

*Edited by* FREDDY CARDOZA

**CHRISTIAN**

**EDUCATION**



*A Guide to the*  
FOUNDATIONS OF MINISTRY

# CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

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FOUNDATIONS OF MINISTRY

*Edited by*  
FREDDY CARDOZA

  
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# INTRODUCTION

FREDDY CARDOZA

**O**ur world has changed. The twenty-first century brought a paradigmatic change as virtually nothing in society has been untouched by the digital age. It has presented humanity with tremendous possibilities and threatening peril.

Revolutionary innovation has occurred in every disciplinary field. Higher education has been shaken to its core. Much of what was assumed to be true in a variety of academic subjects has been deconstructed and laid bare. Current research and novel ways of thinking have challenged both the nature of truth and the very foundations of human knowledge. Biblical authority finds itself juxtaposed between these forces and the paradigmatic changes they have wrought as the world looks for clear convictions in a time of moral and existential uncertainty.

This new reality is radically reshaping our lives and redefining the essence of what it means to be human: how we think, feel, live, and relate. These divergent forces are creating a global crisis in which our world wobbles

between unbounded optimism and uncertain pessimism. Together, these tensions are leading people to desperately search for hope, love, truth, and meaning.

It is within this challenging yet chaotic vortex that we Christian educators find ourselves. Like Issachar's sons of old, we must labor both to understand the times and to know what to do. A discerning look reveals that despite the global ambiguity of our time, divine truth remains. Even within cultural uncertainty, the imperatives issued by Christ continue unabated. And though societal supports shake, the church still stands as the pillar and foundation of truth (1 Tim. 3:15), resting firmly on Jesus, the chief cornerstone of the ages (Eph. 2:20).

On the sole and solid foundation of Christ (1 Cor. 3:11), God has provided his revelation to guide us. As Christian educators are fond of saying, "All truth is God's truth, wherever it may be found." This includes the unassailable truth of God's revealed Word (2 Tim. 3:16) and the corresponding truth divinely revealed

through general revelation in other areas of human endeavor (Rom. 1:19–20).

Despite the certainty of God’s unchanging truth, no academic field of study has remained untouched in this season of human upheaval. This includes the area of Christian education. As times change, each generation of believers must take the truths it holds dear and pass them on to the next generation. This means doing the painstaking work of reconnecting the dots of our discipline so that they build bridges between Scripture and society, Christ and culture.

As was mentioned by Michael Anthony at the turn of the millennium in the literary predecessor of this text, *Introducing Christian Education* (2001), the very notion of Christian education is prone to misunderstanding and confusion. This remains true two decades later as the digital age advances fields of knowledge and creates human needs that Christian academies and ministries must, by necessity, boldly address.

Part of the reason for the misconception about Christian education has to do with the maturation of its many subdisciplines into fully-fledged fields of study. The popularity of Christian formation, childhood ministry, youth ministry, leadership administration, and other movements has led to related but sometimes independently organized disciplines within the broader professional progeny. Another source of misunderstanding about the nature of Christian education has to do with the wide expanse of academic programs and Christian ministries associated with the field. Practical theology degrees in colleges, universities, and seminaries continue to grow in diversity, and the proliferation of targeted church and parachurch programs continues at an epic clip.

What, then, is Christian education? In its essence, *Christian education includes all fields of study and related ministries whose purposes involve equipping in the biblical worldview, helping to make disciples, and facilitating transformation in the lives of believers through teaching-learning (education) and formation.*

Since Christian education is an area of practical theology, it involves both Christian educational ministry-type academic programs and related ministries in churches and parachurch organizations. More specifically, it involves those ministries and disciplines whose direct or indirect purposes relate to supporting or facilitating the lifelong process of disciple making and life transformation. To this end, every attempt is made to educate ministers with the knowledge, to instill them with the values, to train them with the competencies, and to provide them with the relational skills necessary to be and to make transformed disciples in obedience to the Great Commandment and the Great Commission.

As we move headlong into the third decade of the twenty-first century, these realities have created the demand for a new primary textbook in the area of Christian education. Building on the success of the aforementioned *Introducing Christian Education: Foundations for the Twenty-First Century*, edited by Michael Anthony, this work, *Christian Education: A Guide to the Foundations of Ministry*, represents the latest thinking and research from a combination of both newer thought leaders and trusted sages in our guild.

The current offering is divided into five parts. These parts represent a succinct overview of the field at this time. They cover Christian education from the ground up, including

its educational foundations (part 1), educational theory (part 2), educational administration (part 3), educational ministries (part 4), and educational specializations (part 5). Each of these parts has five chapters, representing a total of twenty-five individual themes, each written by a different specialist.

This textbook provides an unapologetic evangelical perspective on the field of Christian education. The authors who have written the following essays are, first and foremost, persons of integrity and personal holiness. Each scholar is known to be an expert in many areas, including the one in which he or she has written. They are trusted colleagues who associate with the Society of Professors in Christian Education, an evangelical body

of academic professors and professionals. They have a combination of grounded theological and theoretical training from the best programs in the discipline. They demonstrate expansive practical experience and ministerial expertise in their respective topics. These men and women represent a wide cross section of institutional types, geographical locations, and evangelical traditions.

Together, these scholars form a chorus of voices that blend into a beautiful harmony of perspectives with the advancement of God's kingdom as their aim and with Christian education as their method. It is our collective hope that ministry practitioners, professionals, professors, and pupils will greatly benefit from and be equipped by this work.

## EDUCATIONAL FOUNDATIONS

**C**hristian education encompasses a large family of disciplines in the education and ministry fields that falls within one of the traditional areas of theology called practical theology. Sometimes called Christian ministries, practical theology includes pastoral ministries and Christian education—and sometimes other ministries. Because of the diversity of Christian education as a field, it provides ministerial training in a great number of areas. For this reason, though Christian education is the historical name of the discipline, this term is more often used today to describe what we do rather than to define it. Sometimes the historical name is replaced with other descriptive names such as educational ministries, church ministries, Christian ministries, discipleship ministries, educational leadership, and others. This great diversity simply points to the overall impact and growth of Christian education as a part of practical theology. It is an expansive field of study that continues to morph as Christian educators identify ministry needs and as the academic discipline forms around those ministry areas

to provide formal education, training, and support for those needing to be equipped.

### **Understanding Christian Education Foundations**

Part 1 of this book covers educational foundations, which are the irreducible core of Christian education. Any person who seeks to understand Christian education as a field of study or wants to be trained in it needs to understand these things. To separate Christian education from its foundations would be akin to divorcing hermeneutics from biblical studies, language from the humanities, or math from the sciences. In each of these cases, one proceeds from the other. The foundations provide essential contextual understanding of the many supporting assumptions, axioms, and organizing principles that form the basis of the work of Christian education. Without the foundations, one cannot make sense of the collective agreement regarding the nature, terminology, boundaries, goals, and strategies of this field. The foundations also provide needed

perspective and depth of understanding about the literature, subject areas, academic degree programs, and career fields of Christian education.

### **The Danger of Neglecting the Foundations**

Without the foundations, people within Christian education, whether academic leaders, ministry practitioners, or current students, lack a unified understanding of what Christian education is, what it should do, and how it should be done. Absent these foundations, the result would be a weakening of the very fabric of the field into pragmatism.

One might argue that something akin to this has already happened to a degree. The fact that so many outside the field and, indeed, within the field do not have a clear understanding of Christian education at its most granular level may indicate a neglect of the foundations, and I suspect this is true. As one who has served in this field for over two decades, I have nurtured a lurking suspicion that one of the major strengths of Christian education may have become its greatest weakness.

As was stated earlier, Christian education is an area within practical theology. Practical theology is by definition *practical*. For this reason, those in the field place a high premium on applying ministry principles to real life and, specifically, doing what works. When doing what works is united with sound theory found in the foundations of the discipline, Christian education makes a tremendous impact. Being practical means that it is praxis-based—meaning a combination of theory and

practice or, more technically, theory-informed practice.

The praxis-based impact of informed Christian education ministry is healthy and dynamic. It is what is needed and desired by churches, parachurch organizations, and institutions of higher education. Even so, a subtle danger exists. Because of the practical nature of Christian education and its many subdisciplines, it is possible for practitioners to begin to view the foundations and theories as known assumptions or, worse, as impractical and therefore unimportant.

### **A Call to Return to the Foundations**

We may have subtly gravitated past praxis to pragmatism. When this happens, Christian educators and the ministry leaders they equip find themselves becoming increasingly gimmick-driven rather than doing the hard work of thinking about how to discern powerful and biblical strategies for potent kingdom impact. By immersing oneself in the mastery of the foundations, one can avoid the errors of pragmatism and discover the timeless truths of practical ministry.

The first part of this textbook issues a challenge for each reader, whether professor, professional, or pupil, to value and master the classical foundations of Christian education. These five chapters include a solid biblical-theological overview of Christian education and a review of its historical, philosophical, psychological, and practical foundations. Together, these form the irreducible elements of all Christian education-related fields.

# 1

## Biblical-Theological Foundations of Christian Education

OCTAVIO JAVIER ESQUEDA

What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us. . . . We tend by a secret law of the soul to move toward our mental image of God. . . . This is true not only of the individual Christian, but of the company of Christians that composes the Church. Always the most revealing thing about the Church is her idea of God.

—A. W. Tozer, *Knowledge of the Holy*

**O**ur theology—our thoughts about and study of God—affects everything we believe and do and is foundational to Christian ministry. While knowledge of God is by nature primary for all Christian believers, disciplines, and ministries, we tend to compartmentalize theology and practical ministry, separating “theory” from “practice.” Sadly, some perceive theology as mere dogmatic

presuppositions that lack real implications for daily life and ministry.

When we do any of that, we act as if what we confess does not affect our behavior. However, as Dallas Willard has correctly pointed out, “We always live up to our beliefs—or down to them, as the case may be. Nothing else is possible. It is the nature of belief.”<sup>1</sup> Therefore, our theology, or lack thereof, always guides and influences the process and the practice of Christian educators. We affirm that all truth is God’s truth since “this world is not a neutral place. It’s God’s.”<sup>2</sup>

This chapter explores key theological foundations from Scripture and explains how each person of the Trinity provides us with guiding principles for Christian education. Since

1. Willard, *Knowing Christ Today*, 309.

2. Naugle, *Worldview*, 26.

the Bible is essential for our understanding of the Triune God, overarching themes of the biblical narrative (creation, fall, redemption, and re-creation) are also discussed in this chapter.

## **God's Revelation and Christian Education**

The everlasting Triune God is majestic and awesome beyond human understanding. God is the only “high and exalted One, Who lives forever, whose name is Holy” (Isa. 57:15 NASB). As finite creatures, we are able to know and understand God only through what he reveals to us. God makes himself known to us through the categories of general or natural revelation and special revelation.

### ***General Revelation***

Theologians refer to God’s disclosure through his creation and the human conscience as general revelation. God’s creation declares his glory and draws our attention to the supreme author of everything that exists (Ps. 19:1–6). This revelation is constant and invites all human beings to praise the Creator God of the universe. God’s eternal power and divine nature are evident to all through his creation (Rom. 1:19–20). General revelation is vital for our understanding of God and stands as a permanent reminder of his love and power.

Unfortunately, we tend to forget about God’s constant presence evidenced by creation. Everyday circumstances reveal routine but amazing phenomena we take for granted: the morning sunrise, our ability to breathe, the stimulating use of our five senses. Each of these is a constant reminder that the Lord designed us and desires for us to know him.

In short, general revelation spurs and enriches our understanding of God. We should pay attention to his voice through his creation and providence because our Lord is always present and speaking to us through his deeds.

### ***Special Revelation***

Our Triune God also speaks to us through the incarnate Word of God, Jesus Christ (John 1:1–3, 9–14; Heb. 11:1–2), and the written Word of God, the Bible (2 Tim. 3:16–17). This kind of revelation is known as special revelation. The focus of God’s special revelation is Jesus; through him, we are able to know more about God and enjoy a personal relationship with him. The Bible is therefore the foundational curriculum in Christian education, and Christ is the standard for its interpretation and application.

### ***Our Limited Understanding***

There is, however, a theological tension we need to acknowledge. On the one hand, the Bible affirms that knowing God is possible and that this knowledge is worthy of praise. Even though humankind tends to base worth on human wisdom, power, or money, knowing and understanding God are of supreme worth and the only valid reasons for human boasting: “Thus says the LORD, ‘Let not a wise man boast of his wisdom, and let not the mighty man boast of his might, let not a rich man boast of his riches; but let him who boasts boast of this, that he understands and knows Me, that I am the LORD who exercises lovingkindness, justice and righteousness on earth; for I delight in these things,’ declares the LORD” (Jer. 9:23–24 NASB).

We are certainly able to know God and appreciate his attributes and deeds. On the other



hand, because God is infinite, we can never *fully* comprehend his majesty. He transcends our finite understanding, as he has clearly stated in Isaiah 55:8–9:

“For My thoughts are not your thoughts,  
Nor are your ways My ways,” declares the LORD.  
“For *as* the heavens are higher than the earth,  
So are My ways higher than your ways  
And My thoughts than your thoughts.” (NASB)

As Christian educators, we recognize that much will surpass our limited knowledge and understanding. If we were able to fully grasp God, then we would be his intellectual equals, and we are not. Our goal should be to learn and to apply what he has disclosed to us. The knowledge God has given is sufficient for effectively living our earthly lives in complete obedience to his commandments (Deut. 29:29; John 15:9–12). Hence, theology and Christian education are tasks involving receptivity, humility, and obedience to the Triune God.

### **The Triune God Is the Foundation for Christian Education**

The Lord has eternally existed as three persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Each person, although distinct, is fully God and has the same divine attributes. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are equal in essence, but as separate persons, they relate differently to one another and to creation (Matt. 3:16–17; 1 Cor. 15:28). Robert Pazmiño argues that the mutual communion of the persons of the Trinity

(*perichoresis*), in which each divine person is a being for the others, provides the foundational model for Christian education aimed at “the formation and transformation of persons as beings for others.”<sup>3</sup> Just as God exists in community (a three-in-one tri-unity), we human beings, created in God’s image, mirror his attributes and exist to live in community characterized by love.

### **Defining the Trinity**

The doctrine of the Trinity is a fundamental doctrine of the Christian faith and a good description of the God of the Bible: the Triune God perfectly represents unity (one God) and diversity (three persons). The Athanasian Creed establishes that whoever wishes to be saved must believe in the Trinity because it represents a core Christian belief. Though each divine person has a distinct role, the perfectly harmonious activities of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit always reflect a “deeper personal unity of conscious thinking, feeling, and willing” that reveals an “essential oneness of being.”<sup>4</sup>

The Holy Trinity is the essential foundation for life and Christian education. The three persons of the Godhead always work together in perfect harmony and are the basis and model for Christian teaching. Christian education exists because the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are teachers. At the same time, as distinct persons, they play different roles and provide various principles for believers and Christian educators. Pazmiño rightly argues that God the Father, as the Creator of the universe, is the *source* from whom all Christian education content originates; God

3. Pazmiño, *God Our Teacher*, 21.

4. G. Lewis and Demarest, *Integrative Theology*, 1:280.

the Son, as the Master Teacher, is *exemplar* or *model* for authentic Christian teaching; and God the Holy Spirit is the *tutor* and *counselor* who sustains the life of the Christian community and the wider society in order to fulfill God's purposes.<sup>5</sup>

### **God the Father**

God the Father is transcendent, distinct, and separate from his creation and at the same time immanent, present, and constantly sustaining his creation. He is called the Creator, Ruler, Sustainer, and Judge of all. As such, he is majestic, glorious, and holy (Lev. 19:2). At the same time, God is intimately personal and full of intrinsic goodness (Ps. 25:8; 86:5; Jer. 33:11; Nah. 1:7). God's existence and deeds can truly be described as incomprehensibly awe-inspiring, for his greatness in all things far exceeds us all (Neh. 1:5; Ps. 66:5). God alone is the source and foundation for life and Christian education.

### **Character and Attributes of the Father**

We can trust in God because we know his character, which he has disclosed to us. God's qualities or character patterns are generally described as divine attributes. Our God is unique, and there is no one like him (Isa. 43:10; 46:9). Therefore, some of his attributes are incommunicable because he does not share them with anyone or anything else (eternal, self-sufficient, immutable, impassible, omnipresent, omnipotent, omnibenevolent, and omniscient).

God also possesses communicable attributes, which he shares with human beings (personal, faithful, loving, holy, wise, and

glorious).<sup>6</sup> Michael Lawson uses thirty-three words to describe the characteristics or attributes of God that can be used to help children understand what God is like: adorable, angry, beautiful, colorful, creative, everywhere, fair, faithful, famous, friend, generous, gentle, holy, huge, invisible, joy, kind, life, light, love, merciful, mysterious, patient, playful, righteous, scary, smart (omniscient), spirit, strong (omnipotent), tender, timeless, a trinity, and unique.<sup>7</sup> Ultimately, any human list of divine attributes falls short of completely representing the awesomeness of our God. Nevertheless, such a list is helpful in showing the breadth and depth of God's personality and being.

### **The Father as Source**

Our God is also a loving Father who instructs and cares for his children. God revealed himself with the term *Father*, indicating that he is the source from whom everything else proceeds. Gordon Lewis and Bruce Demarest note that, in the Old Testament, *Father* denotes "God as the creator (Mal. 2:10), founder of the nation of Israel (Isa. 63:6; 64:8), and the One who entered into a saving, covenantal relationship with his people (Jer. 3:19; 31:9)."<sup>8</sup>

In the New Testament, the term *Father* is widely used, especially in the Gospel of John. In Christ, believers become God's children through regeneration and adoption. Consequently, Lewis and Demarest explain that the word *Father* "signifies the new relation of life and love that Christians enjoy with God (John 14:23; 20:17; 1 John 2:13; 3:1). The Aramaic term *abba*, 'dear Father' (Rom. 8:15; Gal.

6. Bird, *Evangelical Theology*, 127–37.

7. M. Lawson, *Grandpa Mike Talks about God*.

8. G. Lewis and Demarest, *Integrative Theology*, 1:189.

5. Pazmiño, *God Our Teacher*, 33.

4:6), is a title of special intimacy found on the lips of a young child.”<sup>9</sup> As God’s children, we should go with confidence to our heavenly Father to learn and to be instructed by him.

### The Father as Teacher

Christian education exists because God is the ultimate teacher, as Job 36:22 clearly states: “Behold, God is exalted in His power; Who is a teacher like Him?” (NASB). Every time God reveals himself to us, he is teaching us about himself and about the way in which we should go (Ps. 32:8; Isa. 2:3). God anticipates that we will respond to his revelation with complete obedience. This is the simple but indispensable expectation when he teaches us.<sup>10</sup> Obviously, our obedience should come out of reverence and love for the merciful and gracious God of the universe, who is rich in unfailing love and righteousness (Exod. 34:6).

God teaches us in various ways. God teaches people according to their diverse circumstances and is not limited to a singular or a particular teaching method; rather, he uses different ways to communicate with us. For example, God’s creative teaching methodology recorded in the Bible includes the following:

- He spoke directly and audibly from heaven.
- He wrote on tablets of stone.
- He became flesh.
- He revealed himself in supernatural beings.
- He gave vivid dreams and visions.
- He drew on walls of palaces.

9. G. Lewis and Demarest, *Integrative Theology*, 1:193.

10. Esqueda, “God as Teacher,” 35.

- He made animals talk.
- He voiced truth through human prophets.
- He composed poetry.
- He provided visual reminders of promises.<sup>11</sup>

God is indeed the model and example of creativity in teaching. Since we have a creative God, Christian educators should imitate him as they help people grow in their relationship with the Lord.

### God the Son

God the Son is the Lord of all (Phil. 2:11). He became flesh and dwelled among us in order that we may become children of God (John 1:12, 14). Therefore, as the sovereign God and head of the church (Col. 1:18), Jesus Christ is indeed King of Kings and Lord of Lords (Rev. 19:16). The Dutch theologian Abraham Kuyper (1837–1920) brilliantly summarized the centrality of Christ over creation, our lives, and Christian education: “There is not a square inch on the whole plain of human existence over which Christ, who is Lord over all, does not claim: ‘This is Mine!’”<sup>12</sup>

Our Lord Jesus Christ is not simply a necessary cliché in Christian education; he is the fundamental person under whom everything finds its purpose and meaning. In addition, Jesus is the model for Christian teaching. The terms *teacher* and *rabbi* were frequently used to describe Jesus’s earthly ministry. His followers were called disciples over two hundred times in the New Testament. Jesus was a teacher like many religious leaders, but he was

11. M. Lawson, “Biblical Foundations for a Philosophy of Teaching,” 62.

12. Plantinga, *Engaging God’s World*, xiii.

different because he taught with divine authority (Mark 1:21–22). Jesus was a consummate teacher and the only one with the right to be addressed with the title *Master Teacher*. Christian educators should imitate him and follow his example in order to become adequate representatives of Christ. In fact, they should try to live up to the challenge the late Christian educator Howard Hendricks gave to his students: If you want to be like the Master Teacher, you need to master the Master’s life. Authentic Christian education flows from the words and the example of the Master Teacher. Specifically, Robert Pazmiño proposes viewing Jesus as the master of the context, content, and audience of teaching.<sup>13</sup>

### Context of Jesus’s Teaching

Jesus’s teaching was always considerate of the social context. Even though he was a teacher sent from God (John 3:2), he was willing to teach wherever the occasion arose—a synagogue, the temple, the seashore, the countryside, and in people’s homes. He taught in different regions, from metropolitan Jerusalem to little towns such as Bethany and Chorazin, regardless of their social importance. Christian educators can follow the example of Jesus by willingly adapting to the social and cultural environment in order to teach the good news of the kingdom.

In his teaching, Jesus used common language to reach his listeners. His illustrations connected his teaching with relatable ideas and activities from domains that everyone could understand: home, nature, work, business, social relations, government, and national traditions.<sup>14</sup>

13. Pazmiño, *God Our Teacher*, 60.

14. Dillon, *Jesus as a Teacher*, 94–95.

### Content of Jesus’s Teaching

The content of Jesus’s teaching was grounded in the Scriptures (Matt. 22:29; Luke 4:21; 24:32; John 7:38; 10:35). Christian education honors Jesus’s example of making God and his Word the core curriculum. The purpose of Christian teaching is not just imparting knowledge but also leading students into obedience to the Lord (John 14:15).

### Audience of Jesus’s Teaching

Jesus reached different kinds of people without discrimination. He was willing to teach elites such as the Pharisees, scribes, priests, and rich as well as marginalized outcasts such as the poor, the diseased, and tax collectors. Jesus clearly established that the transformation of lives was the goal of his teaching. He wanted those he taught to become like him: “A pupil is not above his teacher; but everyone, after he has been fully trained, will be like his teacher” (Luke 6:40 NASB).

The context, content, and audience of Jesus’s teaching provide Christian educators with solid guidelines for their own lives and ministries. As Christian educators, we must aim to consistently become more like the Master Teacher (Matt. 10:24–25). All believers are followers of Christ and his disciples. Both teachers and students sit at the feet of the Master and by his grace learn how to become better imitators of him in words and deeds. Jesus Christ is the sovereign Lord and the model for and goal of Christian education.

### God the Holy Spirit

The Holy Spirit is essential for the Christian life and for Christian education. As a member of the Godhead, the Third Person of the Trinity is God and shares all the divine attributes

(Matt. 28:19; Acts 5:3, 4, 9; 2 Cor. 3:17). The work of the Holy Spirit is fundamental for the transformation teachers need in their lives and the transformation they hope to see in the lives of their students. The Holy Spirit guides believers into God's truth (John 16:3), reveals God (1 Cor. 2:9–12), and motivates and counsels believers into following God's truths (John 14:26). This reality reminds us that the Holy Spirit is the only one who can change lives and that we should yield to his leading. We always need the Spirit in our lives and teaching because only the Holy Spirit can reach any person from any generation and life situation. Indeed, Christianity and Christian education are meaningless apart from the Holy Spirit.<sup>15</sup>

The Holy Spirit indwells, baptizes, and seals all born-again believers (1 Cor. 6:19; 12:13; Eph. 4:30). Through the Spirit, believers enjoy a personal and intimate relationship with the Father (Gal. 4:6). The Holy Spirit guides God's children to live lives that please the loving Father (Rom. 8:14). As the author of the Bible, God's written revelation, the Holy Spirit helps both teachers and students to understand God's message through illumination (Eph. 1:17–18). The purpose of illumination is to help believers comprehend God's biblical truths.<sup>16</sup> The Spirit also comforts, intercedes, and gives spiritual gifts to God's children (Acts 9:31; Rom. 8:14; 1 Cor. 12:7). Therefore, the ministry of the Holy Spirit is fundamental for all spiritual activities. His presence in our lives is vital, and as believers and Christian educators, we should walk by the Spirit in order to please the Lord (Gal. 5:16). Christian teaching involves working in partnership with the Holy Spirit.<sup>17</sup>

15. Esqueda, "Holy Spirit as Teacher," 75.

16. Esqueda, "Holy Spirit as Teacher," 76.

17. Pazmiño and Esqueda, *Anointed Teaching*, 9.

## Theological Foundations from the Biblical Narrative

God's written revelation, the Bible, starts with creation, in which the Triune God formed the universe out of nothing. God, therefore, is the source of everything, who declared what he had made was "very good" (Gen. 1:31). The Triune God also created human beings in his own image, giving them special dignity and honor beyond the rest of creation. The biblical narrative then moves to the fall and its consequences. However, the Bible's main focus is redemption, which results in reconciliation, wherein the Lord actively seeks to redeem humanity from slavery to sin in order to restore a right relationship with him. Jesus Christ, the Messiah promised in the Old Testament, becomes not only the Savior in the New Testament but also the basis, center, and end of all things. The Bible ends with re-creation, a new heaven and a new earth where sin is finally and completely destroyed and God restores everything back to himself. The fourfold metanarrative of creation, fall, redemption, and re-creation in Scripture provides several important principles for Christian ministry and education.

### Creation

The Lord created the heavens and formed the earth (Isa. 45:18). He created human beings according to his image and with specific purposes, according to Genesis 1:26–28:

Then God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; and let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." God created man in His own image, in the image of God

He created him; male and female He created them. God blessed them; and God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it; and rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over every living thing that moves on the earth.” (NASB)

The threefold commission, or creation decree, of human beings is (1) to have fellowship with and to worship the sovereign Lord in whose image and likeness we are created, (2) to have relationships with other human beings, and (3) to care for and exert dominion over creation as God’s stewards. We exist to have a relationship with God, with others, and with creation.

#### **Created by God (*Imago Dei*)**

All human beings are essentially and ontologically the same, regardless of their culture, background, and generation. We all are created in the image of God. As bearers of God’s image (*imago Dei*), we all, both males and females, share the same importance and self-worth. We are indeed “fearfully and wonderfully made” (Ps. 139:14 NASB). The image of God determines the nature, value, and dignity of humankind and defines our essence (Ps. 8:3–5). Our cultural, personal, and experiential variables are secondary and not essential. They are important but not fundamental. Therefore, Christian education reaches out to all people and considers everyone important and teachable.

#### **Called to Relationship**

We are created in the image of God as relational beings. We are individuals, but we are created for community. We are divinely designed for authentic community and exist to experience deep relationships with God

and with one another (John 17:20–21). For this reason, regardless of our generation and cultural background, we all long for sincere and profound interpersonal relationships. The New Testament is full of admonitions to live in community, as we can see in the many passages with the commonly repeated words, “one another” and “each other.” In fact, Hebrews 10:24–25 reminds us that one of the primary purposes of getting together as the body of Christ is to support one another: “Let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near” (NASB). This is the communal goal of the teaching ministry in the church. Authentic Christian education and spiritual growth can flourish only in the context of the community of believers.<sup>18</sup>

However, individualism is a core value of American culture that subtly interferes with God’s design for us. Soong-Chan Rah argues that “me, myself, and I” has become the unholy trinity of Western philosophy and shaped many Western societies. Sadly, the American church has a tendency to reduce the Christian faith to a personal, private, and individual faith.<sup>19</sup> In the same way, researchers Edward Stewart and Milton Bennett, in their excellent book *American Cultural Patterns: A Cross-Cultural Perspective*, point out that “personal relations among Americans are adapted to gaining emotional benefits from social interaction while preserving independence and avoiding obligations.”<sup>20</sup> They continue, “It is probably accurate to say that in all of the

18. Esqueda, “Sin and Christian Teaching,” 174.

19. Rah, *Next Evangelicalism*, 30.

20. Stewart and Bennett, *American Cultural Patterns*, 89.

world outside the United States, a relationship without obligation is simply not significant.”<sup>21</sup> Relationships without commitment cannot produce authentic Christian community.

### Commissioned as Stewards

Lastly, human beings created in God’s image serve as divine priests of nature and society. The mandate to subdue creation as God’s representatives stresses the importance of the world and of culture. Since God is the unifying element for all creation and everything was created for him and through him, there should not be a distinction between the sacred and the secular. Everything is sacred because it comes from the Lord. Christian education provides a holistic perspective of God’s creation and our role as his representatives in this world.

### Fall

God’s creation is good and declares God’s glory, but it unfortunately also declares the tragedy of fallenness, of chaos, of painful destruction.<sup>22</sup> Sin is not normal but contradicts God’s ideal plan of human flourishing and shalom for his creation. Sin opposes God’s holy character, and its fruits are the vandalism of shalom.<sup>23</sup> Sadly, sin “permeates our entire being and alienates us from ourselves, other people, our world, and most importantly, our creator.”<sup>24</sup> The story of the fall and its consequences reminds us that apart from Christ, we are dead in sin (Eph. 2:1–10).

God’s grace, which saved us and sustains us, can be fully appreciated only in the context of

the fall and its consequences. We are all sinners in desperate need of divine grace to support us and to empower us to serve the Lord as we teach and minister to others.<sup>25</sup> Sin and grace are crucial for a complete understanding not only of the gospel but also of our daily lives and ministries. As Christian educators, we are indeed messengers of grace and shalom.

The realities of Satan and spiritual warfare need to be acknowledged as central elements of the Christian life and ministry. Satan is “the prince of this world” (John 12:31) and the “god of this age” (2 Cor. 4:4). Therefore, we have a real struggle against Satan and his angels, who oppose God and his plan (Eph. 6:12). However, Christ came to destroy the devil’s work (1 John 3:8) and to triumph over Satan and evil (Col. 2:15).

### Redemption

The biblical story focuses primarily on the divine restoration of humanity. In the Old Testament, the sovereign and gracious Lord initiates the story of redemption through his covenants with his chosen people. These covenants are the backbone of the biblical narrative and find their fulfillment in the New Testament with the promised Messiah. Christ, by his grace, provides eternal life and the redemption of sin and its consequences (John 3:16; Eph. 4:2–10). Sin affects all areas of life, but Jesus Christ redeems everything sin has distorted. The Triune God of creation is the Triune God of salvation, restoration, and unity (Rom. 11:36).

Christ’s death and resurrection are indeed the best news for humanity. As Christ followers, we are commanded to proclaim the good news of the gospel and to make completely

21. Stewart and Bennett, *American Cultural Patterns*, 95.

22. Plantinga, *Engaging God’s World*, 47.

23. Plantinga, *Not the Way It’s Supposed to Be*, 16.

24. Esqueda, “Sin and Christian Teaching,” 164.

25. Esqueda, “Sin and Christian Teaching,” 175.

committed disciples of our Lord. The Great Commission in Matthew 28:18–20 mirrors the Edenic commission of Genesis 1:26–28. Jesus Christ calls us to make disciples among all people because every person created in God’s image is important.

Jesus Christ is the perfect image of God, to which his followers will also be fully conformed (Rom. 8:28–30; Col. 1:15). Christ is the head and prototype of the new humanity God is bringing into existence through the work of the Holy Spirit.<sup>26</sup> God regenerates sinners, gives them new life, and progressively transforms them into the image of Christ. People grow and mature differently, but one day God will perfect the work he started in every believer (Phil. 1:6). This transformation to become more like Christ is not merely personal; it also has a communal orientation. God’s purpose and plan of Christlikeness is for all believers in the context of the body of Christ, the church (Eph. 4:11–16). Christian education, then, is the process of helping all believers grow together with the goal of being transformed into the fullness of Christ (Eph. 4:13).

### **Re-creation**

The biblical narrative ends with the final redemption and restoration of the world as the new heaven and the new earth appear after the second coming of Christ.<sup>27</sup> The final consummation of God’s redemptive work of humanity is still to come, and believers live with hope in the Lord, who is always trustworthy to fulfill his promises and will one day completely destroy sin and its consequences. The second coming of Christ is our blessed hope. Eschatology, the

study of last things (Gk. *eschatoi*), is of fundamental importance for Christian theology and ministry. Brian Daley accurately defines eschatology as “the hope of believing people that the incompleteness of their present experience of God will be resolved, their present thirst for God fulfilled, their present need for release and salvation realized.”<sup>28</sup> We expectantly remember Jesus’s last words in the biblical narrative, “Yes, I am coming quickly,” and echo John’s response, “Amen. Come, Lord Jesus” (Rev. 22:20 NASB).

### **Conclusion**

Our Triune God is the foundation of our lives and the source of Christian education. Only in God can we discern our identity as human beings created in God’s image and our calling as God’s children and messengers of grace and reconciliation in Christ. Since knowledge of God is fundamental for a complete understanding of all things, theology always directs our ministry and practice. Christian educational practices emerge from the centrality of God, who provides them with their meaning and purpose. In other words, to know God is the content and to make him known is the purpose of Christian education. Howard Hendricks accurately summarizes the importance of Christian education: “Christian education is not an option, it is an order. It is not a luxury, it is a life. It is not something nice to have, it is something necessary to have. It is not a part of the work of the church, it is the work of the church. It is not extraneous, it is essential. It is our obligation, not merely an option.”<sup>29</sup>

28. Daley, *Hope of the Early Church*, 1.

29. Howard Hendricks, as quoted in R. Clark, Johnson, and Sloat, *Christian Education: Foundations for the Future*, 11.

26. G. Lewis and Demarest, *Integrative Theology*, 2:139.

27. Esqueda, “Biblical Worldview,” 97.