

Christian Formation: Integrating Theology and Human Development

James R. Estep & Jonathan H. Kim, (Eds.)
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As a D.Min. Director whose academic field is Christian Education, this is a most needed and welcomed volume. Having taught Introduction to Christian Education, Human Growth and Development and Adult Development, it is nice to have a textbook quality offering that can be used for Master's Degrees and Doctoral programs.

The book is edited by two well-known evangelical scholars – Jonathan H. Kim and James R. Estep. Estep is associate professor of Christian Education at Lincoln Christian University in Lincoln, Illinois. Kim is associate professor of Christian Education at Talbot School of Theology at Talbot School of Theology at La Mirada, California. Interestingly, Kim and Estep were classmates in the Ph.D. program at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School (Deerfield, Illinois).

Each chapter is authored by one or more other scholars: Timothy Jones and Michael Wilder, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary (Louisville, Kentucky); Greg Carlson, Chair and Professor of Christian Ministries (Deerfield, Illinois); Mark Maddix, Dean of the School of Theology at Northwest Nazarene University (Nampa, Idaho).

The titles of each chapter reveal the coverage given to this vital subject of Christian Formation:

Chapter 1 - Christian Anthropology: Humanity as the Imago Dei

Chapter 2 - Developmental Theories

Chapter 3 - Intellectual Development

Chapter 4 - Personality Development

Chapter 5 - Moral Development

Chapter 6 - Faith Development

Chapter 7 - Adult Development

Chapter 8 - Spiritual Formation

Chapter 9 - Cultural Development

Often, multi-volume works have an unevenness in treatment, but I did not find that to be true in this book. The overall coverage is even and excellent. In fact, it had a feeling of a seamless flow between and within chapters.

A key to the book's purpose is found in the Introduction, p. 3, "The social sciences are those sciences in which humans are the subject of the study. Most relevant to the Christian educators are those that address human and development - the growth and maturing of humans over the lifespan - and learning theories, which are frequently tied to the development of cognition or intellect in humans." In my class, Foundation of Teaching Ministries, which is required of M.Div. students, I refer to the psychological foundation as making two contributions to the field of Christian Education - how people develop and mature and how humans learn.

The authors further state that the purpose of the book is threefold: survey pertinent biblical data and theological perspectives of humanity; explore the major

theories of human development and learning; offer a comprehensive spiritual formation and development. They also include a “hidden agenda,” that Christian educators and other Christian leaders would no longer regard the theologies of the Church and the theories of social sciences as independent from one another – or even adversaries – but as interdependent in regard to Christian formation, mutual endeavoring to understand the process and product of growth in Christ.” (p. 7)

The authors include several assumptions: Christian formation is, in part, human; Christian formation is informed by both theology and the social sciences; Christian formation can be influenced by the ministry of the church.

The book is organized into three parts: Chapters 1 and 2 provide a rationale for integration; Chapters 3 – 6 looks at the classical dimensions of human development; Chapters 7 – 9 address development from specialized areas – adult spiritual and cultural. I feel that the last three chapters add a great strength to this effort. Cultural considerations make a great contribution. The same can be said for spiritual formation and adult development.

It is interesting to note that this volume chooses to use the more general term, “Christian Formation,” as the umbrella while spiritual formation is considered as a part of the overall topic. This approach can be debated, but the authors make it fit.

The layout of each chapter provides for great theory and practical application. In each chapter there is a well-done overview of theories and theorists, followed by Biblical/Theological insights and implications for ministry. I can see this book being used for academic purposes, as well as for church and parachurch leaders.

In evaluating a work that portends to review the major theories of human growth and development, I always want to see if major issues are covered fairly, evenly and critically. I believe that there is ample and adequate coverage. I didn't discover any glaring omissions. Therefore, the book would be a great personal review whether used as a text or not.

Of great value to the reader is a series of reflective questions at the end of each chapter. These could also be used for group study. Another highlight is that this work is replete with Bible references. This is expected by a book written by evangelical scholars. For those who desire to make the presentations about the social sciences more biblically based, there will be a lot of help. Those with other views regarding Scripture will still find a great deal of help for their own presentations.

An outstanding feature is the number of excellent and usable charts comparing the various theories with each other. The Imago Dei in each area of life (Physical, Intellectual, etc.) is compared and contrasted with Scriptures and Developmental theories. (p. 32) An overview chart is given as a typology of various views: Developmental Theory, Soft Development Hard Theory; Functional Model and Cultural Age Model. Thoughts about each key theorist are included. Almost every chapter has one or more charts – great for teaching the subject.

As to the level of scholarship, I am impressed. For example, on Faith Development, there are seven pages of end notes. These references are solid in other chapters as well.

I have become very convinced of the value to the field of Christian Formation this book will be. It is well researched and well written and can be of help in academics and church ministry. I see it as a major textbook or a great supplemental text for Master's and Doctoral level courses. I strongly recommend it for consideration and purchase.