . . The work of Piaget and Kohlberg says nothing about the theological givens. Instead, it focuses on an understanding of man.” Non-Christians can only understand man apart from God, but Christians need to view man and everything about his nature through God's perspective. The anthropological view is “a given” according to Richards; but neither Piaget, Kohlberg, Maslow, nor most other social scientists had a biblical view of

man. Examples include: Maslow (1971) on spiritual life says that it is the basic component of our biological life; and Kohlberg's emphasis on moral reasoning led to *autonomy*, relying on self rather than God (Pazmino, 2008, p. 209). Educational psychologists and philosophers designed their theories based on the assumption that we are biological beings and our spirituality is based on biological functions rather than on the work of the Holy Spirit and godly instruction. Their presuppositions that man is only a biological being drove their interpretation of the things they observed (Gutek, 1997, ch. 1).

Most educational psychologists and philosophers base their presuppositions on humanistic anthropology that says man is good and does not need to be redeemed because there is no sin and there is no God. When this is their worldview, they interpret what they observe through a lens other than biblical. Their observations are more than likely correct, but without analyzing data through the lens of the Bible, their interpretation of what is happening is faulty. When a teenager is blatantly disobedient to his parents, it may seem "normal" because the majority of teens in our culture act this way but that does not make it godly or acceptable behavior from a biblical perspective. Accepting it as "normal" behavior gives excuses for sin and does not teach the teen a principle that is godly: "Children, obey your parents" (Eph. 6:1). In fact it encourages sin.

Several tenets of the Humanist Manifestos describe the humanists' view on anthropology and God that is accepted by social science. Such tenets are contrary to a Christian's view of God and man (Priolo, 2000, pp. 149–153). The following theological topics contrast the humanist philosophy with biblical theology to show that the foundation of most developmental theories leads to a distorted view of truth and man.

## Origins

The creation of man is described in Gen. 1:27: "God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them." *Manifesto I* (1933), Second Tenet, says: "Humanism believes that man is a part of nature and that he has emerged as the result of a continuous process." The first aspect of redemptive history, Creation, is denied with a belief in evolution.

## Ethical Values

Sin is described in the Bible as transgression of the law of God (1 Jn 3:4) and rebellion against God (Deut. 9:7; Josh. 1:18). In Genesis 3 Adam and Eve disobeyed God and sin separated all mankind from God. God's laws set standards for all mankind and mankind has disobeyed those standards (see Rom. 3:23; Prov. 6:14; Judg. 21:25; and Rom. 5:12). *Manifesto III* (2003) declares that "Ethical values are derived from human need and interest as tested by experience." Sin is denied and man's desires and perceived needs become the standard. Human behaviors are based

on our sin nature, not on a stage of development we are going through. When stages of development become the reason for unacceptable behavior, the why of the behavior is accepted and not addressed. Rather than godliness, the behaviors described in the developmental stages become the standard for normality. The second stage of redemptive history, the Fall, is denied.

## Emancipation

Without sin, there is no need for redemption; there is no such thing as eternal life. Christians know that we are redeemed by the blood of Jesus (Jn 3:16). However, *Manifesto II* (1973) declares “Promises of immortal salvation or fear of eternal damnation are both illusory and harmful. They distract humans from present concerns, from self-actualization, and from rectifying social injustices.” Salvation and eternal life are denied, making the individual’s goal in life *self-actualization* because, simply put, there is nothing more; the process of fully developing and using one’s own abilities makes one’s own personal development the goal in life. Such an idea of man is in direct conflict with God’s purposes for man. The third stage of redemptive history, Redemption, is denied.

## Souls and Eternal Life

We are comprised of the physical and the spiritual. In 1 Thess. 4:13-16 it is written:

But we do not want you to be uninformed, brethren, about those who are asleep, so that you will not grieve as do the rest who have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep in Jesus. For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first.

However, *Manifesto II* (1973) declares:

Modern science discredits such historic concepts as the “ghost in the machine” and the “separable soul.” Rather, science affirms that the human species is an emergence from natural evolutionary forces. As far as we know, the total personality is a function of the biological organism transacting in a social and cultural context. There is no credible evidence that life survives the death of the body. We continue to exist in our progeny and in the way that our lives have influenced others in our culture.

The fourth stage of redemptive history, Glorification, is denied and hope is destroyed.

In this section, the bedrock of most developmental theories, humanism, is contrasted with the Christian’s theological foundation—Creation, Fall, Redemption,

and Glorification—to show that a humanist perspective is antigod. Next the integrationist’s approach to Christian education is examined.

## The Integrationist Approach to Christian Education

God created us as beings that grow in all aspects of our humanity. As Christian educators we affirm that developmental patterns move us from infancy to childhood toward adulthood with the goal of maturity. We recognize and respect the differences between how a five-year-old learns and how a fifteen-year-old learns, and, therefore, teach responsibly—not simply for effectiveness in the classroom but out of respect for each divine image bearer (Anthony, et al., 2008, pp. 195–196). While we are wholly human from conception, we are not wholly formed adults for many years. We grow up! We grow and mature through the process of human development. However, Scriptures simply reflect the observable growth of individuals: they are usually not prescriptive nor do they tell why (1 Sam. 2:26). Such passages at least offer observations of the growth process as continual in human beings. Similarly, these changes occur from childhood to adulthood in all areas of human life: “When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put childish ways behind me” (1 Cor. 13:11).

Currently Christian educators use Luke 2:52 to support developmental theories. Their interpretation of Scripture describes Jesus’ developing (*increasing*) spiritually (*before God*), intellectually (*in wisdom*), physically (*in stature*), and socially (*before man*); thus, the text seemingly justifies the integration of the Bible and social sciences. It is an attempt to fill in gaps that God has purportedly left out of Scripture.

The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines integration as forming, coordinating, or blending into a functioning or unified whole; uniting with something else and incorporating it into a larger unit. According to the etymology of the word at etymology.com, it word was first introduced in the 1630s and meant “to render (something) whole, bring together the parts of.” The meaning to put together parts or elements and combine them into a whole dates from 1802. The implication is that each part is separate but makes up the whole. The current perception of integration, therefore, is that biblical and social aspects of education are each a “piece of the pie” needed to make education whole. Integrationists go a step further and say that without integration of the developmental theories, one would not have Christian education. To the Greek minded, such a concept is called dualism (Allen, 2011, pp. 29–35).

Many of our most beloved professors in Christian education base their theories of Christian education on the integrationist model (Estep & Kim, 2010; Wilhoit & Dettoni, 1995; Parrett & Kang, 2009; and Yount, 2010). Yount (2010, p. 2) says, “Educational psychology stands as one of the foundational disciplines of the teaching-learning process.” He then explains that we accept other things that are spiritually neutral in our day to day living. However, one’s perspectives on truth, man’s needs,



God, and redemption deal with spiritual matters and are not neutral. Pearcey (2004, ch. 11) contends that nothing is spiritually neutral but everything is created by God as laws of nature. All things invented by man are still under the ethical and natural laws put in place by God. Thinking that things invented and concepts contrived by man as he is fulfilling the creation mandate are in the same category as explanations of the nature of God, man, and truth is like comparing humans and cars.

Probe Ministry's Don Closson addressed the issue of using humanistic psychology in Christian education in an interview with Dr. Coulson, who was a long-time associate of Carl Rogers (June 18, 2015). Closson asked, "Why would educators implement a curriculum so damaging to what we as Christian parents want for our children? We must consider the religious assumptions held by those who created the theoretical foundations for these programs." Dr. Coulson went on to state that "there is a fundamental incompatibility between Christianity and these programs. The two belief systems begin with different views of man and God" (Closson, 1991). The content of Christian education has become self promoted through developmental theories; however, Christian education should give full attention to the triune God as He relates to man and as mankind relates to Him and each other.

With the emphasis on self and particular age-appropriate developmental sequences, children are no longer taught the responsibilities of adulthood. Millennials are offered "adulting classes" at universities like Georgia Tech. "Adulting is something nobody prepares you for, but you know it when it happens. It's the unglorified part of being on your own" said one not-quite-30-year-old (Zaleski, 2018). Our culture has become so obsessed with the stage of development of our children that we do not prepare our children for adulthood and day-to-day living, let alone to become mature Christians.

Gaebelein (1968, p. 8) in *The Pattern of God's Truth* suggests that Christian education is tempted with the problem of integration when they add secular musings in support of the foundational truth of God. Thus instead of their hope being anchored in the truth of God, they are seduced into adopting empty man-centered philosophies of the world. As Christian educators we are expected to think about these questions: Why should we scrutinize the theology, anthropology, and epistemology of the creators of the social theories when they make sense, they are observable, and they work when they are applied? And, if they work, why are so many young people falling away from what they were taught? Can we as Christian educators utilize non-biblical philosophies and not compromise the truth? How are the methods we use related to the theories? If we do not use developmental approaches from the social sciences, what methods can we use to teach and still make sure that we teach for understanding?

To have God's perspective on integration, the Bible is not a "piece" of the pie but the crust of the pie—in Christian education, the lesson falls apart without the Bible because Scripture is the foundation that gives it continuity and meaning (Johnson, 2015, p. 18). There cannot be biblical integration when the definition of man, his problems, and the solution to his problems are not standing on biblical truth. It is like

mixing water with oil—they simply do not mix. The Christian’s curriculum is based on biblical principles, not ideas conceived by men who do not have the same concept of God, man, and truth as described in the Bible.

Unfortunately, many Christians’ minds are held captive by man’s reasoning rather than God’s truth; thus, they answer to vain speculations and false ideologies (Col. 2:8). Just as people living in a polluted country do not recognize the smell but accept it as normal, these Christians do not recognize the faulty reasoning that permeates their lives. Living with a divide between our sacred lives and our secular lives is the challenge almost all Christians face (Schaeffer, 1990; Pearcey, 2004).

### **The Intended Meaning of the Text**

With claims that Luke 2:52 supports developmental theories and the integration of their ideologies into Christian education, an in-depth examination of the authorial meaning of the text puts Luke 2:52 into proper perspective. In *Nurturing Children’s Spirituality*, Allen (2008) suggests that Luke 2:52 makes three areas of growth evident: (1) wisdom means Jesus was developing a relationship with God; (2) stature not only refers to physical growth but to moral character; and (3) favor refers to developing sincere relationships with God and others. In Luke 2:40 one gets a glimpse of Jesus’ early childhood years up until he was 12 years old when He was old enough to travel with His parents to Jerusalem for the Passover. The next 18 years of Jesus’ life are described in one verse, Luke 2:52: “And Jesus kept increasing in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men.” An investigation into the meaning of the words used in the original text establishes a standard for judging historical interpretations of the passage.

#### **“And Jesus kept increasing...”**

The word for increasing (*prokoto*, Strong’s G4298) suggests a variety of translated meanings: to drive forward; to advance; to increase, proceed, profit, be far spent, wax; to lean forward, to advance, to make progress. The word is used five other times in the New Testament: Rom. 13:12, Gal. 1:14; 2 Tim. 2:16; 3:9, and 3:13. Each of these verses describes a movement toward fullness or completion. For example, when the moon waxes, it goes from a new moon to a full moon. Although the moon has always been there, its presence is fully revealed over time. Thus, the text tells us that Jesus was “coming into the fullness of wisdom and stature” during those years.

#### **“...in wisdom”**

The New Testament describes two kinds of wisdom using the word *sophia* (Strong’s G4678) for both—(1) that of the world and man’s intellect, and (2) that of God. There is nothing good that is said about worldly wisdom; the Greek word worldly

(*bebēlos*, Strong's G952) refers to profane, unhallowed, common, of men, ungodly. The context indicates which meaning of the word the passage is referring. Godly wisdom in the Bible indicates a higher wisdom and is linked with knowledge that is not the same as cognitive knowledge but is revealed by the Holy Spirit who enlightens the meaning of Scripture. Although developed as a Christian matures, worldly wisdom is contrary to wisdom which can only come from God. In 1 Cor. 1:19-21, Paul reminds the church at Corinth:

For it is written, "I WILL DESTROY THE WISDOM OF THE WISE, AND THE CLEVERNESS OF THE CLEVER I WILL SET ASIDE." Where is the wise man? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not *come to* know God, God was well-pleased through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe.

If anyone asks how Jesus, who was the eternal Wisdom of the Father, the only wise God, increased in wisdom, they must know that all things in Scripture which are spoken of Christ are not spoken with respect to His entire person, but with respect to one or the other nature united in that person. He increased in wisdom just as He did in age with respect to His humanity, not to His Divine nature. As God daily increased His grace and favor toward Jesus, God gave Jesus favor with the people of Galilee, so that when Jesus started His ministry His reputation had already been established (Poole, 1685). Such a view is contrary to contemporary educators' emphasis on critical thinking and problem solving that are established by making wise choices based on cognitive knowledge.

### **"...in stature"**

The word *stature* has several possible meanings including age, time of life, length of life, height, and comeliness. The Greek word for stature (*helikia*, Strong's G2244) is used as a noun seven other times in the New Testament: Matt. 6:27 and Lk. 12:25 (a single hour); Lk. 10:3 (the only time the word refers to physical size); Jn 9:21 and 9:23 (of age); Heb. 11:11 (proper time of life). Eph. 4:13—" . . . until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the *stature* which belongs to the fullness of Christ" fits into the concept of growing into fullness of Christ as the definition of stature.

### **"...and in favor with God and man"**

The favor with God came about through His innocence as a child, His freedom from childish faults, His complete holiness of life through positive obedience and subjection to God and man. Favor with men was completed when He died for our sins and is realized when someone accepts Him as their Lord and Savior (Schaff, 1979, p.

90). Matthew Poole (1685) says that Jesus grew in respect to his humanity; Jesus got wisdom, which included a healthy concept of Himself, not related to self-esteem but to God-esteem, so that He had “a healthy sense of personal worth that produces the ability to make right decisions because of a right relationship with God . . .”

The question is not whether or not Jesus grew—God created humans to grow; rather, the authorial intent of the passage is in question. By putting Luke 2:52 into context one is enlightened to its understandings. Luke 2:51 reads: “And He went down with them and came to Nazareth, and He continued in subjection to them . . .” It is because of Christ’s obedience to His own parents that He found favor. Learning obedience means humbling yourself, not desiring your own way but to come into relationship with a loving God and developing self-discipline.

The fact is, all education, which includes any activity in life, is formative no matter what strategies are used, but the question is: To what *telos*—purpose—are the ultimate goals of Christian education? (Smith & Smith, 2011, p. 140). What philosophical underpinnings about God, man, and Truth are embedded in the instruction? God intends for a Christian to increase into the fullness of Christ—to be restored to His image through this process we call growth. Christian education that is faithful to God and His word teaches that Jesus was fully man and fully God, Christians should have a right relationship with others, and humans grow in several different ways with the end result in mind. However, according to Luke 2:51-52, teaching obedience to a loving God who desires to be the focus of our lives and instructing for transformation into the image of His son are the ultimate goals of Christian education (Rom. 12:2).

## Conclusion

This research review shows that the acceptance of developmental theories as an integral part of Christian education misrepresents the word *Christian* in Christian education. Furthermore, Luke 2:52 is taken out of context to affirm the use of developmental theories with ideologies that are not grounded in biblical thinking. The integrationist’s view of Christian education focuses on self by emphasizing stages in life rather than facilitating the learner’s transformation into the image of Christ. An examination of the authorial meaning of Luke 2:52 in context provides a glimpse of the why of Christian education as well as what should be taught in order to reach God-focused goals and restoration to a full relationship with God, himself, and man. The proper interpretation of the passage in question points to the fact that Jesus gained these attributes through surrender to those in authority.

God, however, has given all mankind the capability to reason, discover, and create through their imaginations. Because all men are image bearers, they have the capacity to observe and come up with ideas, inventions, etc. that seem to be rational (Schaeffer, 1990). Fallen man, however, cannot know the things of God and even the “saved” man is not complete until he meets Christ face-to-face in death or in the second coming. As Christian educators, we must carefully scrutinize the discoveries about man, truth, and education or we may lead future Christ-

followers into wrong ideas about God, sin, and redemption. *Spiritual training* of an individual is in preparation for justification followed by *spiritual formation* through the work of the Holy Spirit and biblical training that is put into practice. Spiritual training teaches non-Christians as well as Christians to live a moral life but does not redeem an individual from sin. Spiritual formation, that is, the sanctification process, is the restoration of the image of Christ after one who puts his trust in Christ Jesus as Lord and Savior. Justification and sanctification are dependent on the work of the Holy Spirit and Scripture. Christian education is the training for salvation, both justification and, afterwards, sanctification that allows the one who puts his faith in Christ to be restored at glorification to the original Image of God. It cannot be overemphasized that the only criterion for salvation is that you “confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead” (Rom. 10:9).

The context and interpretation of the Luke passage provide a picture of our Savior learning the attitudes and behaviors that children and adults should grow into—and that is an attitude of obedience and total surrender to Him as Lord of our lives (Phil. 2:5-9). Learning to be obedient is caught through modeling by godly parents and teachers but must also be taught. Like the Son of Man, Christians can and must continue to advance all the days of their lives in all that glorifies God. Increasing in favor with God is fulfilling the commandment to love the Lord your God. Increasing in favor with man is learning to fulfill the second great commandment: Love your neighbor as yourself (Jn 13:34). The focus is on the kingdom of heaven (which begins upon justification) as the culture we prepare for rather than the many cultures of the world or a current stage in life. The Christian faith is unique and represents norms that are different from the world’s.

As mentioned earlier, scrutinizing individual theories and the psychologists/educators who designed the developmental theories from a biblical worldview is a daunting task. The author wonders how many Christian educators in higher education have studied the original works of these individuals and read their biographies. Those of us in Christian academia have become lazy in our academic rigor by accepting man’s ideas without testing them, not by the standard of what works, what we observe, or what is accepted (which are all man’s view) but by the standard found in Scripture. We all start with a belief in some standard; that is our philosophy or worldview and becomes the lens through which we judge truth. It behooves us to examine the data observed by Piaget, Erikson, Kohlberg, Maslow, Fowler, and others to interpret their observations through the lens of the Bible. We need to use our faith to reason what is of God and what is not with the help of the Holy Spirit and the Bible.

1 Corinthians 2:12-14 reminds us:

Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, so that we may know the things freely given to us by God, which things we also speak, not in words taught by human wisdom . . . But the natural man does not accept the things of


the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised.

The hidden agenda in writing this article was to encourage Christian educators to consider the idea that a cultural interpretation of the Bible more often than not distorts God's intended meaning, leading educators to utilize a faulty approach to Christian education. Man's fall into sin corrupted every aspect of his being, including the mind as reiterated by Calvin: "The reason of our mind, wherever it may turn, is miserably subject to vanity" (Boa, 2001, p. 222). Unbelievers are ignorant of the truth even though they seem rational—reason does not lead to truth but reason for the believer is a way to discern truth. Thus, despite the fact that nonbelievers cannot reason truth, Christian educators accept the developmental theories of men who are blinded from the truth—men who do not believe in God, the sinfulness of man, and that mankind acts the way they act because of sin. It simply does not make sense to accept their ideologies—even a smidgeon of any one of them—when they are based on lies and/or half-truths.

### Note on contributor

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