

InFo
Vol. 5, No. 1
April 2002,
Pp. 65 - 80

Ellen White and the "Harmonious Development" Concept

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Ellen G. White (1827-1915), a founder of the Adventist educational system, defines education as "the harmonious development of the physical, mental, and the spiritual powers" (Ed 13). This "harmonious development" phrase has, in fact, become a motto within Seventh-day Adventist education, to the extent that it appears in the vast majority of Adventist educational bulletins, typically under the section of philosophy and purpose.

A contemporary of White, John Franklin Bobbitt (1876-1956), has taken exception, however, to the use of this phrase. He notes, "Objectives that are only vague high-sounding hopes and aspirations are to be avoided. Examples are: 'Character building,' [and] the 'harmonious development'" (*How to Make a Curriculum*, 1924, Boston: Houghton Mifflin, p. 33). It was the purpose of the present study to determine if Ellen White has amplified her intent of "harmonious development" elsewhere in her writings and if she delineates, in practical terms, intermediate steps to facilitate this purpose.

To answer these questions, a search was conducted to identify passages in the works of Ellen White in which the concept of harmonious human development was discussed. Although a significant portion of White's writings on educational topics are contained in four works? namely, *Education*, *Counsels on Education*, *Fundamentals of Christian Education*, and *Counsels to Parents, Teachers, and Students*, there are also numerous articles as well as portions of other works that address the educational process. For purposes of comprehensiveness, this document analysis utilized the *Complete Published Ellen G. White Writings, Version 3.0* (1998, Silver Spring, MD: Ellen G. White Estate), available on CD-ROM.

As a result of this search, fifty distinct references utilizing the key term were identified. (A listing of these passages appears as an appendix to this article.) Furthermore, conceptually related terms (e.g., balanced, symmetrical) were also included in the investigation. Once these excerpts had been identified, content analysis was conducted focusing on the principal themes of *significance*, *areas of development*, and *ways and means*. To facilitate reading, as well as provide ready access to these references, a system of two- or three-letter abbreviations to White's literary works has been utilized throughout this report (see the Bibliography for full references).

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Importance of a Harmonious Development

It does appear that Ellen White placed significant value on the concept of harmonious development, both within the educational context and in the crucible of life itself.

True education, White proposes, should result in well-balanced minds (CT 295-96; MYP 239) and harmonious characters (4T 608) conditions that will subsequently be evidenced in a clear, strong intellect and in sound judgment (ST 1880/5/6, par. 10). In this harmonious state, students can study better (SpM 53), preparing themselves more fully for usefulness in this world and acquiring a moral fitness for the immortal life (1MCP 360; 4T 425). The rationale provided is that an individual cannot achieve the highest potential of any faculty unless all are developed as a whole (CT 541; CP 67), and that only an educational process focused on harmonious development will yield results that endure throughout eternity (COL 330; 1MCP 360; MYP 168).

White provides some illustrative cases. She notes, for example, that when God created mankind, all of Adam's faculties were well-balanced (Con 19; Te 11), and further maintains that the primary aim of education is to restore man to this original harmonious state (Ed 13; PP 595). She observes that individuals of influence, such as Moses and Daniel, are those who have developed harmoniously (CE 52; FE 119), and upholds Jesus Christ as the prime example of a "perfectly harmonious" life (18MR 112). Furthermore, she asserts that all who are saved in heaven will have developed harmonious characters (3T 364).

In the life experience, White proposes that a harmonious development results in happiness (GW 92; 1MCP 112; 4T 417) and in the blessing of God (1MR 343), while its absence will yield deformity in one's life (18MR 205). She maintains that a well-developed Christian life is "harmonious in all its parts" (Con 67), and that such a life will be a light in the world (CT 505), a powerful witness that will save others from ruin (5MR 405; SpM 92).

Areas Included in a Harmonious Development

What dimensions are to receive harmonious development? In writing on this subject, White proposes a variety of factors that should mature in a balanced manner. One of the most common dyads identified is that of mind and body (CE 124; 1MCP 112; 4T 417), alternatively described as brain and muscles (1MR 34) or as the physical and mental faculties (CG 293; CT 53; 1MCP 360; MYP 168; RH

1900/7/3, par. 12; STE 47). Another frequently designated dyad focuses on the harmonious development of the mental and moral powers (BE 1892/9/1, par. 10; CT 541; LHU 91; 2MCP 374; MYP 394), sometimes identified as a balance of knowledge and character (CT 505) or of literary and spiritual training (FE 255).

White then combines these dimensions in her frequently cited triad of physical, mental, and moral development (FE 57, 434; HR 1874/3/1, par. 17; 1MCP 360; 4T 425; TSA 60), also described as the harmony of body, mind, and heart (MH 398). It should be noted, however, that even in the classic "harmonious development" reference (Ed 13), a fourth dimension seems to enter. After noting that true education harmoniously develops the physical, mental, and spiritual powers, she observes that such training "prepares the student for the joy of service in this world and for the higher joy of wider service in the world to come." The incorporation of this social dimension is further born out in White's assertions that mind, soul and body are all to be used for uplifting fellowman (1MCP 359; PP 595); that body, mind, and soul are to be trained for divine service (COL 330); and that the physical, mental, and moral faculties are to be developed for the performance of every duty (1MCP 360; MYP 168).

It should be noted, however, that a number of statements take a somewhat different approach. These alternate groupings include the harmony of the emotions, words, and actions (Con 18); of nerve, muscle, and will (RH 1904/5/26, par. 11); and of brain, bone, and muscle (MH 398; SpM 53), all of which are to be employed in active service (ML 136; MM 296). In a final grouping, Ellen White states that "harmonious development" includes temperance, kindness, and godliness, or stated somewhat differently, a duty to ourselves, to our neighbors, and to God (CG 39). The underlying concept seems to be that there must be a balanced, symmetrical development "on every point," particularly as this relates to one's life and character (RH 1904/1/14, par. 3).

Ways and Means to a Harmonious Development

We now address Franklin Bobbitt's primary concern and ask, How is this "harmonious development" to take place? How can we translate this ideal into educational practice?

In response, Ellen White provides two fundamental approaches. The first is to include in the educational experience certain curricular components that complement the traditionally cognitive emphasis of classical education. These ingredients focus on psychomotor, social, affective, and spiritual dimensions. The second approach is more didactic in nature and focuses on instructional techniques that seek to develop a personal but also balanced profile of traits and abilities.

A common theme in White's works on education is the importance of physical development concomitant with cognitive learning processes. She advocates, for example, that students should combine "body and mind exercise," rather than dedicate their entire time in school to sedentary learning (TSA 60). In order to attain this balance, schools must establish a system of physical culture (CE 124) and of practical, work-oriented physical training (CT 296; MYP 239). This concept of manual labor as a vital curricular dimension is consequently developed quite extensively in White's educational writings.

The incorporation of social skills and activities constitutes a second curricular component that aims to bring about the learner's harmonious development. White advocates that students should engage in cooperative learning activities, avoiding situations of rivalry and intense competition (3T 424). Furthermore, they should participate in community-oriented service activities, designed as an integral part of the learning experience (RH 1891/9/29, par. 5; YI 1898/4/21, par. 9). Finally, the social dimension should include an element of witness, in which learners share with others their understanding of and experience with God (MM 217; 3T 466).

Affective elements, including values and attitudes, constitute the third curricular component aimed at a balanced development. A key theme here is the concept of excellence. In order to develop harmoniously, White proposes that students must resolve to do their best in every learning activity (1MR 343), aiming to reach the highest degree of excellence (1MCP 359; PP 595) in order to uplift fellow men and glorify God (CE 52; FE 119). Students must also develop self-reliance (CG 39; FE 57) and cultivate habits of order and self-discipline (RH 1904/5/26, par. 11). In this endeavor, resolute effort is required on the part of the learner (RH 1904/5/26, par. 11), and teachers must avoid any vestige of indulgence or flattery (3T 364). In essence, students must progressively develop a virtuous character and a stable, coherent personality (RH 1904/1/14, par. 3; ST 1880/5/6, par. 10).

As a religious educator, Ellen White places considerable emphasis on the spiritual life, which she holds as integral to any developmental process. She maintains, for example, that students need both literary and spiritual training (FE 255), and that their harmonious development is compromised by moral depravity (HR 1873/7/1, par. 28). Although spiritual growth comes about through divine agencies (20MR 192), human beings must still cooperate actively with God (18 MR 205). This occurs when the learner obtains a correct understanding of God's will (3T 466), seeks to be guided by the Holy Spirit (CT 37; DA 251; LHU 91), and commits himself to serve and please God in every aspect of life (1MCP 51). This, in turn, is brought about through studying the Bible (FE 434; RH 1900/7/3, par. 12) and taking the principles of God's Word as guide for all the affairs of life (ST 1880/5/6, par. 10; YI 1899/6/15, par. 7). In essence, faith in God must be reflected

in the attitudes, priorities, decisions, and activities of one's life.

In addition to the curricular components, Ellen White also proposes a number of instructional interventions that seek to bring about harmonious development. A key strategy seems to be that teachers, parents, and the learners themselves must repress or restrain traits that are too prominent while concurrently cultivating those that are deficient (FE 66). Teachers and students, for example, should avoid overemphasizing a favorite topic or branch of study to the neglect of others perhaps equally important (CT 232). Although recognizing that one's gifts and talents are to be cultivated (CG 166), there must be a simultaneous development of the weaker traits and abilities (CG 39; FE 57). This can be accomplished by taking particular care to strengthen the underdeveloped points through nurture and exercise (ST 1886/10/28, par. 2).

To this end, teachers and parents must institute an effective course of redemptive discipline (3T 532), avoiding damaging leniency and permissive indulgence (RH 1900/7/3, par. 12). Such discipline, however, is not to focus on punishment, but rather on developing the individual's understanding of their inclinations, consistently endeavoring to "bend them toward the right" (ST 1877/12/20, par. 3).

In essence, each dimension of the individual is to be equally taxed and symmetrically cultivated (MM 296; ML 136). Such harmonious development is the result of continual dependence on divine grace, faithful improvement of every opportunity, a purpose to develop harmoniously, and earnest effort invested to accomplish this end (HR 1874/3/1, par. 17; RH 1892/8/30, par. 4).

Conclusion

Based upon an examination of her writings, it appears that Ellen White not only emphasized the importance of the harmonious development concept and identified those areas to be included in this development, but that she also defined specific curricular approaches and instructional processes contributing to this end. Thus it seems that White has successfully deflected Franklin Bobbit's criticism that "harmonious development" is but a lofty, vague aspiration.

Bobbit's concern, however, may be warranted. It could be possible that Seventh-day Adventist educational institutions, having adopted this motto of harmonious development but not having been sufficiently concerned about its implementation, have in effect adopted a "high-sounding hope" that finds little supporting evidence in educational practice. Perhaps it behooves contemporary Adventist educators to closely examine White's proposed strategies for implementation and endeavor to discover how these might best be employed within their particular contexts.

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- [SpM] *Spaulding and Maga's Unpublished Manuscript Testimonies of Ellen G. White*. 1915-1916. (Reprinted 1985.) Payson, AZ: Leaves-of-Autumn Books.
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- [YI] *Youth's Instructor, Journal*.

Appendix

References from the Writings of Ellen G. White

- [BE 1892/9/1, par. 10] The greatest work the teacher can do is to influence those who are under his care to become Christians. Then the cultivation of the mental powers will not hinder the harmonious development of the moral powers. Divine grace will give clearness and force to the understanding and he who has a virtuous character will become a bright light in the world. He will represent Christ in a well-ordered life and Godly conversation.
- [CE 52] See FE 119.
- [CE 124] It is essential that students exercise their physical powers in such a way that their physical strength shall not be disproportionate to their mental development, and therefore a judicious system of physical culture should be combined with school discipline, that there may be a harmonious development of all the powers of mind and body.
- [CG 39] The nature of man is threefold, and the training enjoined by Solomon comprehends the right development of the physical, intellectual, and moral powers. To perform this work aright, parents and teachers must themselves understand "the way the child should go." This embraces more than a knowledge of books or the learning of the schools. It comprehends the practice of temperance, brotherly kindness, and godliness; the discharge of our duty to ourselves, to our neighbors, and to God?. So far as possible, every child should be trained to self-reliance. By calling into exercise the various faculties, he will learn where he is strongest, and in what he is deficient. A wise instructor will give special attention to the development of the weaker traits, that the child may form a well-balanced, harmonious character.
- [CG 166] It is only by the right use of the talents that the character can develop harmoniously.
- [CG 293] See CT 64.
- [CG 394] The harmonious, healthy action of all the powers of the body and mind results in happiness; and the more elevated and refined the powers, the more pure and unalloyed the happiness.
- [COL 330] And those who would be workers together with God must strive for perfection of every organ of the body and quality of the mind. True education is the preparation of the physical, mental, and moral powers for the

performance of every duty; it is the training of body, mind, and soul for divine service. This is the education that will endure unto eternal life.

- [Con 18] Adam was then created in the image of God and placed upon probation. He had a perfectly developed organism. All his faculties were harmonious. In all his emotions, words, and actions, there was a perfect conformity to the will of his Maker.
- [Con 67] The light of heaven is to be reflected through Christ's followers to the world. This is the Christian's lifework to direct the minds of sinners to God. The Christian's life should awaken in the hearts of worldlings high and elevated views of the purity of the Christian religion. This will make believers the salt of the earth, the saving power in our world; for a well-developed Christian character is harmonious in all its parts.
- [CT 37] The faculties devoted unreservedly to God, under the guidance of the divine Spirit, develop steadily and harmoniously.
- [CT 64] True education means more than taking a certain course of study. It is broad. It includes the harmonious development of all the physical powers and the mental faculties. It teaches the love and fear of God, and is a preparation for the faithful discharge of life's duties.
- [CT 232] No one branch of study should receive special attention to the neglect of others equally important. Some teachers devote much time to a favorite branch, drilling the students upon every point, and praising them for their progress, while in everything else these students may be deficient. Such instructors are doing their pupils a great wrong. They are depriving them of that harmonious development of the mental powers which they should have, as well as of knowledge which they sorely need.
- [CT 295-296] In order for men and women to have well-balanced minds, all the powers of the being should be called into use and developed. There are in this world many who are one-sided because only one set of faculties has been cultivated, while others are dwarfed from inaction. The education of many youth is a failure. They overstudy, while they neglect that which pertains to the practical life. That the balance of the mind may be maintained, a judicious system of physical work should be combined with mental work, that there may be a harmonious development of all the powers.
- [CT 505] Knowledge harmoniously blended with a Christlike character will make a man a light in the world.

- [CT 541] The improvement of the mind is a duty, which we owe to ourselves, to society, and to God. But we should never devise means for the cultivation of the intellect at the expense of the moral and the spiritual. And it is only by the harmonious development of both the mental and the moral faculties that the highest perfection of either can be attained.
- [DA 251] Under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the mind that is devoted unreservedly to God develops harmoniously.
- [Ed 13] Our ideas of education take too narrow and too low a range. There is need of a broader scope, a higher aim. True education means more than the pursuit of a certain course of study. It means more than a preparation for the life that now is. It has to do with the whole being, and with the whole period of existence possible to man. It is the harmonious development of the physical, the mental, and the spiritual powers. It prepares the student for the joy of service in this world and for the higher joy of wider service in the world to come.
- [FE 57] See CG 39.
- [FE 66] Fathers and mothers should carefully and prayerfully study the characters of their children. They should seek to repress and restrain those traits that are too prominent, and to encourage others which may be deficient, thus securing harmonious development.
- [FE 119] It is the work of each individual to develop and strengthen the gifts which God has lent him, with which to do most earnest, practical work, both in temporal and religious things. If all realized this, what a vast difference we should see in our schools, in our churches, and in our missions! But the larger number are content with a meager knowledge, a few attainments, just to be passable; and the necessity of being men like Daniel and Moses, men of influence, men whose characters have become harmonious by their working to bless humanity and glorify God, such an experience but few have had, and the result is, there are but few now fitted for the great want of the times.
- [FE 255] The minds of men need literary as well as spiritual training that they may be harmoniously developed.
- [FE 426] The harmonious action of all the parts, brain, bone, and muscle, is necessary to the full and healthful development of the entire human organism.
- [FE 434] The result of such Bible study will be well-balanced minds; for the physical, mental, and moral powers will be harmoniously developed.

- [HR 1873/7/1, par. 28] There is too much of the moral weakness of depravity in the human soul to permit its harmonious and useful development without the restraints and aids of grace.
- [HR 1874/3/1, par. 17] If woman would answer the object of God in her creation she would claim the aid of divine grace, and by faithful improvement of every heavenly gift aim to high and harmonious development of physical, mental, and moral strength.
- [LHU 91] It is the precious privilege of children and youth to yield their minds to the control of the Spirit of God and become intellectual Christians. Their mental and moral powers may grow in harmonious proportions. Their understanding may be strong, their consciences, pure, and their characters, lovely.
- [1MCP 51] Those who are determined to make the will of God their own must serve and please God in everything. Then the character will be harmonious and well-balanced, consistent, cheerful, and true.
- [1MCP 67] See CT 541.
- [1MCP 112] The harmonious healthy action of all the powers of body and mind results in happiness.
- [1MCP 359] All the varied capabilities that men possess of mind and soul and body are given them by God to be so employed as to reach the highest possible degree of excellence. But this cannot be a selfish and exclusive culture; for the character of God, whose likeness we are to receive, is benevolence and love. Every faculty, every attribute, with which the Creator has endowed us, is to be employed for His glory and for the uplifting of our fellowmen. And in this employment is found its purest, noblest, and happiest exercise.
- [1MCP 360] The youth should be taught the importance of cultivating their physical, mental, and moral powers that they may not only reach the highest attainments in science, but through a knowledge of God may be educated to glorify Him; that they may develop symmetrical characters, and thus be fully prepared for usefulness in this world and obtain a moral fitness for the immortal life.
- [2MCP 374] See CT 541.
- [2MCP 641] See CG 394.

- [MH 398-399] True education includes the whole being. It teaches the right use of one's self. It enables us to make the best use of brain, bone, and muscle, of body, mind, and heart. The faculties of the mind, as the higher powers, are to rule the kingdom of the body. The natural appetites and passions are to be brought under the control of the conscience and the spiritual affections. Christ stands at the head of humanity, and it is His purpose to lead us, in His service, into high and holy paths of purity. By the wondrous working of His grace, we are to be made complete in Him.
- [ML 136] See MM 296.
- [MM 217] Christ has made every provision that your character may be harmonious through the grace given you. Then build it harmoniously. Let the structure rise, stone on stone. Catch the rays of divine light from Jesus, and let them shine upon the pathway of others who are in darkness. All the universe of God is looking upon us with intense interest.
- [MM 296] The most astonishing ignorance prevails in regard to putting brain, bone, and muscle into active service. Every part of the human organism should be equally taxed. This is necessary for the harmonious development and action of every part.
- [1MR 343] If we will resolve to do our best here, exercising the physical muscles equally with the brain powers, if we will work for the harmonious development of all the powers of the being, the blessing of the Lord will rest upon us in large measure.
- [5MR 405] Put all that there is of you in working to get as close as possible to perishing souls. See if you cannot by a consistent, harmonious, all-round character, [and] by the presentations of truth to individuals who are out of Christ, save some souls from ruin.
- [18MR 112] In His life Jesus of Nazareth differed from all other men. His entire life was characterized by disinterested benevolence and the beauty of holiness. In His bosom existed the purest love, free from every taint of selfishness and sin. His life was perfectly harmonious. He is the only true model of goodness and perfection. From the beginning of His ministry men began more clearly to comprehend the character of God.
- [18MR 205] Unless men possess the love of Christ, the qualifications that otherwise would be of value in God's work will be controlled by the natural selfishness of the human heart. Christ desires every man's character to be a

harmonious whole. If it is not this, deformity exists. God and man must cooperate to make the character beautiful and symmetrical.]

- [20MR 192] Wonderful working agencies are in active service, cooperating with hidden power to keep the human machinery in harmonious action.
- [MYP 168] See COL 330.
- [MYP 239] See CT 295-296.
- [MYP 394] See CT 541.
- [PP 595] The true object of education is to restore the image of God in the soul. In the beginning God created man in His own likeness. He endowed him with noble qualities. His mind was well-balanced, and all the powers of his being were harmonious.
- [RC 149] See FE 426.
- [RH 1891/9/29, par. 5] There cannot be a complete, harmonious development of Christian character when Christians exclude themselves from the world; for in this they are not following the example of Christ. [
- [RH 1892/8/30, par. 4] Symmetry of character and the harmonious development of the work will be accomplished only through continual dependence upon God and earnest effort on the part of man; for the secret of our success and power as a people advocating advanced truth will be found in making direct, personal appeals to those who are interested, having unwavering reliance upon the Most High.
- [RH 1900/7/3, par. 12] By indulgence he has destroyed the harmonious action of the different parts of the being. He has misused his physical and mental powers, and the temple of the body is in ruins. By acquiring earthly knowledge he thought to gain a treasure; and he laid his Bible aside, ignorant that it contained a treasure worth everything else.
- [RH 1904/1/14, par. 3] The characters of many of those who have received such wonderful truth are a jumble of opposites. Christ has promised to make them harmonious on every point, not pleasant and agreeable and kind today, and tomorrow harsh and disagreeable and unkind, falsifying their profession of faith.
- [RH 1904/5/26, par. 11] Habits of order and discipline are to be cultivated. All that is done is to brace nerve and muscle and will to more resolute effort for the harmonious development of the whole being.

- [SpM 53] If the students had developed brain, bone, and muscle harmoniously, they could have studied better.
- [SpM 92] See 5MR 405.
- [ST 1877/12/20, par. 3] If the father would have his children develop harmonious characters?, he has a special work to do?. In some children the moral powers strongly predominate?. In others the animal passions are almost irresistible?. There is not so much to be gained by punishing children for their transgressions, as by teaching them the folly and heinousness of their sin, understanding their secret inclinations, and labor to bend them toward the right.
- [ST 1880/5/6, par. 10] A new and symmetrical character may be formed by laying up one grace and good deed upon another, thus climbing Peter's ladder of eight rounds in sanctification. A character thus built will be harmonious in all its paths. Faith will sustain works, for faith works by love and purifies the soul.
- [ST 1886/10/28, par. 2] We are not all constituted alike. We have varied minds; some are strong upon certain points, and very weak upon others. These deficiencies, which are often so very evident, need not and should not exist. If those who have them would take pains to strengthen the weak points in their character by cultivation and exercise, they would soon find these inequalities disappearing. And when all the faculties are in harmonious exercise, the intellect will be clear and strong and the judgment sound.
- [STE 33] See FE 426.
- [STE 47] See CT 64.
- [3T 364] Their characters are so warped by indulgence, flattery, and indolence that they are useless for this life. And if useless so far as this life is concerned, what may we hope for that life where all is purity and holiness, and where all have harmonious characters? I have prayed for these persons; I have addressed them personally. I could see the influence that they would exert over other minds in leading them to vanity, love of dress, and carelessness in regard to their eternal interests. The only hope for this class is for them to take heed to their ways, humble their proud, vain hearts before God, make confession of their sins, and be converted.
- [3T 424] You have loved to debate the truth and loved discussions; but these contests have been unfavorable to your forming a harmonious Christian character, for in this is a favorable opportunity for the exhibition of the very traits of character that you must overcome if you ever enter heaven.
- [3T 466] Working for the salvation of sinners will keep the love of Christ warm in the heart and will give that love a proper growth and development.

Without a correct knowledge of the divine will there will be a lack of harmonious development in the Christian character.

- [3T 532] Rebellion is too frequently established in the hearts of children through the wrong discipline of the parents, when if a proper course had been taken, the children would have formed good and harmonious characters.
- [4T 417] See 1MCP 112.
- [4T 425] See 1MCP 360]
- [4T 608] God would educate men? to the development of a harmonious character.
- [Te 11] All the organs and faculties of his [Adam's] being were equally developed, and harmoniously balanced.
- [TSA 60] No youth can engage in constant study or sedentary employment, and have harmonious action of the physical, mental, and moral powers. Every part of the living machinery must be used. Both mind and body must be given exercise.
- [YI 1898/4/21, par. 9] Humble, willing service is before every one who claims to be a child of God. To every one the Lord has given his work. There is to be earnest, faithful waiting for the message from God, calling to his service. In prospect of the solemn event of the advent of Christ, there is to be no idle waiting with nothing to do. God's children are to prepare others for that great event. There is waiting and watching to be done, but this is to be combined with working. This will develop a harmonious Christian character. This will make the Christian an all-round man, perfect in Christ Jesus, "not slothful in business; fervent in spirit; serving the Lord."
- [YI 1899/6/15, par. 7] The cornerstone of right character is Jesus Christ. His word, if practiced, is sufficient to develop harmonious characters in all who believe, and who fashion their lives in accordance with it.

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