



A Creational Developmentalist's View of Education: *An Excerpt*¹

Ted Ward

A creational developmentalist posits two issues: 1) What is the developmental process? and 2) where did it come from? The developmental process is an unfolding of that which is there. Therefore the educator doesn't create it—the educator, parent, pastor, facilitates it becoming what it is: a fulfillment of all that is meant in becoming spiritually alive. The word “creational” signifies that all must be done in respect for God the Creator.

To be Christian, education needs a Christ-like respect for people; it needs a creational respect for the handiwork of God; it needs a whole life scope ignoring none of the empirical aspects; and it needs a holistic awareness of the spiritual core of personhood. These are the minimal requirements for an education that calls itself Christian. To be education, Christian education needs a focus on the reorganization of experience and the development of a critical conscience. This is different from an additive view of learning.

Further, education would need to integrate with the sociocultural context of the person's life walk—a hands-on relationship to the way people live. An education that does not affect the life walk is not education. Finally, to be truly Christian education, education must promote praxis as the primary mode of education. Praxis is a concern for the relationship between knowing and doing. The movements of education are then, reflection and action, knowing and doing.

The Creedal Confession of a Creational Developmentalist

As a facilitator of human development, not doing to people but helping people become; not changing people, but helping people develop; not giving knowledge as a commodity, but helping people discover meaning; seeing people as the image of God, spiritual beings, equal before God, with great potential—whole, alive, eternal. The creational developmentalist exercises a special kind of leadership, not from high status but as a servant; not commanding, but exhorting; not ruling, but sharing; having a special kind of a motive—joining as partners in the creative God's redemptive processes; creatively respecting the creation and every creature because of devotion to the Creator; celebrating the redemption which gives meaning to every act of kindness and love.

Sometimes I am asked, “What is your educational philosophy? Are you a follower of Dewey?” No, I'm not. I don't reject near as much of Dewey as some of my Christian friends do because I don't quite share that hang-up with Dewey. He wasn't a Christian, and he therefore didn't see everything that he should have seen; but there are Christians who don't see everything they ought to see. And, even though I'm a Christian, I don't see everything I ought to see either. But I try not to throw the baby out with the bath water. So, though I'm not a follower of Dewey, I don't reject Dewey.

You say, “Well then what are you?”

I'm a developmentalist. “What's a developmentalist?”

¹ Ted Ward. A Creational Developmentalist's View of Education-Excerpt. Excerpt from an address at Golden Gate Theological Seminary, 1982

A developmentalist is a person who believes that human beings develop! Which is a little different from saying that human beings get stuff added on to them. Have you ever watched a sculptor? One of the sculptor's techniques is to take a small amount of clay and then add other wads of clay to the emerging shape—continuing until the shape is complete. The artist shapes a beautifully formed figure by sticking on more and more lumps of clay.

That view of education is more common than it should be—that what is becoming fully developed as a human being is an additive process. Different people come along and stick on more clay to “round out” the person. Too often the notion of the “well-rounded person” has to do with how much stuff has been stuck on to the basic core.

A developmentalist takes another view, one closer to what a worker in marble does. Marble is sculpted differently from clay. If you look at a block of marble, it looks square. But you say, “It’s there!” Little by little you chip away at what isn’t part of the developed figure, and little by little the figure emerges. In this case, development is a matter of shedding limitations.

Human beings are born into this world frightfully dependent and extremely limited. Have you ever watched a horse being born? Do you know how long it takes a horse to begin to behave like a horse? Minutes! That horse will be up scampering in a couple hours. But God the Creator gave me an infant who was the most helpless little creature you could ever imagine. And talk about time and energy that is required to keep that infant surviving until he could begin scampering! I don’t want to over-moralize this observation, but I think the human being was created in such a way that his or her dependencies would demonstrate that the human has to be seen in terms of a mass of limitations that have to be systematically shed and lived beyond.

Development. Think about it. Is it adding things? No, it’s losing things. Losing limitations. Think of spiritual development in the same way. What is the new birth? Another language for the new birth is “being made spiritually alive.” Right? But what is spiritual development? Becoming more alive? No, spiritual development is living through the limitations of immaturity. In the New Testament, Paul and Peter used the language of physical development to talk about spiritual development. For example, consider the three texts that have to do with milk. The notion of milk, appropriate nurture, enables the development to be sustained. So whatever spiritual development is, in some respects we can see it.

What is it? It is being alive but being very dependent. One of the limitations that the human being is born with is a dependency that requires a one-way flow of help. All being well, one grows through dependency to become a person in proper interaction and relationship in social community. Human infants are not reciprocal human beings. They have to do some developing before they truly become interactive with you in terms of “meeting your needs” while you are meeting their needs. Could that be a description of spiritual development?

A developmentalist presumes that it is normal and reasonable for people to have limitations. So therefore, a developmentalist is not preoccupied with getting people right. A developmentalist is in contrast then with the behaviorist who has pre-determined what others ought to be. The great watershed in psychology today is between developmentalists and behaviorists. Behaviorists in general are people who have their model of what others ought to be and are working aggressively to make others over into the model they have in mind. I would argue that Scripture presents a fulfillment model of development—of spiritual development. A fulfillment from the resources that are there by the virtue of being made alive spiritually.