



I Am a Creational Developmentalist¹

Ted Ward

I am a creational developmentalist. Within the secular realm as well as in Christian circles, we certainly understand what a developmentalist is. A developmentalist is a person who takes as presupposition that life is a development process; that human experience is an outworking of a development dynamic that exists within the organism. That view is in contrast the "acquisitional" position where it is assumed that development and learning and all of those processes that we associate with growing up are acquisitional—that the human being, indeed any life form, reaches out and pulls from the environment what is needed, and little by little acquires, and through that acquiring process becomes.

As a Christian I see development much more in terms of a process that was in creation. In the sustaining acts of the provident God it continues because God has created development. There is something unique and special about the human being. God created male and female. That sixth day is punctuated at the end with a sort of exclamation point that tells us that God felt very good about that particular creative day. At the end of that day, unlike all other creative days, God said, "It is *very* good."

I have to take something from that story in Genesis and bring it to my understanding of myself and of humankind. If you study the history of humankind and even look anthropologically across cultures, you will discover that humankind shares something of that capacity to create; but that is not really the essence of humankind. The essence of humanity is an image reflection of the revealing act. God reveals; humans inquire. It is within the capability of men and women to be disciplined about inquiry into those things that God has done. The inquiry of theology keeps us from misusing the Word. The discipline of science keeps us from misusing the natural creation.

Then, as a "creational developmentalist" I hold to four basic premises.

The first and most basic is that I take the first four words of the Bible to be the most crucial: "In the beginning God." Whatever else I presuppose on any topic, including the issue of my own personal relationship with God, I begin not with God as something that came along later, or was created out of my own imagination; but in the beginning, God. Whatever it is that we find in the creation: God lies behind it.

The second premise is that it pleased God to create development. In virtually all of the creation, whether we're talking about the intergalactic space, or geological processes within a planet, there is a cycle, a developmental pattern; there is something that can be understood about the unfolding-ness in every element of creation. A river does not stay steady; a river erodes its terrain; it carves; it creates further development.

God elected in his sovereign providence to bring you into this world as a rather hopeless, helpless individual—an ultimate dependency that is strange among the animal kingdom. Within an hour a newborn horse is up and running and moving rather well. The human being takes about 2 years to achieve that same stage of steadiness.

The third premise is that men and women are uniquely communicating creatures. Now this is not to say that people are the only creatures capable of communicating. When God created Adam, he walked and talked with Adam in the garden. Part of that magic of that sixth day was that God walked

¹ Ted Ward. I Am a Creational Developmentalist. From an address at Grace College of the Bible, Omaha, Nebraska, February 27-28, 1981

and talked with his human creation. God was interested not only in a communicating relationship, but in a walking alongside relationship.

The fourth premise is also drawn from the first chapter of Genesis in which we find that men and women are not intended to be solitary. Human beings are created to be social beings. When God said, "It is not good for man to be alone," he was not simply talking about sex, procreation, and relationships. The human being depends on communication, depends on a walking-talking relationship for continued development. If those connections are not possible, the person generally does not develop. Communication is your lifeline to your own development processes, and if you have a severe communication limitation, your own development processes will be handicapped.

Communication properly understood is a process of becoming. Development comes through intellectualization of thought, and idea, and verbalization, and listening. Those are the things that produce development. Interpersonal relationships are one-on-one, two-on-one, three-on-three, and other kinds of social transactional contexts in which communication is in the form of a person-invested idea. The communication process should not be understood as a one-way flow of thought. Communication is interaction. We need feedback and we need to listen.

We can also share meanings of experience. We share our experience by processing it into words and sharing it with other people. Sharing is also a walk, a companionship, a way of life. So much evangelical Christianity today has become simply a verbal religion. Knowing all the right things to say about all the crucial issues; knowing about all the doctrinal dogmas; knowing how to pick out churches where people preach the word of God; and knowing how to stay among those who use your language to talk about Jesus Christ. I submit that kind of verbal Christianity falls far short of what we are intended to be as God's children. The informing that God wants to do in our lives is not a knowledge informing; it is an informing of the shaping of life itself.

In the first letter of John in the second chapter beginning with the third verse, "By this we know that we have come to know him if we keep his commandments." In other words, the knowing that comes from "informed" Christian experience, is not the knowing of information but the knowing of action.

We are instructed consistently in the Scriptures to let that sort of communication occur in our own lives that develops us as persons who walk in obedience to our Lord and Savior.

Let's pray.

Our Father, we thank you for the word. We thank you for Jesus Christ. We thank you for the energizing of the Holy Spirit available and working in our lives. We thank you God that you are the mighty creator who has set all things to be. May we treat with respect those things that you have written and those things that you have shown, and may we approach them in responsible theological ways, and responsible scientific ways. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.