

Christian Education Ministry for the 21st Century and Beyond

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The title of this article is that of a course I was asked to teach, and which I had the privilege and pleasure to do so, at a seminary in Asia in January 2020. This article contains highlights of the course together with related and additional details on what is needed for the most effective Christian education in churches and Christian schools throughout the world in the 21st century. The curriculum I developed to teach this course is, [*Christian Education Ministry in the 21st Century and Beyond: A 30-Hour Full Credit Graduate School Masters and Ph.D. Level Course.*](#)

Emphasize principle and practice.

In designing an innovative plan for effective Christian education today, it is essential to structure it according to what in theology is referred to as God's special revelation (his Word) and general revelation (including careful science, e.g., Romans 1:20), including valuable cross-cultural research in education and related fields. Throughout his special revelation, we clearly see that God is calling us corporately (church and its related ministries, e.g., Christian schools) and individually (including parents and grandparents, e.g., Deuteronomy 6:4-9; 4:9; 2 Timothy 1:5; 3:15) to teach his Word, the Bible, the record and message of God's mighty acts of the redemption of his creation, all pointing to and fulfilled in and through the life, suffering, death, resurrection, ascension, and reign of the Lord Jesus Christ, including his Second Coming, judgment, and the new heaven and the new earth. The teaching we are called to do involves not only words but deeds, living accordingly in our homes, in our workplaces, and elsewhere ("when you walk by the way," Deuteronomy 6:7).

Theory and practice together are required in academe and in the church. To paraphrase German philosopher, Immanuel Kant, while theory without practice is empty, practice without theory is blind, and, I add, makes one vulnerable to fads and costly errors, including, when it comes to theology, heresy and abomination. Since that disconnect between theory and practice, and its accompanying phenomenon of spiritual hypocrisy in the form of proclaiming but deliberately disobeying God's Word, is occurring in too many churches today,¹ in Christian education ministries, we must take the required time to explain theory (including how to distinguish careful science from bogus science²) and, most importantly, the corresponding Biblical teaching and the related practical applications.

¹ This is why I urge people who are looking for a church home to make sure that the leaders of a church they're considering are teaching the Word of God faithfully and applying it in their lives accordingly. Forgetting Romans 12:2 and many other Scripture passages, too many pastors, teachers, and other leaders, especially in the West, are placing political correctness as a higher priority than Biblical correctness. Recognizing that everyone sins (Romans 3:23), the issue is not trying to find a leader who is perfect; Jesus Christ is the only human (he's 100% human as well as being 100% divine) who lived a perfect sinless life. (Hebrews 4:15) The issue is finding pastors, teachers, and other church leaders who correctly handle the word of truth and live in obedience to God's Word and will, trying to please God in all they do. (2 Timothy 2:15; 4:1-5; James 3:1)

² For example, a number of my professors emphasized, in my doctoral courses in the College of Education at Michigan State University, that "95% of the studies in the field of education alone aren't worth the paper they're printed on!" One of the main reasons such publications are so flawed, is that the researchers have not carefully followed each step of the scientific method and have skewed the steps by inserting their own biases, thus producing

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The Holy Spirit uses careful science in educational theory, to help liberate leaders from conforming to the constraint to idolize past or present “heroes” and other models. One essential aspect of human learning theory that we Christian educators must employ in our teaching, is the finest of the research in curriculum development, which contains valuable tools for teaching key themes of Scripture, such as the unity of word and deed, faith and works, principle and practice. Several theorists have published their systems for such writing and teaching, and I’ve synthesized them in an application to Christian church and school education in a seven-step model based on the Hilda Taba’s model of curriculum and unit development.

My model is presented and explained in an essay, “[Curriculum Development and Lesson Planning: For Teachers & for Teachers of Teachers](#).”³ The first step is to identify the needs of the learners, beginning with felt needs (those the students know they have) and unfelt needs (of which the students are unaware but which teachers and administrators know they have). Addressing the former in promotional literature, in the curriculum and lesson plan, and in the classroom, is highly motivational for attendance, continued interest, and applying what is learned to daily life. Addressing the latter in and out of class is essential for the needed maturity in Christ to occur. Out of class learning takes place in reading assignments, lunch conversations, and other meetings.

The second step is identifying objectives. It is crucial to express them precisely in terms of student behavior, whereby they will be demonstrating they not only understand but are using what they have learned as stated in the objectives. Such Level III objectives should be written for all three domains of human learning, cognitive, affective, and behavioral, pertaining to the subject matter. The accomplishment of these objectives will meet the needs identified in the first step.

Steps three and four consist of selecting and organizing the subject matter content, the learning of which will accomplish the objectives that will meet the students’ needs. The fifth and sixth steps involve selecting and organizing learning experiences/teaching methods that will help students learn the content that will accomplish the objectives that will meet their needs.

The seventh step, evaluation, consists of two dimensions: formative evaluation and summative evaluation. Formative evaluation is a progressive ongoing analysis throughout each lesson and the entire course that enables the teacher to discern whether the objectives are being accomplished and whether any midclass or midcourse modifications are necessary. Summative evaluation is what is typically understood as evaluation, an analysis of the end results. It answers the question: Were all the objectives accomplished so as to meet the students’ needs? Details pertaining to these two types of evaluation are included in this essay explaining the model.

faulty science, rather than valid and reliable results that occur by carefully adhering to each step of the scientific method.

³ This essay is available on both of my Websites, a WordPress Website, *From Acorn to Oak*, accessible at either www.fromacorntooak12.com or www.edwardseely.com (both domain names go to the same Website). I also have an academic Website, at <https://seelyedward.academia.edu/>.

I've included further information on the very important subject of evaluation in two other documents on my Websites. The first is an adaptation of educator Robert E. Stake's "[Discrepancy Assessment Model for Evaluation](#)," which I've modified for Christian education; it's a valuable tool for implementing and evaluating curriculum development. One especially helpful dimension of Stake's model is how a teacher can plan for and overcome the not uncommon discrepancy between his or her original plan in the office and what must actually occur in the class or course on site. The other document in which I've provided further information on evaluation is in a PowerPoint program on leadership, entitled [Leadership and Administration in the Church—Balancing Two Key Dimensions of Leadership: Initiation of Structure and Consideration](#).

Several of the newer teaching methods help learning occur, including the vitally important results of putting into practice what has been learned, especially when the instructor asks the Holy Spirit to help in planning, in presentation, and in follow-up. These methods can be used for children, youth, and adults, including in seminary, and they facilitate learners drawing relationships and applications to the ministries where the Lord is leading them. One such method, developed by educational theorist, David Ausubel, is called the advance organizer model. Bruce Joyce, et al., mention that "Ausubel describes advance organizers as introductory material presented ahead of the learning task and at a higher level of abstraction and inclusiveness than the learning task itself. Their purpose is to explain, integrate, and interrelate the material in the learning task with previously learned material (and also help the learner discriminate the new material from previously learned material)... The most effective organizers are those that use concepts, terms, and propositions that are already familiar to the learners, as well as appropriate illustrations and analogies."⁴ Related concepts can provide auxiliary organizers.

Briefly, in this model a basic overall concept, what educator Sara Little describes as "a substantive summary,"⁵ is presented first in a general manner, in terms the students already know, which provides what Ausubel calls a cognitive scaffold or structure, that they can use to further construct and develop their understanding of what follows, as the more detailed and specific components of the subject are presented and carefully explained. In so doing, the logical sequence of the subject matter is emphasized and the subsequent information is integrated into the subject's components.

Little further explains:

What would follow would be the clearest possible unfolding of the organizer, with the use of diagrams or other visual aids, illustrations, images,...assigned reading to answer specific questions, questions to test one's understanding, applications, and conclusions,.... Directed student activities may be interspersed

⁴ Bruce Joyce, Marsha Weil, Emily Calhoun, *Models of Teaching*, sixth edition, (Needham Heights, MA,: Allyn and Bacon, 2000), p. 253.

⁵ Sara Little, *To Set One's Heart: Belief and Teaching in the Church* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1983), p. 45.

with the presentations. What [occurs] must be organized in such a way that the new knowledge is relevant to older knowledge, that each part of the presentation is an integral part of what precedes and follows, so that learning can be assimilated. The advance organizer, and subsumer organizers, serve as “cognitive bridges,” and facilitate what Ausubel calls “meaningful learning.”

The first thing that comes to mind is probably a lecture. Ausubel sees that, or other forms of organization and presentation or investigation of subject matter, as a form of teaching that calls for no apology. Related to “reception learning,” it is directed toward active, not passive, thought on the part of the student, whose task becomes a mental interaction with and internalization of ideas. Designed “to strengthen students’ cognitive structures,” the model is a time and energy saver for students.⁶

This model is especially useful for presenting large amounts of information in the most meaningful, logical, and efficient manner possible that also facilitates putting what has been learned into use and transfer of learning to other applications. “Generally speaking, the development of an intellectual structure...increases the probability that students will learn those structures and the thinking processes associated with them, and that they will retain material more fully.” (*Models of Teaching*, Sixth Edition, p. 255.) When used as follows with prayer for the help of the Holy Spirit, the likelihood of students’ maturity in Christ increases significantly. (Ephesians 4:11-16)⁷

An advance organizer, I used at the beginning of the course, “Christian Education Ministry in the 21st Century,” together with the method of concept formation, focused on several Scriptures, including Exodus 20:1-17, esp. v. 6 and John 14:15-27, esp. v. 21, where the students observed that a major motif⁸ throughout the whole Bible is the link between loving God and obeying him, of doing his will, pleasing him. It is not enough to know about him and his will, he expects those in relationship with him will desire to honor, including obeying, him and indeed do so.

This motif is a key and vital concern today that the church needs to address in its educational ministry for the 21st century. Many young adults, have been raised in troubled homes where even Christian parents have too often not functioned well. Due to the hypocrisy⁹ they’ve observed and the pain it has produced, these young adults engage in counterproductive lifestyles,

⁶ Little, pp. 45-46.

⁷ I have illustrated another use of the advance organizer model in the PowerPoint presentation of my systematic theology course entitled, “Essential Christianity: Historic Christian Systematic Theology With a Focus on Its Very Practical Dimensions, Including God’s Answers to Our Great Questions of Life—For Now and Eternity,” which is available without charge at <https://www.fromacorntoak12.com/theology/>.

⁸ The term, “major motif,” is a technical term from the academic discipline of Biblical Literature, a study of the Old and New Testaments. It refers to the considerable number of essential concepts, e.g., covenant, marriage, unity of word and deed, that recur throughout the whole Bible.

⁹ Hypocrisy, which is condemned throughout the Bible (cf., e.g., Psalm 26:4; 28:3; Matthew 23; Luke 13:15; Acts 5:1-11), is a major issue, problem, and concern, especially for young adults. It must be addressed in Christian education today.

e.g., cohabitation rather than marriage, substance abuse, and discontinuing their association with the church, thus harming themselves spiritually and in other ways, producing a serious matter with which Christian educators have to grapple.

Base Christian education on the Bible and historic Christian systematic theology.

The Bible, the Word of God, is of course the most important subject to teach in church education for the 21st century and all other centuries. Doing so should include three aspects of Bible study, and all three should be offered regularly. One very valuable aspect of Bible study is an overview of the whole Bible, that includes its major themes, the major motifs and basic principles presented throughout the Scriptures. One resource for doing so is the PowerPoint program, [Bible Digest](#) together with its accompanying [Bible Digest Notebook](#) that contains additional information on the slides.

The vital second aspect of Bible study is focused reading and reflection on each book of the Bible with a qualified teacher in a course setting and also in more fellowship-oriented nonformal home Bible study groups with a mature and experienced leader. One or more carefully selected commentaries written by vetted scholars from the past and present who have taught God's Word faithfully are helpful.

A third important dimension of Bible study is a course on Biblical hermeneutics, instruction on the discipline of interpretation, consisting of a presentation on and examination of the basic principles of how to understand Biblical literature. Most of these principles pertain to all literature, and others apply uniquely to the Bible, and are essential for helping readers of Scripture to come to an accurate understanding of the text. Throughout church history, many dangerous heresies have resulted from inaccurate and wrong interpretations of Biblical passages, where readers have failed to correctly handle the word of truth. (2 Timothy 2:15) This reality is one of the reasons for including courses on church history in Christian education, now and for the future, in order to avoid as much as possible the mistakes of the past.

One of the most effective ways to help the church learn God's Word and will and mature in Christ (2 Timothy 3:14-15; 4:3; Ephesians 4:11-27) is to teach historic Christian systematic theology, which itself is an advance organizer for Bible study and helps to provide the logical framework, the Scriptural perspective, for the study of God's Word and for other applications such as witnessing and apologetics. The six loci of historic Christian systematic theology are the core of Christianity, the best summary of the main teachings of the Bible, and most helpful for teaching, preaching, and facilitating Christian witness and the accomplishment of God's purposes in and through the church. All Christian denominations have at least these six basic doctrines; those that are more liturgical and emphasize the more cognitive (head) dimensions of the Christian faith, specify them with more precision and extensive explanation, while those that are more oriented to the affective (heart) dimensions of the Christian faith, don't emphasize their logic but still include these essential doctrines.

Those called to church planting should consider another application of historic Christian systematic theology. Dr. Arthur DeKruyter, the outstanding pastor who founded Christ Church of Oak Brook in Chicago's western suburb of Oak Brook and was able to synthesize and explain
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systematic theology and its practical applications, wrote a curriculum for a course he called *Basic Christianity*. While always acknowledging the Holy Spirit as being the key and most important agent, Dr. DeKruyter told me on more than one occasion that, humanly speaking, teaching *Basic Christianity*, beginning in homes, was the next most important factor in starting and building Christ Church of Oak Brook from no members to over 5,000!¹⁰

This experience of the building of Christ Church is a good illustration of how necessary it is in church planting, and in all ministries, to facilitate the development of and feed and water the church; the seed of emerging faith needs nurturing.¹¹ (Cf. Jesus' parable of the sower in Matthew 13:2-23; Mark 4:1-20; Luke 8:4-15) We need to provide good spiritual soil, grounded in the Scriptures, so strong faith in Jesus Christ, given and fostered by the Holy Spirit, can take root, mature, and be productive for the Lord. Please join me in daily prayer for both the extension of God's kingdom (through evangelism and witnessing) and the nurture of his kingdom (through teaching and living according to God's Word) throughout our local communities, our country, and the whole world.

One resource for teaching theology is a PowerPoint program of my systematic theology course entitled, [Essential Christianity: Historic Christian Systematic Theology With a Focus on Its Very Practical Dimensions, Including God's Answers to Our Great Questions of Life—For Now and Eternity](https://www.fromacorntoak12.com/theology/). Accompanying essays providing additional information the six loci are available at <https://www.fromacorntoak12.com/theology/>.

A second resource for teaching theology is a curriculum I'm writing, "Teaching Basic Christianity," which can be used for teaching systematic theology in high school and adult church education. Both the PowerPoint and the curriculum at this writing are nearing completion, and enough of each are on my WordPress Website to give seminary students and church and school teachers additional information to answer their students' questions and to teach basic and more advanced doctrine. Both also are models for how to write a curriculum, including the seven steps of curriculum construction in the educational field of curriculum development.¹² Each lesson also contains examples of Level III objectives in all three domains on the triangular continuum.

¹⁰ Currently, the book, *Basic Christianity*, is available only in Mandarin Chinese. For Chinese churches, this outstanding resource for teaching systematic theology, has been translated by Mrs. Amy Lay. It's a very valuable resource for linking to and nurturing the cognitive dimension of human learning, in particular spiritual development. Another book by DeKruyter, *Journey into Joy*, and its accompanying video, nurtures the affective aspect of spiritual development. Nurturing the affective domain is essential to motivating the development of cognitive understanding and the resultant coordinate behavior, the understanding of and desire to obey God's Word and will and then actually doing so with the help of the Holy Spirit.

¹¹ Notice the implications for Christian education and Christian worship, including for the sacraments.

¹² The current English version of the PowerPoint is on the Christianity Theology page of my Website at <https://www.fromacorntoak12.com/theology/>. I plan to also put it on my academic Website when it is completed. The original English version of the curriculum will be on both Websites when it is finished. Mrs. Amy Lay has also translated much of what I've written, all of which is easily accessible for Chinese churches at <https://www.fromacorntoak12.com/select-chinese-language-style/>. See also my academia.edu Website at <https://seelyedward.academia.edu/>.

Make Christian education multidimensional.

While a study of history and other academic disciplines, as well as the memory of elderly people, show that many aspects of human life remain the same as in the past, they also show that significant aspects of human life have changed. To cite only a few examples, the phenomenon of wives working outside the home and the concomitant need for husbands to take on some of the work women homemakers traditionally handled leaves men and women less free time and schedule flexibility than previous generations experienced. One implication: finding time for church education. Another example is the extensive rise in broken homes. For just three implications: the need to offer [a premarital education ministry](#), the need to help single parents to find time for formal and nonformal learning opportunities, and the need for church education ministries to add many trustworthy and reliable resources for helping these parents and their hurting children deal with the painful prequels and sequels of separation and divorce both in the near and far term.¹³

As I document in the essay to which I just referred, both boys and girls who grow up in a single parent home experience a significant loss of what the other parent brings to the family, even when visitation is arranged. Since separation and divorce are so widespread, and since courts typically assign children to live with their mother, they grow up without a daily strong male role model, parent, and caregiver. As a pastor, it has grieved me to talk with many single mothers, mostly all divorced, who pleaded with me to connect them with male role models in the church. One program I began in response to this request was a well-received one called “Anglers for Christ,” in which men in the church took children of single mothers fishing. This activity, which many children enjoy, was a catalyst for conversations that lead to developing relationships that facilitate much learning and development, including sanctification in Christ. It was very well appreciated and enjoyed until, sadly, the board established to run the program had to close it due to legal advice concerning fear of litigation. In the highly litigious United States culture, we need to work on tort reform. A program such as “Anglers for Christ,” is an effective education ministry for church congregations in countries where these legal concerns are not prohibitive. Of course, a similar program to connect girls and boys, who live with their dads and have limited or no contact with their mother, to women in the church who would provide good female role models for the children should also be offered as needed. A catalyst other than fishing will likely be more desirable for this program, and the mature women selected for this ministry will be able to suggest such alternatives that align with their strengths and experience as well as the needs and desires of the children.

Establishing, or further developing, a [church library](#) and where possible also a [church book store](#), are vital resources for Christian education. In doing so, it is very important to produce a document called the library collection development policy,¹⁴ a standard procedure in library

¹³ See my paper, “[Is Divorce Harmful to Children?](#)” As I explain in this essay, the need for trustworthy and reliable resources is essential. Many biased books, videos, and counseling, often produced by those who are themselves divorced, offer advice that is opposed to God’s Word and harmful to his people.

¹⁴ I have written library collection development policies, and one that applies to and is being used by churches is at this URL. Permission is granted for anyone to use it: http://church.immanuelloveland.org/sites/default/files/inserted-files/church_library_collection_development_policy.pdf.

science. It can also apply to the book store. Here is where a church library and also a church book store, which only carry resources consistent with the Bible and historic Christian systematic theology, are very valuable components for Christian education in the 21st century, as always.

In this digital age, libraries are not at all obsolete. Church libraries can carry vital print and DVD resources, and they can also recommend the best of online eBooks and other trustworthy digital resources. Invite donations of books, DVDs, and other materials that people no longer need or want but that can build your library and be useful for others. As always, check the donations for compliance with your collection development policy.

Not everyone uses computers; many cannot afford one and others don't want to be bothered with the learning and upkeep of computers. Furthermore, many valuable digital books and other materials have a significant cost for some people. If your church library is able to do so, include a computer in your library's budget, and offer help for people to learn how to use it. Download some of the excellent electronic Biblical and theological resources on the Internet (those that comply with your collection development policy) and store them, or their URL, on the library's computer.

If your church has a Website, work with the person in charge of the Website to have a church library page on your church's Website. Include in your budget a digital catalogue for your library that will enable people to view, even from their own home, what your library has in its collection and quickly access what they need when they are at church. An example of such a church library Website page and digital catalogue can be seen on the Website of Immanuel Lutheran Church in Loveland, Colorado, USA at this URL: <http://immanuelloveland.org/926-2/>.

Whenever possible, and as a future goal if it is not now possible, the church library should be located near the sanctuary. In order to have the library used to its fullest, it must be near the largest traffic flow when people come to church, preferably on the entry level. Too many will not search out the library, and we are up against the old reality, "out of sight, out of mind." We have to attract people to this rich reservoir of resources they need, especially for spiritual and also other development, and facilitate their access to those materials in every way we can, whether they are unaware of the library or are coming on their interest or having been referred the church library by the pastor, another counselor, or a caring Christian friend.

Both nonfiction and fiction should be included in the church library. An important objective for the library is to have at least one resource for every human need. Nonfiction resources are vital and most valuable, but fiction well-written by Christian authors offers not only entertaining but engaging models of how many life circumstances can be resolved or at least managed well in accord with God's Word and will. Not only those common personal challenges in life, e.g., those in the next paragraph, but also at least one commentary on each book of the Bible, should be in the library's collection.

Other examples of significant changes in contemporary 21st century life include younger adult generations' (e.g., Millennials and Gen Xers) noninvolvement with the church; skyrocketing spiritual, physical and psychological struggles, including (but not limited to) stress, anxiety, depression, substance abuse, and loneliness; and in the West societal and cultural changes due to

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increased opposition to the Christian basis of those societies and cultures, all of which are manifesting the spiritual warfare (e.g., Ephesians 6:10-18) that is promoted and exacerbated by anti-Christian influences in strategic places such as the entertainment industry, biased media, and public preschool, elementary, secondary, and higher education as well as other sectors in society, including government entities. Educational implications of the younger adult generations non-involvement with the church include, but are not limited to, courses on marriage, parenting young adults, theology, evangelism, and witnessing for Christ. Implications of the skyrocketing spiritual, physical, and psychological struggles include offering pastoral care resources for individuals and groups including counseling, courses and small group Bible studies related to these matters, and providing excellent books by trustworthy therapists in a church library. Implications for addressing the societal and cultural challenges due to the spiritual warfare in which we're engaged, include courses on evangelism and witnessing for Christ and effective Christian action bathed in prayer.

Christian education must focus on teaching God's Word, including how to do it and to help others do it, which is a key part of every Christian's calling (e.g., Matthew 7:12-24; 28:18-20; 1 Peter 3:15). Thus, for Christian education in the 21st century to reach people with many time and motivational constraints, we need to employ a multidimensional program that will help Christ's church to mature in and model Christlikeness, "walk the talk," obey and honor God, living as people holy to God, witnessing to the Lord, indeed to the triune God, so the world cannot accuse us of hypocrisy, which God abhors (cf. e.g., Matthew 23). This maturity in Christ is necessary in order to reach all, especially the younger adults, specifically the Millennials and Gen Z.

Multidimensional Christian education for the 21st century and beyond can be categorized by formal, nonformal, and informal learning. *Formal* programs feature regular curriculum course offerings on subject matters all children, youth, and adults need to know, as well as elective courses on subjects important to some; a strong emphasis on marriage and family education, including a [required premarital course couples must take before being married in the church](#); and a balance between regular course offerings and short-term (minicourse and one-session) classes. See, e.g., "[Curriculum at a Glance, Basic Program: Children and Youth](#)" and "[Church Adult Education Program and Checklist](#)."¹⁵

Nonformal educational contexts include strong children, youth, and adult educational ministries; small group Bible study and fellowship opportunities; and field trips (e.g., short-term missions and travel to the lands of the Bible and church history). Another example, in which the seminary students I've taught are especially interested, is called Workplace Ministry, a program I produced for many years in the education department at Christ Church of Oak Brook in suburban Chicago.

To help develop and coordinate this workplace ministry program, I asked a highly respected businessman in the congregation to select and chair a board to oversee this aspect of the church's

¹⁵ These resources are on both of my Websites, and more are being added. They are available for anyone worldwide. Mrs. Amy Lay has translated many into Mandarin, and they are available on the Chinese Translations page of my WordPress Website, *From Acorn to Oak*, accessible at either www.fromacorntooak12.com or www.edwardseely.com (both domain names go to the same Website).

education ministry, in which we invited spiritually mature, respected, and experienced business and professional people to speak in seminars about how they serve Christ in their workplace. For churches with more blue collar workers, it is important to include them as well, inviting such a leader in these fields to speak to those in related vocations. In addition, sessions for and led by such women leaders addressing business, professional, and vocational women's issues and opportunities meet unique needs they have.

Included in being a valuable venue offering opportunities to witness for Jesus Christ, indeed for our triune God, the workplace offers many opportunities to demonstrate how Christians' Bible-based orientation is vitally helpful for the success of the business. For just a few examples, following God's Word and will that we love (i.e., being patient and kind...not arrogant or rude...not easily angered...not delight in evil...always protect [e.g., 1 Corinthians 13:4-7]) all people (including customers as well as fellow workers); are trustworthy (e.g., Exodus 18:21; Nehemiah 13:13; Matthew 25:21, 23; 1 Corinthians 13:6); act mature and not childish (e.g., 1 Corinthians 13:11; Ephesians 4:13); persevere, don't give up (e.g., 1 Corinthians 13:7); and seek always to do our best (including producing high quality products and services (e.g., Matthew 24:45-51; 25:14-30); and when we have a servant mentality (communicating to the customers that our company [which is composed of people not an abstract impersonal entity] exists to serve them rather than to be served, e.g., Matthew 20:24-28; 25:14-30), all of which come from the Bible, those factors lead to success. Contrast failing companies: factors leading to their decline and demise typically include ignoring these Scriptural values, principles, and commands. From an individual perspective, Christians maturing in Christ and functioning in the above and other ways taught in God's Word, tend to be promoted rather than demoted or ousted. (Cf., Matthew 25:14-30)

Christian education for the 21st century should make careful use of the new technologies. The word, careful, is important. As much as technology can facilitate the accomplishment of educational objectives, it can also interfere and function counterproductively. Not only children and young people, who are glued to their smart phones, but also older people allow their digital devices to divert them from developing relationships and maturity in Christ. It is no wonder why loneliness and depression are so rampant today and increasingly so. This reality should be one of the unfelt needs addressed in both formal and nonformal educational programs in this century.

Nevertheless, as always, we can and should use technology to help people mature in Christ. To cite just a few examples, churches and Christian schools should invest in smart boards, which enable teachers to write and bring up on the same surface PowerPoint programs with creative, extensive, and highly motivating graphics, videos, and previously prepared texts that can be stored and made available for students to review, as well as others throughout the church, the community, and worldwide. The church's and school's library books' and DVDs' call numbers can be put on a Website together with downloadable digital documents. Formal and nonformal courses, seminars, Bible studies, classes, and other shorter and longer term learning opportunities, as well as meetings, can be held via face-to-face sessions such as with Zoom video conferencing, which permits people throughout the whole church and others they invite anywhere in the world to join the class or group.

Churches and schools making use of these and other electronic means of instruction, will not only help their members and friends to become connected who might not otherwise be able or inclined to do so, but they will be able to offer evangelistic and educational learning opportunities for people in hard to reach locations. These churches and schools will also be well-positioned to connect with one another during crises such as the 2019-2020 coronavirus COVID-19 epidemic when many countries shut down their normal daily functioning and limited physical interaction, even requiring people to stay at home (but still have access to the Internet).

What other possibilities come to your mind as you read and reflect on these important educational digital tools? One key principle in this matter is to use technology and not let technology (ab)use us. Digital technology should be used prudently; nothing can replace human fellowship face-to-face in the presence of one another.

Informal educational opportunities include, but are not limited to, an ample church library (of carefully selected Biblically consistent books and DVDs, see above) and church bookstore; a focus on the vital importance of setting time each day for reading the Bible¹⁶ and prayer; a “Bring It Home” daily devotional guide included with the church bulletin each Sunday reviewing, expanding on, and applying the Bible texts focused on in worship that Sunday morning, which also strongly affirms the importance of daily reading God’s Word and praying, with guidance on how to do both;¹⁷ and opportunities at least a couple times a month where a minister stands by a sign, “Ask a Pastor,” in a main gathering place in the church, such as the narthex or fellowship hall, and people can come to the pastor and ask any question about the Bible or the Christian faith. I began this ministry in Chicago when I was working full time, and I now enjoy doing so as a “retired” pastor in a church in Colorado; thus, it is also a fine opportunity for pastors who are no longer working full time, or for pastors who have entered another profession but still have much Biblical and theological knowledge, wisdom, and experience to share with the church and others who have questions. Leaders should also view conversations in the halls and on phones as valuable opportunities to teach.

Another informal teaching opportunity, which many pastors dislike, but should view differently, is the feeling of “living in a fishbowl,” i.e., the awareness that people are constantly watching how they live. Instead of disliking this reality, church leaders should gladly embrace it and view living in a fishbowl as a great opportunity to use the teaching method of modeling, whereby they can exhibit Biblical family living, one of the biggest needs of people today, especially in the younger generations where many have grown up without an admirable male role model, and sometimes not an admirable female role model, and where the models they are viewing in the movies are often despicable! The fishbowl complements, and is part of, their teaching ministry:

¹⁶ Careful research by the Barna Group reveals that six out of ten adults who read the Bible state that doing so has transformed their life and “positively correlates to relational and spiritual growth.”

(<https://juicyecumenism.com/2019/05/02/scripture-reading/>) (Accessed 10/24/19)

¹⁷ Such guides can be seen at <http://church.immanuelloveland.org/resources/daily-devotions>. They’re written by the pastor, or another he asks, for each Sunday’s church bulletin. They expand upon the Biblical text(s) on which the sermon for that Sunday was based, facilitating the congregation’s continuing to think about and act on the sermon message throughout the coming week.

Their preaching and teaching explain the Bible's instruction on what to do; their daily lives show how to do it!

These three aspects of multidimensional Christian education, formal, nonformal, and informal, should all emphasize and provide resource support for family education. We cannot improve on God's original plan (Deuteronomy 6:4-7, et al.), that his covenant people primarily learn his Word and grow in relationship with him in the home, including in the extended family (Deuteronomy 4:9, et al.), and that developing faith is supported by the covenant community, the church. Nowhere in the Bible, is the primary responsibility for Christian nurture placed on any entity outside the family.

This point is not to be interpreted in any way as meaning to ignore single (never married) or unmarried (divorced or widowed) people; they have very significant needs. One way they are included is that many are part of the extended family relationships referred to in the preceding paragraph. Further, their needs can be included in what has been said earlier in this essay. Also, affinity group ministries designed to focus on their needs provide many opportunities for Biblical and theological knowledge, spiritual growth, and Christian fellowship with peers. Many single and unmarried people have much to offer in teaching and in other areas of church leadership. In addition, they will benefit from the teacher and leader education sessions that become available to them.

Include the triangular continuum in curriculum development and lesson planning.

Twenty-first century Christian education should include how human learning occurs, specifically what I call the triangular continuum in the brain's cerebrum, where the three domains of human learning (cognitive, affective, and behavioral) subsist on a continuum (as opposed to conceptualizing them as discrete categories, i.e., separate entities). This explanation involves how each domain relates to the others and requires nurture in order to produce the informed, loving, and willing obedience to God's Word and will, motivated by and demonstrated in Christlike love (e.g., in John 14:21 and throughout the Bible). Include also [curriculum development and lesson planning for teachers of all ages, and for teachers of teachers](#), and [Christian education goals and objectives with an emphasis on Level III objectives for all three domains](#), which are vitally important to help all ages learn and apply in their daily lives the major motif of the Biblical unity of word and deed, of obeying God's Word and will, which lead to maturity in Christ Jesus and the accomplishment of God's purposes.

“The one having my commands and obeying them, that one is the one who is loving me; indeed the one loving me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and will manifest myself to him.”
(John 14:21, Greek, EDS translation)

Level III objectives include three components: required observable behavior of the students in a specified context with measurable indicators as to how well the objective is to be accomplished.

These statements enable teachers to know how to be sure that their students are *understanding and doing* what they have taught them.¹⁸

Implement other key aspects of theology and sound social science research.

Other subjects, vital for Christian education in the 21st century, include worship planning (in which students are always very interested), specifically how systematic theology also informs planning worship.¹⁹ Pay close attention to how the elements in worship, especially churches using the historic liturgy (e.g., reciting the Nicene Creed), connect with all three learning domains. I've been excited to see how eager and enthusiastic seminary students, pastors, and other church leaders have been in learning about these aspects of planning Christian worship in courses I've taught on several countries and continents.

Two additional dimensions of sound social science research are valuable for Christian education in the 21st century. The first involves vital aspects of leadership, which I've included in the previously cited PowerPoint program, "[Leadership and Administration in the Church—Balancing Two Key Dimensions of Leadership: Initiation of Structure and Consideration](#)."²⁰ Leadership education is crucial in Christian education today, and always. We see this emphasis on the importance of leadership in many places throughout the Bible. (Cf. e.g., Exodus 18:13-26; Joshua 1:5-9; 2 Chronicles 1:10; John 3:10, Hebrews 13:7; James 3:1) Notice also Jesus' analogy of the shepherd and his sheep in John 10:2 ff. The shepherd leads his sheep, "'and his sheep follow him because they know his voice. But they will never follow a stranger; in fact, they will run away from him because they do not recognize a stranger's voice.'" Jesus is the good shepherd. (John 10:11). Here we see the task of Christian education: to help people recognize Jesus' voice, so they can follow him.

The second contains valuable findings from a field of study called the Diffusion of Innovations, a cross-cultural subfield of communication research. Diffusion research studies how something new diffuses, or spreads throughout, and is adopted by a social system, including a church. Knowledge of this subject matter helps church educators to obtain acceptance of their new ideas, programs, and methods by the church and other segments of society. If pastors, teachers, and other church leaders develop great innovations for Christian education in the 21st century that will help God's people mature in Christ, but the church doesn't want them, then all that good work will not be put to use there for the accomplishment of God's purposes. So, we need to introduce and explain this research to Christian educators and other church leaders, including how to use it, in order to help the church accept and adopt their leaders' innovations. For a resource in doing so, see my essay, "[Defusing Fear of Innovations: Facilitating Change in the](#)

¹⁸ The PowerPoint presentation on that subject, which Amy Lay has translated, is available on both Websites in English and in Mandarin on the WordPress Website.

¹⁹ See the Christian Theology and Christian Worship pages at www.fromacorntoak12.com or www.edwardseely.com.

²⁰ This program, also translated by Amy Lay, is available in Mandarin at <https://www.fromacorntoak12.com/select-chinese-language-style/>. The same is true for the two remaining subjects. A couple of these resources in English, "Christian Education Goals and Objectives," and "Defusing Fear of Innovations: Facilitating Change in the Church," are also on the academia.edu Website.

Church,” and the accompanying PowerPoint program, “Defusing Fear of Innovations: Diffusing Change in the Church.”²¹

The challenges of constructing a Christian education ministry that will equip the church to effectively learn and teach God’s Word in the 21st century “to prepare God’s people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ,”²² are extensive. Nevertheless, with God’s help directly in our hearts and minds, indirectly through his global church, and by means of his special and general revelation, it can be done. And it always will be done: When God calls people to serve him, he equips them, and guides them to accomplish his purposes! It is my prayer that this essay may be one of the resources God uses to equip and to guide, including stimulating other ideas, for developing a strategy for such a ministry throughout the rest of this century and far beyond, indeed until the Lord returns!

²¹ Both of these resources are also translated by Amy Lay and are available in Mandarin at <https://www.fromacorntoak12.com/select-chinese-language-style/>.

²² Ephesians 4:12-13.