



Integrating Faith and Learning in Christian Religious Education: A Theological Approach by James R. Estep

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Abstract

Christian education plays an important role in the formation of faith, character, and church community. James R. Estep, in his works, developed an approach that blends theology and pedagogy to integrate faith in the daily life of the congregation. This article aims to explore Estep's practical approach to Christian education, focusing on the integration between education and spiritual formation in the church context. The method used is a literature review of Estep's works and related sources on the theology of Christian education, as well as an analysis of its application in the context of church and society. The results of the study show that Christian education according to Estep does not only aim to transfer knowledge, but also to shape character and leadership in the church. Estep proposes that education should strengthen the church community and support mutual spiritual growth. The contribution of this study is to emphasize the importance of Christian education as a means to transform individual lives and strengthen the role of the church in the formation of a healthy and sustainable faith community.

Keywords: Faith; Learning strategies; James R. Estep; Theology of Christian education; Church community.

Abstract

Christian education plays an important role in the formation of faith, character, and church community. James R. Estep, in his works, developed an approach that blends theology and pedagogy to integrate faith in the daily life of the congregation. This article aims to explore Estep's practical approach to Christian education, focusing on the integration between education and spiritual formation in the church context. The method used is a literature review of Estep's works and related sources on the theology of Christian education, as well as an analysis of its application in the context of church and society. The results of the study show that Christian education according to Estep does not only aim to transfer knowledge, but also to shape character and leadership in the church. Estep proposes that education should strengthen the church community and support mutual spiritual growth. The contribution of this study is the emphasis on the importance of Christian education as a means to transform individual lives and strengthen the role of the church in the formation of a healthy and sustainable faith community.

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INTRODUCTION

Christian education, as an integral area within the church and Christian educational institutions, has a very important role in shaping the character, morality, and spiritual life of believers. In many ways, Christian education aims to develop a deep understanding of the Christian faith while teaching values that are in line with the teachings of the Bible. However, the integration of faith and learning is often a challenge faced by many Christian educators. This is especially problematic in the context of Christian schools and church teaching, where there is often a separation between academic knowledge and the teachings of the faith. James R. Estep, an expert in Christian education, has proposed a holistic and theological approach to address this challenge by integrating Christian education with deeper spiritual formation. As Estep explains in *A Theology for Christian Education*, Christian education should be more than just cognitive instruction, but also involve spiritual transformation for the individuals involved in the educational process.¹

Christian education does not only aim to provide cognitive information or teaching, but also to shape spiritual life and personal character. This is an important reason why Christian education should be integrated with correct theological understanding, so that teaching not only touches the intellectual aspect, but also the spiritual life of the individual. Estep underlines that Christian education should not only teach knowledge about the Bible or theology, but also relate it to the daily lives of Christians.² In this regard, the main challenge faced by many Christian educators is how to integrate the two—that is, between faith teaching and academic learning—in a holistic way. In this context, Estep's theological thinking and approach becomes very relevant to be studied, especially in an effort to find a middle ground between theology and effective pedagogy in Christian education.

Research on the integration of faith and learning in Christian education has grown rapidly in recent decades, but there is still a void in studies that connect theories of Christian education with practice in the field. Many studies focus on the cognitive and curriculum aspects of Christian education, but less on how this education can shape learners' character and spiritual life. James R. Estep contributes greatly to filling this void by offering a more holistic approach that emphasizes the importance of integrating theology in Christian education.³ This approach involves not only the teaching of religious information, but also the formation of a person who reflects the teachings of Christ. Through his works, Estep has illustrated the importance of

¹ James R. Estep, *A Theology for Christian Education* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2010), 13.

² James R. Estep, *Essentials of Christian Education: A Comprehensive Guide* (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2015), 45.

³ James R. Estep, *Christian Educator's Handbook on Teaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2004), 22.

harmony between academic education and spiritual education, where both support and reinforce each other in shaping the whole Christian. By integrating faith and learning theologically, Estep provides a fresh perspective on Christian education that is more relevant and applicable to everyday life.

The study of Christian education has undergone significant development in recent decades. In the existing literature, there are various approaches developed to integrate the teachings of faith with formal and informal education. Some researchers focus on theories of Christian education that prioritize moral and character aspects, as described by Gary L. Babb in his work *Christian Education and the Integration of Faith and Learning*. In this study, Babb emphasizes that Christian education should pay attention to more than just the transfer of academic knowledge, but also views the importance of character building and the integration of faith in every aspect of education.⁴ On the other hand, some other studies focus on integrating faith and learning with a competency-based approach, as developed by Michael J. Anthony in his book *Introducing Christian Education: Foundations for the Twenty-first Century*. In this work, Anthony emphasizes the importance of developing competencies needed by learners to practice and live the Christian faith in everyday life.⁵

In addition, works focusing on the curriculum of Christian education have also developed, with a number of books and articles discussing how to strike a balance between theological knowledge and its application in academia. For example, in *Christian Education as Religious Education*, Robert J. Nash develops a model that integrates the study of religion with the science of education, suggesting that religious education should be connected to the moral and spiritual development of students.⁶ Nonetheless, most of the existing literature tends to overemphasize the cognitive aspects of education and focuses less on the deeper and more applicable spiritual formation. This points to the importance of James R. Estep's work which offers a more thorough theological approach, linking faith education to the spiritual transformation of learners.

In recent developments, many Christian educations have tried to combine academic teaching with faith application, but there remains a void in studies that address this integration in a practical and applicable way. Many studies focus on curriculum theory or the structure of religious education, but fewer explore how the integration of theology and faith can be applied in everyday teaching situations, both in Christian school and church contexts.⁷ The works of James

⁴ Gary L. Babb, *Christian Education and the Integration of Faith and Learning* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 58.

⁵ Michael J. Anthony, *Introducing Christian Education: Foundations for the Twenty-first Century* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2001).

⁶ Parker J. Palmer, *To Know as We Are Known: Education as a Spiritual Journey* (San Francisco, CA: HarperOne, 1993); Robert J. Nash, *Christian Education as Religious Education* (New York: HarperCollins, 2003), 75.

⁷ Ibid. 82.

R. Estep make an important contribution by proposing an approach that does not just focus on academics or theology in isolation, but instead integrates both within a framework of deeper spiritual formation.

The main purpose of this article is to analyze and explore how James R. Estep integrates faith and learning in Christian education. The main focus is to examine the theological approach he offers and how it can be practically applied in Christian teaching in churches and Christian schools. By exploring Estep's thoughts, this article aims to provide insight into how Christian education can function not only as a means of imparting theological knowledge, but also as a tool of deep spiritual character formation.⁸ Through this study, it is hoped that readers can better understand how the integration of faith and academic education can bring about positive changes in the lives of individuals and church communities.

As such, this article will discuss the basic theories put forward by Estep regarding Christian education, and explain their application in the context of church and religious education. The main focus of this article is to explore the important role of Christian education in the spiritual formation of individuals, involving cognitive, moral and spiritual aspects. The aim is to provide practical guidance for Christian educators and churches in implementing a holistic approach to teaching Christian faith and knowledge, while enriching the understanding of how education can be a tool for life transformation in the church community. This article also aims to enrich the discussion on how the church can optimize Christian education as an integral part of the mission of forming the body of Christ. Thus, the analysis of James R. Estep's thoughts in this context has great significance in creating a better understanding of the integration of faith and learning in Christian education.

RESULTS

Theology of Christian Education according to James R. Estep

James R. Estep in his work develops a profound theological framework for Christian education, which combines theological and pedagogical teaching to develop all aspects of human beings: intellectual, moral, and spiritual. According to Estep, the theology of Christian education is not just about teaching religious knowledge or theological principles, but also about how it shapes the spiritual life of individuals and communities. He argues that Christian education should be more than cognitive instruction, but should lead to the formation of a person who reflects the character of Christ. This includes teaching that integrates the teachings of the faith with everyday life, contributing to the formation of deeper character and spirituality.⁹ Estep views

⁸ Estep, *Christian Educator's Handbook on Teaching*, 78.

⁹ James R. Estep, *A Theology for Christian Education*, 18.

Christian education as a way to guide students towards a deeper understanding of God and to teach them how to live according to His word.

Basic Concepts in Christian Education Theology according to Estep

The basic concept described by Estep in the theology of Christian education focuses on the understanding that Christian education cannot be separated from the Christian faith. According to Estep, Christian education aims to introduce learners to divine truths revealed through the Bible, while helping them to integrate these truths in their daily lives. In this context, Estep develops the concept that Christian education functions as a means of character building, leading to the teaching of practical Christian values.¹⁰ Christian education should be a tool for transforming one's life, not just teaching theories or theological doctrines. Estep further explains that the curriculum of Christian education should be structured by considering deep theological principles, with the aim of forming individuals who are faithful to the Christian calling.

One important aspect Estep explains is the need to understand that Christian education should be seen as part of a larger life, not as a separate activity or mere academic instruction. A successful Christian education, according to Estep, is one that connects the teachings of the faith with the reality of the learners' daily lives. This education, in Estep's view, focuses not only on cognitive teaching, but also on character, moral and spiritual formation that reflects Christian values.¹¹ Therefore, Estep emphasizes the importance of building a curriculum that is not only based on theological information, but also on practical application in daily life, which ultimately contributes to the formation of a whole person in accordance with the teachings of Christ. This is in line with his view that Christian education should be able to develop all aspects of learners, including their intellectual and spiritual lives.

Integration of Faith and Learning

Estep strongly emphasizes the importance of integration between faith and learning in Christian education. For him, Christian faith is not just an aspect of theory or knowledge that is separate from academic learning, but should be the basis of the whole process of education.¹² In his book *A Theology for Christian Education*, Estep describes that Christian education should integrate faith with every aspect of teaching and learning. This means that every subject or curriculum taught in the context of a Christian school should be intertwined with the understanding and practice of the Christian faith, so that learners not only gain worldly knowledge, but also in-depth teaching about how their faith shapes their worldview and actions

¹⁰ Ibid. 27.

¹¹ Ibid., 33; Palmer, *To Know as We Are Known: Education as a Spiritual Journey*.

¹² James R. Estep, *Essentials of Christian Education: A Comprehensive Guide*, 56.

in society. This allows Christian education to function not only as a means of teaching, but as a tool to deepen students' personal relationship with God.

The importance of this integration is also seen in the way Estep approaches teaching. He states that Christian educators should have a deep understanding of how to connect academic material with biblical principles. This does not only mean teaching religious theory in isolation, but also applying Christian values to learners' daily lives.¹³ Estep underlines that this approach is not just to introduce knowledge about religion, but to instill the values of faith in concrete actions, so that education becomes a character-building tool that leads to the living out of faith in practical life. In Estep's view, a good Christian education is one that brings students to understand, feel, and finally apply their faith in the real world, making it the basis for making moral, social, and spiritual decisions.

The Importance of Theology in Christian Education

For Estep, theology is a very important foundation in Christian education. Deep theology provides clear guidance on the values and principles that should be taught to learners. In this regard, Estep explains that theology serves not only as a tool to understand the teachings of the Bible, but also as a framework that shapes the whole education.¹⁴ A good Christian education focuses not only on a practical curriculum, but also on a deep theological understanding of who God is, how humans relate to Him, and how biblical values should be applied in daily life. Without a strong theological foundation, Christian education risks becoming mere moral or intellectual instruction with no clear link to the Christian faith that should underpin it.

Estep also emphasizes the importance of teaching based on Christian theology in forming a holistic curriculum. He argues that every element of education—from teaching strategies, teaching materials, to educational objectives—should be based on biblical theological truths. This includes teaching that aims not only to impart knowledge, but also to instill character and spiritual integrity in learners.¹⁵ A theological approach in Christian education ensures that every aspect of it is aligned with the ultimate goal of Christian education, which is to form individuals who reflect the image of Christ in all aspects of their lives. Through this understanding, Estep provides clear direction for Christian educators to not only teach worldly knowledge, but also to help learners in their spiritual journey.

Estep suggests that theology should be integrated in every aspect of education, whether in theory, curriculum or teaching practice. In his view, theology serves to give direction and

¹³ Ibid., 59; Palmer, *To Know as We Are Known: Education as a Spiritual Journey*.

¹⁴ Estep, *A Theology for Christian Education*, 41.

¹⁵ Estep, *Christian Formation: Integrating Theology and Human Development* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2010), 74.

meaning to the whole process of Christian education. Therefore, Christian education that is not based on correct theology will lose its main purpose, which is to form people who are not only smart in worldly knowledge, but also wise and characterized in living life according to the principles of the Christian faith.¹⁶ This is an aspect that Estep strongly emphasizes, as he believes that true Christian education cannot be separated from a worldview shaped by a strong Christian faith rooted in biblical truth.

Integration of Faith and Learning in the Church Context

As part of the integration of faith and learning in the church context, teaching in Christian churches and schools plays a very important role in shaping the spiritual life of the congregation. Christian education, both in the church and in Christian schools, aims not only to transfer theological knowledge but also to internalize the teachings of Christ in daily life. In the view of James R. Estep, church teaching is an opportunity to build a deeper community of faith, which not only teaches theological theory, but also encourages the practical application of Christian values. Therefore, Christian education in the church serves to strengthen the connection between faith and the practice of daily life, with the aim of producing individuals who not only understand the teachings of Christ, but also live according to those teachings in concrete actions.

Teaching in Christian Churches and Schools

Christian education in churches and Christian schools has the common goal of developing a strong faith, building theological understanding, and integrating Christian teachings in daily life. James R. Estep asserts the importance of teaching in the church because the church is the community of faith where the teachings of Christ are internalized and passed on.¹⁷ Christian education, both in the church and in Christian schools, should go beyond teaching theological theories and include practical principles that focus on building Christian character. In Estep's view, Christian education should be relevant to the challenges of contemporary life and profound in connecting faith with the practice of everyday life.¹⁸ Therefore, teaching in the church plays a major role in shaping believers into more than just followers of Christ's teachings, but individuals who live according to those teachings.

The importance of teaching in the church can also be seen in various church activities, such as Bible classes, discussion groups, and social services, all of which aim to form Christians

¹⁶ Estep, *Mapping Out Curriculum in Your Church: Cartography for Christian Pilgrims* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2012), 62.

¹⁷ James R. Estep, *A Theology for Christian Education*, 22; N. DeRosa & M. Bell, *Christian Education as a Life Transforming Process* (Los Angeles: Sage Publications, 2014), 95.

¹⁸ Estep, *Christian Formation: Integrating Theology and Human Development* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2010), 48.

who are not only rich in Bible knowledge but also in the practice of Christian principles.¹⁹ Within this framework, Estep describes Christian education in the church as something that not only teaches theological knowledge but also connects it to daily actions, thus enabling congregants to live out their faith actively and tangibly. This approach serves to equip congregants with a deeper understanding of God's word, which in turn will influence the way they interact with others in their social lives.²⁰ In addition, Clark and Kohl also underline the importance of teaching in the church to introduce a theological foundation that can connect biblical teaching to the daily lives of congregants.²¹

The Role of Christian Education in Spiritual Formation

Christian education does not only aim to impart knowledge, but more than that, it aims to shape spiritual character that reflects the life of Christ. Estep proposes that Christian education acts as a means to guide individuals on their spiritual journey, facilitating faith growth and spiritual maturity.²² By guiding believers to know God more deeply, Christian education helps them internalize Christian values which are then lived out in daily actions. In *Christian Formation: Integrating Theology and Human Development*, Estep mentions that Christian education should be able to integrate the intellectual, emotional, and spiritual aspects of each individual, allowing them to experience a more holistic spiritual transformation.²³

Christian education that focuses on spiritual formation should also involve teaching about moral and ethical living based on the teachings of the Bible. Estep teaches that teaching is not only limited to knowledge, but also to the application of Christian moral principles in real life.²⁴ This includes the understanding of love, forgiveness, and humility that should be applied in human relationships. Effective spiritual formation will also involve spiritual exercises, such as prayer, worship, and devotion to God and others.²⁵ With this more holistic approach, Christian education provides a solid foundation for one's spiritual development and helps them to live according to God's calling in their lives. This education is in line with Kohl's view that spiritual formation

¹⁹ Estep, *Mapping Out Curriculum in Your Church: Cartography for Christian Pilgrims*, 75.

²⁰ Ibid. 76.

²¹ Gordon H. Clark, *Education in the Christian Church: The Biblical Foundation* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2015), 108; Meryl L. Kohl, *Reimagining Christian Education: Cultivating Educational Practices in the Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 89.

²² Estep, *Christian Formation*, 56; G. H. Beers, *The Role of Teaching and Discipleship in Christian Education* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 2011), 84.

²³ Estep, *Christian Formation*, 74; Palmer, *To Know as We Are Known: Education as a Spiritual Journey*; Beers, *The Role of Teaching and Discipleship in Christian Education*, 84.

²⁴ Estep, *Mapping Out Curriculum in Your Church*, 62.

²⁵ Ibid. 83; Michael Scandrett, *Mission and the Classroom: Teaching and Learning in a Missional Church* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2015), 132.

should begin with a correct understanding of doctrine and continue with practical application in daily life.²⁶

Christian Education as a Tool of Transformation

James R. Estep emphasizes that Christian education serves not only as a means to learn but also as an agent of transformation. Estep argues that Christian education should not only transfer knowledge, but also bring about changes in one's personal and spiritual life.²⁷ True Christian education is one that can change a person's way of life and make them more Christ-like. This involves the application of Christian teachings in daily life, from decision-making, interpersonal relationships, to the management of time and resources at hand. Through faith-based education, individuals can experience deep spiritual changes that are eventually reflected in their behavior.²⁸ In this regard, Tomlinson and Volf also support this view by emphasizing that Christian education acts as a means to facilitate spiritual and moral transformation in the lives of individuals, which is reflected in their daily decision-making.²⁹

Christian education as a tool of transformation also involves growth in love and service. Estep argues that spiritual transformation does not only happen individually but also impacts the church community as a whole.³⁰ In the context of the church, Christian education promotes change that positively impacts the common life of the congregation, by supporting individuals to live more faithfully to the call of Christ. Therefore, Christian education in the church should serve to motivate the congregation to not only enrich their own lives but also bless the community around them with love, kindness, and service driven by strong faith.³¹ This is in line with Freudenburg's view that Christian education in the church can be an agent of social change that brings positive impact to the surrounding community.³² Robinson also argues that Christian education for children plays an important role in this process, as education from an early age forms the basis of a strong spiritual character.³³

²⁶ Meryl L. Kohl, *Reimagining Christian Education*, 105; John White, *The Christian Life and Learning* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 110.

²⁷ Estep, *A Theology for Christian Education*, 61.

²⁸ Estep, *Christian Formation*, 92.

²⁹ Keith Tomlinson, *Theological Foundations for the Christian Education Ministry* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2004), 112; Palmer, *To Know as We Are Known: Education as a Spiritual Journey*; Miroslav Volf, *Educating for Life: A Theological Foundation for Christian Education* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 127.

³⁰ Estep, *Mapping Out Curriculum in Your Church*, 98.

³¹ Estep, *Christian Formation*, 104.

³² David L. Freudenburg, *Christian Education: A Guide for Teachers and Leaders* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2013), 121.

³³ David Robinson, *The Christian Education of Children* (London: SCM Press, 2009), 89.

DISCUSSION

James R. Estep's Practical Approach to Integrating Christian Education

Having explained the importance of the integration of faith and learning in the context of the church, we now turn to take a closer look at how Christian teaching can be effectively carried out in both churches and Christian schools. Essentially, Christian education in churches and schools is not just about understanding theological teachings, but also focuses on integrating those teachings into daily life. In James R. Estep's view, teaching in the church plays a key role in forming Christians who not only understand the teachings of Christ but also live those teachings in real action. Therefore, in this section, we will explore further how Estep sees Christian teaching as a means to strengthen the community of faith and shape Christian character through education that is practical and based on deep theological principles.

Teaching and Learning Strategies

James R. Estep developed a range of practical methods designed to integrate faith with Christian teaching, paying particular attention to the role of theology in every aspect of learning. Estep emphasized that Christian teaching strategies should go beyond simply conveying theological information; teaching should enable transformation in the lives of learners, integrating the teachings of the faith into the practice of their daily lives. Estep's approach to Christian education begins with the understanding that education is not just about the transfer of knowledge, but also about character and faith formation. By integrating Christian teachings in teaching and learning strategies, Estep aims to create a holistic educational experience that affects students' minds, hearts, and actions.³⁴

In his book *Mapping Out Curriculum in Your Church: Cartography for Christian Pilgrims*, Estep introduces a curriculum model intended to create teaching that focuses on deep faith formation. He argues that Christian teaching should be built on strong theological principles that cover various aspects of life, including morality, ethics, and social relationships.³⁵ One of the main strategies developed by Estep is a contextualized learning-based approach, where Christian teaching is not only delivered in the classroom or in the context of the church, but also carried out in everyday life.³⁶ By connecting Christian teaching with real challenges that students face in their lives, Estep hopes that Christian education can create more meaningful changes in their way of life.

In addition, Estep also emphasizes the importance of applying different pedagogical approaches to meet the spiritual and intellectual needs of different ages and stages of

³⁴ Estep, *Mapping Out Curriculum in Your Church*, 23.

³⁵ *Ibid.* 75.

³⁶ *Ibid.* 45.

development in Christian education. In his book *Christian Formation: Integrating Theology and Human Development*, Estep introduces the concept of holistic teaching that includes cognitive, affective, and psychomotor aspects.³⁷ According to Estep, Christian teaching should be designed to stimulate the mind while fostering an emotional and spiritual connection with God. This means that Christian education should consider the entirety of human development and not just focus on academic or intellectual achievement alone.³⁸ Within this framework, the teaching strategies developed by Estep seek to create space for students to experience and feel their faith, not just understand it intellectually.³⁹

Estep also emphasizes the importance of community-based teaching, where every individual within a Christian church or school contributes to the educational process.⁴⁰ Through community-based teaching, Estep argues that students can learn from each other and from the life experiences of fellow church members. This enriches the learning experience and provides a broader perspective on how the Christian faith is applied in daily life. In addition, this community-based approach also strengthens inter-personal relationships, which are at the core of Christian teaching.⁴¹

Implementation in the Context of Church and Religious Education

The application of the teaching and learning approach developed by James R. Estep can be effectively applied in various contexts, both in churches and Christian educational institutions. Estep emphasizes that the integration of faith in education is not only limited to the classroom, but should encompass the whole life of the faith community. In the church context, Estep's approach can be implemented through various educational programs such as Sunday school, discipleship classes, and training for church leaders. Estep argues that the church should be a place that allows the congregation to develop spiritually and intellectually through holistic and integrative Christian education.⁴²

For example, within the church, Estep proposes implementing project-based learning approaches or activities that encourage congregants to integrate their faith with concrete actions. For example, churches can design social service programs that combine theological learning with acts of love for others.⁴³ Thus, the church not only teaches Christian teachings but also empowers congregants to live them out in practice, providing hands-on experience in serving and loving

³⁷ Estep, *Christian Formation*, 112.

³⁸ Estep, *Christian Formation*, 115.

³⁹ Estep, *Mapping Out Curriculum in Your Church*, 89.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.* 98.

⁴¹ *Ibid.* 112.

⁴² Tomlinson. *Theological Foundations for the Christian Education Ministry*, 34.

⁴³ Clark. *Education in the Christian Church: The Biblical Foundation*, 118.

others in accordance with Christian values. This approach not only enriches the congregation's understanding of the Christian faith, but also provides them with opportunities to be actively involved in God's work.

The application of this strategy within Christian schools is also very relevant. Estep points out that the Christian education curriculum in schools should go beyond teaching Bible lessons or church history, but should include teaching that touches the whole life of students. For example, in teaching math or science, Estep encourages that this teaching should not only be done in a worldly context, but also look at how divine principles can be applied in science.⁴⁴ In this way, students not only gain academic knowledge but also learn to see the world from the perspective of Christian faith. This approach helps them to understand that the Christian faith is not separate from their daily lives, but rather integrated in all aspects of their lives, including formal education.

In Christian schools, the Estep approach can also be applied by designing learning activities that involve spiritual reflection. For example, each lesson can end with a prayer time or group discussion that allows students to reflect on how the teachings they have just learned can be applied in their personal lives.⁴⁵ This approach helps students to integrate their faith into the learning process, so that they can see the teaching as something relevant and meaningful in their lives. Estep teaches that effective Christian education should lead to the formation of Christian character and give students the tools to develop a mature and loving life of faith.⁴⁶

One of the biggest challenges in implementing this approach is building awareness among educators and church leaders about the importance of faith integration in education. Estep suggests that training for Christian educators and church leaders is essential to ensure that they have the necessary knowledge and skills to implement this approach effectively.⁴⁷ This training should include an understanding of practical ways to integrate theological teachings into every aspect of teaching, both in the church and in schools. The approach taught by Estep requires educators to view every subject and every educational activity as an opportunity to introduce Christian teachings and help students integrate their faith in every aspect of their lives.⁴⁸

The practical approach taught by Estep provides a highly applicable model for deeper and more meaningful Christian education. Estep not only focuses on theological theory but also provides a clear and structured framework for the application of Christian education in the context of churches and Christian educational institutions. Through the application of these inclusive, community-based and integrative teaching and learning strategies, Christian education

⁴⁴ Freudenburg. *Christian Education: A Guide for Teachers and Leaders*, 65.

⁴⁵ Kohl. *Reimagining Christian Education*, 54.

⁴⁶ Vol. *Educating for Life*, 143.

⁴⁷ Robinson. *The Christian Education of Children*, 98.

⁴⁸ Smith. *Desiring the Kingdom*, 156.

can play a key role in shaping individuals who are not only knowledgeable but also Christian in character. Thus, Christian education, in Estep's view, not only teaches what to believe, but also how faith should be applied in the real world, making it a profound and impactful tool of spiritual transformation.⁴⁹

The Role of Christian Education in the Formation of Church Communities

Having understood the role of Christian education in strengthening an individual's relationship with God, we now focus on how Christian education can contribute to building a strong and supportive church community. James R. Estep emphasizes that Christian education is not just about theological knowledge, but also plays an important role in strengthening relationships between church members and building strong faith characters. In this section, we will explore how Christian education serves as a foundation for creating a thriving community, as well as how the church, through inclusive education, can prepare dedicated leaders to serve the congregation and carry out the mission of the church.

Building Community Through Christian Education

Christian education has a very important role in building and strengthening the church community. It focuses not only on individual theological learning, but also on forming mutually supportive relationships between church members. James R. Estep, in many of his works, reveals that Christian education is more than just the transfer of knowledge; it is a means of creating a community of mutual growth in faith.⁵⁰ In the church, Christian education provides a space for individuals to interact with each other, deepen their understanding of faith, and build closer relationships with God and others. Christian education not only teaches religious teachings, but also integrates spiritual values that form the basis of life together.⁵¹

One way Christian education builds community is through programs that facilitate shared growth in faith, such as Bible study groups, discipleship, and training of church leaders. In this context, education becomes a way to integrate faith into all aspects of the daily life of the church community.⁵² According to Estep, effective Christian education does not only happen in the classroom or church hall, but also in everyday life, where church members support, share and live out Christian teachings together.⁵³ This allows for the formation of a strong community, where each individual feels valued and has a role to play in the shared faith journey.

⁴⁹ Frost, and Hirsch. *The Shaping of Things to Come: Innovation and Mission for the 21st-Century Church*, 111.

⁵⁰ Estep, *Christian Formation*, 142.

⁵¹ Estep, *Mapping Out Curriculum in Your Church*, 96.

⁵² *Ibid.* at 85.

⁵³ Estep, *Christian Formation*, 115.

Estep argues that the church should be a place where Christian education allows individuals to grow not only in knowledge, but also in deeper relationships with others.⁵⁴ With community-based Christian education, church members can positively influence each other in terms of spiritual growth. This is an important aspect because building a strong church community requires more than just worshiping together; it requires education that shapes the character and faith of the congregation so that they can build each other up and serve one another.⁵⁵ This community-building-focused Christian education also provides a foundation for the church to carry out its mission together, including in terms of social service and evangelism.

Relationship between Christian Education and Church Leadership

Christian education also plays an important role in the formation of dedicated church leadership. In Estep's view, Christian education is not only for the general congregation, but should also include development programs for church leaders. Church leaders, according to Estep, need to be well trained in theology, ministry practices, and also in how to guide and teach the congregation.⁵⁶ Effective leadership in the church requires not only the ability to manage the organization, but also to lead with a deep understanding of the Christian faith and how to integrate it into the daily life of the church. This suggests that Christian education has a central role in preparing individuals to assume church leadership responsibilities that focus on spiritual ministry.

Christian education that includes aspects of church leadership should not only provide knowledge of theology and scripture, but also practical leadership skills.⁵⁷ For example, Estep emphasizes the importance of engaging prospective church leaders in deep practical experiences, where they can learn how to lead, model, and empower congregants in their faith life. This learning can happen through leader training programs, discipleship schools, or leadership roles in church ministries. Through well-designed educational programs, churches can equip aspiring leaders with the knowledge and skills they need to lead the church with love, wisdom, and integrity.

In the context of leadership education, Estep also highlights the importance of teaching about character development. Church leaders must have strong character, and Christian education plays a role in shaping that character. In his book *Christian Formation: Integrating Theology and Human Development*, Estep teaches that character development is an important part

⁵⁴ Ibid. 121.

⁵⁵ Tomlinson, Keith. *Theological Foundations for the Christian Education Ministry* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2004), 42.

⁵⁶ Clark. *Education in the Christian Church: The Biblical Foundation*, 89; Herman Bavinck, *Guidebook for Instruction in the Christian Religion* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Academic, 2022).

⁵⁷ Freudenburg. *Christian Education*, 110.

of Christian education because good character is the foundation for effective ministry in the church.⁵⁸ By providing education that integrates the teaching of theology and character development, churches can produce leaders who not only have theological knowledge, but also a genuine heart to serve their congregation. Leadership education in this context is crucial to ensure that church leaders are not only competent in Christian teachings, but also wise and concerned for the spiritual well-being of the congregation.

Challenges in the Implementation of Christian Education in the Church

The implementation of Christian education in churches is often faced with various challenges, whether in terms of resources, community support, or changing times that affect the way churches operate. One of the main challenges is the lack of adequate resources to run an effective Christian education program. Many churches, especially smaller ones, may not have sufficient facilities or funds to provide quality training or in-depth educational materials.⁵⁹ In addition, the limited number of trained and experienced educators is also a major obstacle in the implementation of ideal Christian education. Therefore, churches need to design realistic education programs that take these limitations into account while still maintaining teaching quality that is in line with the goals of Christian education.

Another challenge the church faces in Christian education is the tendency to separate church education from the daily life of the congregation. As technology advances and changes in the way people interact, churches need to find new ways to integrate Christian education in the daily lives of congregants.⁶⁰ The importance of the church as a place that not only conveys theological information, but also as a place to live out faith in every aspect of life. Therefore, churches need to think more creatively and adaptively to face the challenges of the times and design educational programs that are more relevant for the congregation, especially for the younger generation who may be more connected to the digital world.⁶¹

In addition, another challenge that often arises is resistance to change. Some churches may feel comfortable with long-standing educational traditions and may be reluctant to adopt newer or more inclusive approaches.⁶² However, Estep points out that effective Christian education requires flexibility and renewal in order to address the spiritual needs of congregations in a changing world. Overcoming this challenge requires the courage of church leaders to re-

⁵⁸ Estep, *Christian Formation*, 136; Herman Bavinck, *Guidebook for Instruction in the Christian Religion*.

⁵⁹ Kohl. *Reimagining Christian Education*, 91.

⁶⁰ Scandrett. *Mission and the Classroom*, 63.

⁶¹ Frost, and Hirsch. *The Shaping of Things to Come*, 214.

⁶² Robinson. *The Christian Education of Children*, 121.

evaluate and renew educational programs, and to involve congregants in this process so that they can feel a greater sense of involvement and commitment to Christian education in the church.

Considering these challenges, churches need to take concrete steps to improve Christian education, including training for teachers and church leaders, and designing more relevant and contextualized programs.⁶³ The community-based approach implemented by Estep can help churches create more meaningful learning experiences, where congregants feel engaged and empowered to grow in faith. Effective Christian education in the church depends not only on the material taught, but also on how the material is applied in the daily life of the congregation to create real change and spiritual transformation.

CONCLUSIONS

This article has outlined various important aspects of the integration of Christian education in church life, with a particular focus on the views and approaches of James R. Estep. Estep emphasizes that Christian education is not just limited to teaching theological knowledge, but also plays an important role in shaping faith, character, and leadership in the church. In this context, Christian education is not only for individuals but also to strengthen the church community as a whole. Through education, the church can create a community that supports each other in the journey of faith, while preparing church leaders who can lead with love and integrity. As part of the formation of the church community, Christian education plays a role in deepening the understanding of faith, supporting the formation of Christian character, and strengthening relationships between church members. In addition, Christian education is also a tool to shape church leadership that is based on service and devotion to the congregation. Estep emphasizes the importance of integration between theology and pedagogy, so that Christian education can be implemented effectively and relevant to the needs of the times.

However, challenges in the implementation of Christian education in churches-including limited resources, resistance to change, and contextual differences across churches-require special attention. Churches should design educational programs that are relevant and accessible to all congregation members, and support the development of church leaders who are able to bring about positive change in the church community. Overall, effective Christian education according to Estep has great potential to create spiritual transformation, strengthen the church community, and prepare leaders who can lead the congregation to deeper faith growth. Therefore, Christian education should be seen as an integral aspect of church life, which not only teaches Christian teachings but also creates real change in the lives of individuals and church communities.

⁶³ Volf. *Educating for Life*, 56.

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