

Article

Shaped by His Upbringing: Jesus' Mission in Luke 4: 16–22 Aligned with Luke 2: 51–52 as a Paradigm for Youth Formation, Empowerment, and Social Engagement Today

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Abstract: This paper examines the formative influence of Jesus' upbringing in Nazareth, particularly as depicted in Luke 4: 16–22, alongside related passages such as Luke 2: 51–52. Through these accounts, this analysis seeks to elucidate the social, cultural, and spiritual dimensions of Jesus' early life and their significance in shaping his mission and identity, as well as how his religious customs and community involvement can inspire contemporary youth by integrating the core pillars of faith, education, and family and empowering them to confront modern challenges with a holistic perspective inspired by Jesus' mission. Methodologically, it should be taken for granted that a tendency to psychologise biblical characters—interpreting their actions or decisions as if they shared modern psychological frameworks—can lead to oversimplifications or misapplications. For example, Jesus' obedience to his parents reflects a culture of strict family authority, contrasting with today's focus on independence and self-expression in youth development. By examining key Greek terms such as *tethramménos* (from *trépho*: 'having been brought up') and *katà tò eiōthòs autò* ('as was his custom') in v.16, this study emphasises Jesus' strong connection to his faith and cultural heritage. His regular participation in synagogue life and his upbringing in a religious and familial context (see Luke 2: 51–52) were crucial in shaping his identity and preparing him for his transformative and transforming mission, according to the Isaianic prophecy (61: 1–2) he read on the same occasion. This paper argues that these early experiences, particularly his education within the Jewish tradition and his family's role in nurturing his spiritual growth, were foundational for the holistic mission Jesus would later proclaim—a mission that sought spiritual, social, and physical liberation.



Citation: Sciberras, Paul. 2024. Shaped by His Upbringing: Jesus' Mission in Luke 4: 16–22 Aligned with Luke 2: 51–52 as a Paradigm for Youth Formation, Empowerment, and Social Engagement Today. *Religions* 15: 1433. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel15121433>

Academic Editor: Franziskus Knoll

Received: 30 October 2024

Revised: 18 November 2024

Accepted: 19 November 2024

Published: 26 November 2024



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Keywords: upbringing; mission; youth; family; faith; theology of education and youth; youth and religion/belief

1. Introduction

Luke 4: 16–30 has garnered considerable scholarly attention, primarily due to its placement within the Gospel and its nuanced relationship to Synoptic parallels in Mark 6: 1–6a and Matthew 13: 53–58 (Tannehill 1975; D. Sloan 1977; R. Sloan 1977; Tyson 1992). Similar to Mark and Matthew, Luke's account includes key elements such as a synagogue setting (v.16), an inquiry regarding Jesus' heritage (vv.22–23), a reference to the adage of a prophet's lack of honour among his own (v.23), and an observation on rejection rooted in unbelief (v.24), which was a significant and pressing challenge to Jesus himself. While both Mark 1: 21–29 and Matthew 4:23 describe Jesus teaching within the synagogue, Luke differs, indicating only his entry (v.16, Greek, *eisēlthen en tē heméra*) and reading from Isaiah 61: 1–2 (Laldinsanga 2019). Furthermore, Luke uniquely introduces the reading of the scroll of the prophet Isaiah (v.16, Greek, *anéstē anagnōnai*), adding a distinctive element that enriches the narrative's theological and literary depth.

A critical but often overlooked aspect of this passage is the emphasis on Jesus' upbringing and religious formation. The text notes that Jesus went to the synagogue "as was his custom", (Greek, *katà tò eiōthòs autò*) revealing the foundational role of his family and

religious education in preparing him for his mission. Jesus' early years, deeply rooted in Jewish tradition, family values, and communal worship, were not merely background—they shaped the transformative ministry he would undertake (Meier 1991).

The details presented at the outset of the pericope in Luke 4:16–22, when considered alongside complementary passages such as Luke 2:51–52, serve as definitive indicators for fostering identity formation, personal development, faith maturation, and holistic spiritual growth. These texts collectively underscore the processes of self-understanding, moral and spiritual progression, and the deepening of faith within the context of one's vocation and relationship with the community. The conclusion to which this paper leads us is that even in Jesus' case—a thirty-year old youth (Luke 3: 23)—there exists a strict exemplary link between his upbringing and his 'Mission Statement' that he applies to himself after proclaiming Isaiah 61: 1–2.

2. Jesus' Mission of Holistic Salvation

It is noteworthy that the Greek form of the quotation from Isaiah 61 recorded by Luke 4: 18–19 displays subtle variations from the original Hebrew text in Isaiah. Specifically, Luke omits the phrase "to bind up the broken-hearted" (Hebrew, *lahabosh l' nishbê rê-leb*; LXX, *iásasthai tous suntetrimménous tē kardía*) in Isaiah 61: 1, possibly reflecting his consistent thematic use of the term "heal" (Hebrew, *hābash*; LXX, *iáomai*) to denote physical cures. In contrast, Luke incorporates the phrase "to set the oppressed free" (Isaiah 58: 6), which may alternatively be rendered as "to send the oppressed away in forgiveness". This additional phrase underscores the emphasis in Jesus' message on liberation and freedom (Hamm 2018; Laldinsanga 2019). The citation of Isaiah 61: 1–2 and Jesus' interpretation fundamentally alter Luke's source (see Mark 6: 1–6a). Here, Luke offers a mixed citation from the LXX of Isaiah 61: 1; 58: 6, and 61: 2, leaving out "to heal the broken-hearted", and replacing Isaiah's "call" (Hebrew, *liqro'*; LXX, *kalésai*) with "proclaim" (Greek, *kērúksai*, in 4: 19) (Fitzmyer 1981; Johnson 1991; Hamm 2018). Luke must have exchanged the verb *kalésai* with *kērúksai* as it had become the technical term for Christian proclamation (Rossé 1995).

In Isaiah 61: 1–2, the prophet articulates a divine promise of vindication directed towards the socially marginalised, denoting categories of individuals situated on the peripheries of the socio-political structures of the time, embodying forms of exclusion and disenfranchisement. In contrast, the Lukan gospel modifies these categories of recipients, reorienting and framing them towards the salvific message within a paradigm that emphasises physical and socio-economic marginalisation (Patella 2022). This shift not only underscores Luke's theological emphasis on liberation, but also suggests a nuanced expansion of the Isaianic vision to encompass broader dimensions of suffering and marginality in the socio-cultural milieu of the gospel's audience.

Luke 4: 16–22 records a pivotal moment in Jesus' life, marking the start of his public ministry and the appropriation of Isaiah's prophecy as his own 'Mission Statement'. Returning to his hometown of Nazareth, Jesus entered the synagogue and read from the scroll of the prophet Isaiah, outlining his mission—a holistic vision of liberation, encompassing the spiritual, social, and physical dimensions of human existence (Hamm 2018).

3. Avoiding the Psychologisation of Biblical Characters

The example of Jesus' upbringing in Nazareth and his customs of attending the synagogue (Luke 4: 16) and maintaining good relationships with his parents (Luke 2: 51–52) provide valuable insights for youth maturation today. These accounts highlight principles such as respect for familial and community structures, spiritual devotion, and a commitment to learning. However, these examples are not without their limits when applied to contemporary contexts.

3.1. Cultural and Temporal Context

Jesus lived in a first-century Jewish society with cultural norms vastly different from those of today. For instance, his relationship with his parents was embedded in a patri-

archal system with a strong emphasis on filial piety and communal living (see Luke 2: 48: “Your father and I”). While respect for parents remains a universal value, the societal structures supporting such relationships, including extended family systems (see Luke 2: 44), have evolved or diminished in many parts of the world.

Similarly, his practise of attending the synagogue reflects a context where communal worship and religious education were central to identity and daily life. In modern times, the diversity of religious expressions, secular influences, and the individualistic tendencies of many societies make it harder to draw a direct parallel.

3.2. *Modern Challenges and Dynamics*

Young people today face unique challenges, such as the pervasive influence of technology, rapidly shifting cultural norms, and the increasing complexity of family dynamics (e.g., blended families or single-parent households). These dynamics were not part of the biblical milieu and require tailored approaches that cannot rely solely on Jesus’ example without cultural and situational adaptation.

3.3. *Avoiding Psychologisation*

The tendency to psychologise biblical characters—interpreting their actions or decisions as if they shared modern psychological frameworks—can lead to oversimplifications or misapplications. For example, while Jesus’ obedience to his parents is exemplary, it occurred within a societal expectation of strict compliance to family authority, unlike today’s emphasis on independence and self-expression in youth development.

Rather than viewing Jesus’ example as a one-size-fits-all template, it is helpful to extract timeless principles, such as prioritising spiritual growth, fostering healthy relationships, and engaging actively in community life. These principles must then be contextualised within modern realities, acknowledging the distinct pressures and opportunities facing young people today. Encouraging critical thinking about how to adapt these principles ensures that Jesus’ life remains relevant and inspiring without imposing an anachronistic framework on contemporary youth. By recognising these limits, young people can appreciate Jesus’ example as a guiding framework rather than a rigid model, allowing room for culturally and personally appropriate applications.

In the modern landscape, where young people are deeply entangled in navigating their identities, ambitions, and roles within society, the example of Jesus’ upbringing and mission becomes increasingly relevant. Contemporary studies on youth development and psychology reveal that young people today confront unique and unprecedented challenges. Research underscores the strain from high academic expectations, pressures to secure financial stability amidst economic uncertainty, and the pervasive impact of social media on self-esteem and identity formation (Twenge 2019). Additionally, some studies highlight the psychological effects of structural inequality, with factors like race, gender, and socio-economic status influencing young people’s access to resources and social mobility (Lareau 2011; Silva 2013). Lareau’s ethnographic study explores how socio-economic factors shape parenting styles and children’s access to resources, influencing their identity and social mobility. Her work highlights the impact of structural inequality on youth development. On the other hand, Silva’s work examines the challenges faced by working-class youth in transitioning to adulthood, noting the effects of economic instability and social inequality on their life choices and psychological well-being.

4. **Jesus Provides a Framework**

By examining Jesus’ early life and mission, this paper seeks to provide a meaningful framework through which the youth of today can interact with and critique essential societal institutions—namely, family, education, religious systems, and society in general. For example, scholars in youth studies have identified family as a cornerstone in shaping identity, yet they note that modern family dynamics are often fraught with competing expectations and generational conflicts (Arnett 2000). This study explores the unique devel-

omental phase of adolescents and emerging youth, highlighting how family expectations and societal pressures influence identity formation and personal development among young adults.

Jesus' interactions with his family, particularly during pivotal moments such as his time in the temple, underscore the significance of this sacred space as a focal point for his ministry and identity. The temple, as a central symbol of Jewish religious life, not only serves as the backdrop for these interactions, but also emphasises the tension between familial obligations and divine calling (Luke 2: 41–52). Thus, this event suggests a model of critical engagement with family expectations. His respectful yet independent approach offers the youth a way to balance family loyalty with personal integrity and purpose. Moreover, educational systems are known to be both a source of empowerment and stress for young people. Contemporary scholars argue that educational settings often emphasise standardised performance over holistic development, which can inhibit critical thinking and personal growth (Freire 2000; Giroux 2011). Jesus' approach to knowledge, characterised by open questioning and critical discourse with the teachers of the Law (Luke 2: 46–47), provides a counter-model to rigid educational structures (Luke 4:21; Greek, *sēmeron peplērotai hē graphē haútē en tois ōsin humōn*). His emphasis on wisdom over rote knowledge aligns with current educational theories that advocate for critical pedagogy and student-centred learning, which encourage the youth to question societal norms and seek truth through dialogue and reflection.

Religion plays a complex role in the lives of young people today. Studies suggest that while some youth find solace and identity in religious affiliation, others are increasingly questioning traditional religious structures or identifying as “spiritual but not religious” (Smith and Snell 2009). Jesus' own journey illustrates a dynamic relationship with religious authorities, emphasising a faith that is lived and active rather than bound strictly by institutional traditions. This model invites youth to engage in faith-based or spiritual practises that foster personal and social transformation, rather than mere adherence to doctrinal norms. Jesus' striking appropriation of the Isaianic text—“Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing”—serves as a compelling illustration of this argument.

Through a synthesis of biblical exegesis and insights from contemporary studies on youth identity formation, Jesus' life offers a paradigm for youth empowerment. His mission, grounded in his early experiences, offers a transformative blueprint that encourages young people to confront personal, social, and spiritual challenges with resilience, critical thought, and compassion. By doing so, they are not only better equipped to navigate the complexities of the modern world, but are also empowered to enact meaningful change within it.

4.1. An Exegetical Approach of Jesus' Upbringing and the Role of Custom

In Luke 4: 16, the phrase “as was his custom” (Greek, *katà tò eiōthòs autô*) is key to understanding the significance of Jesus' early life and religious habits. In alignment with the depiction of his parents (2: 42), Jesus is consistently portrayed as a devout Jew (Hamm 2018), regularly participating in synagogue worship (4: 15.31). His involvement within the synagogue setting reappears throughout the narrative (4: 33.44; 6: 6; 13: 10), underscoring his adherence to Jewish piety and community worship practises (Johnson 1991). The term highlights the regularity of Jesus' synagogue attendance, underscoring his consistent participation in Jewish communal worship and instruction (Meier 1991). In his commentary on Luke, Joel B. Green underscores that this subtle detail reveals Jesus' profound integration within Jewish religious culture, highlighting a life deeply formed by scripture, tradition, and familial practises (Green 1997). This kind of upbringing laid the groundwork for his later ministry, providing a foundation for the profound engagement with scripture that characterised his mission of liberation.

The Greek term *tethramménos* (perfect passive nominative masculine singular participle from *tréphō*), meaning “having been brought up”, adds further nuance to our understanding of Jesus' formation. The term suggests both physical nurturing (often as with food; see Luke 23: 29) (Johnson 1991) and spiritual growth or the nurturing of childhood (Bauer et al. 2000;

Feneberg 1993), indicating that Jesus' upbringing was holistic, involving the development of intellectual, social, and religious dimensions (Keener 2014). Jesus was not only a product of Nazareth's cultural and familial environment, but was nurtured in a way that integrated these elements with a deep religious consciousness.

In Luke 4: 16, the term *tethramménos* carries significant intrinsic value in understanding Jesus identity and mission. The perfect passive participle form of the verb suggests an action completed in the past that has ongoing implications (Zerwick 1963; Wallace 1996), emphasising that Jesus was not only raised in Nazareth but that this upbringing continues to shape his ministry and purpose. This background is crucial as it highlights the duality of his human experience and divine anointing. The allusion to Isaiah 61: 1–2 reinforces this notion; while Jesus has been brought up in a humble context, he is now empowered by the Spirit to proclaim good news, heal the broken-hearted, and declare freedom. This anointing is not merely a past event but an enduring reality that manifests in his actions and teachings. Thus, the use of *tethramménos* underscores the continuity between Jesus' formative years and his current mission, illustrating how his past informs his present role as the Messiah who fulfils prophetic expectations.

This exegetical detail aligns with contemporary studies on the formation of identity in youth. Research in developmental psychology suggests that religious and familial environments significantly shape young people's moral and ethical frameworks. According to a study by Smith and Snell (2009), consistent religious practise during adolescence is linked to stronger moral reasoning, higher levels of civic engagement, and a greater sense of social responsibility in young adulthood. Jesus' habitual engagement with the synagogue, as described in Luke, reflects a similar process, where the practises and values instilled during his formative years equipped him to engage meaningfully with the world.

4.2. Integral Formation

In order to integrate Luke 4: 16 into this analysis, it is methodologically commendable to explore how Jesus' return to Nazareth and his participation in synagogue service are not only shaped by his upbringing, but also reflect his established patterns of community involvement, which are evident in Luke's emphasis on his formative years. This approach underscores both his Jewish identity and his sense of mission, which unfolds in continuity with the values established in Luke 2: 51–52. After three days of searching, Jesus' parents ultimately locate him, a temporal detail that prefigures his passion, death, and resurrection within the same city (Patella 2022). This episode thus functions as the initial component of an *inclusio*, completed with Jesus' final teaching in the Jerusalem temple preceding his arrest (22: 53). Following this encounter, Jesus returns with his parents to Nazareth, where, as Luke records, he remains obedient to them (Greek, *ēn hupotassómenos autois*). However, this event conveys to both his parents and the reader that Jesus' mission transcends familial bonds and the constraints of familiar geographic settings. It is quite evident that there is an arching integration of Luke 4: 16 with Luke 2: 51–52. Textual context and exegetical insights help to demonstrate this integration (Meier 1991).

Luke wants to make a programmatic statement that precisely his hometown of Nazareth—which, in the final analysis, appears here representatively for all Israel—hears the good news and resists it from the start.

Luke is familiar with the Greek tripartite chronology of birth, the first years at home (*ēn tethramménos*), and the period of education at school (as with Paul in Acts 22: 3; Greek, *anatethramménos*). Jesus is presented as a pious Jew with a good upbringing; he regularly attends synagogue (Bovon 2002). In Luke 4: 16, "When he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, he went to the synagogue on the sabbath day, as was his custom", Luke reinforces Jesus' habitual engagement with his faith community, demonstrating that his mission emerges naturally from his established patterns of religious and social practise. This setting functions as a bridge between Jesus' early life, expressed so emphatically in Luke 2: 51–52, and his public ministry, a structure that resonates with Luke's portrayal of Jesus as one who increases "in wisdom and in years, and in divine and human favour"

(Luke 2: 52) (Meier 1991). Marshall makes a very interesting comment when he suggests, “Jesus’ visit to the synagogue probably reflected his normal custom since childhood [Greek, *katà tò eiōthòs autò*], but the parallel expression in Acts 17: 2 suggests that here the reference is rather to his regular use of the synagogue for teaching (Luke 4: 15)” (Marshall 1978; see also Tannehill 1996). The repeated emphasis on his return to his hometown (Greek, *hupo/anastrepho*) and synagogue participation illustrates a continuity from his childhood obedience and development in Nazareth, lending consistency to his role as one who embodies, fulfils, and ultimately transforms Jewish tradition from within.

4.3. Theological Implications

Luke’s specific mention that synagogue attendance was Jesus’ “custom” (Greek, *eiōthòs*) underscores that his participation in Jewish life was regular and intentional, suggesting that his ministry is deeply rooted in Jewish religious culture rather than an abrupt departure from it. Scholars (Fitzmyer 1981; Nolland 1989) highlight that this phrasing aligns with first-century Jewish piety and upbringing, marking Jesus as a person formed within, and respectful of, the traditions he later engages. Jesus’ active participation in synagogue services exemplifies the practical outworking of the character traits established in his youth, such as obedience and wisdom, thus echoing the formative role of his upbringing highlighted in Luke 2: 51–52.

Moreover, the phrase “where he had been brought up” (Greek, *ou ēn tethramménos*) connects his return to Nazareth with his developmental years in the same location, showing how his early life experiences in this community prepare him for the subsequent public role he will play. Exegetical scholars like Bock (1994) suggest that Luke is intentional in portraying Jesus as a member of the community, whose mission arises naturally from his heritage. The emphasis on his upbringing and practise of regular worship underscores a theologically rich image of Jesus as both ‘the fulfilment of the Law, the Prophets, and the Psalms’ (Luke 24: 4; see also Matthew 5: 17) and as a figure deeply embedded in the traditions and practises of his people.

In theological terms, Luke 4: 16 can be seen as embodying a continuation of the holistic growth described in Luke 2: 52. His commitment to synagogue worship reflects a life lived in alignment with God and respectful engagement with his community, which is central to Luke’s portrayal of Jesus. By maintaining this custom, Jesus exemplifies the traits of reverence and responsibility taught in his youth, thus presenting a model for youth empowerment that stresses continuity with one’s religious and social heritage (Meier 1991).

The narrative arc from Luke 2: 51–52 to Luke 4: 16 illustrates how Jesus’ mission is rooted in his formative years, with his obedience, wisdom, and engagement in his faith community serving as the foundation of his public ministry. His participation in the synagogue is not merely a ritual obligation, but a profound act that reflects his identity and his commitment to his heritage (Evans 1990). Luke’s portrayal thus emphasises that empowered missions begin with grounded identity and continuity in community, offering a model that speaks to the importance of a grounded, well-rounded upbringing for effective engagement in one’s faith and society.

4.4. Application for Youth Formation and Social Engagement

In considering Jesus’ upbringing, contemporary youth can draw parallels between his early life and their own journeys. The emphasis on growing “in wisdom and in years, and in divine and human favour” (Luke 2: 52) serves as a powerful model for youth today, encouraging them to pursue both personal development and social responsibility.

Youth programmes that incorporate mentorship, community service, and spiritual guidance can foster similar growth patterns. Just as Jesus’ upbringing shaped his mission, so too can the formative experiences of today’s youth shape their contributions to society. Thus, Luke 2: 51–52 offers a profound insight into the intersection of upbringing and mission, emphasising that empowerment arises not only from personal achievements but also from a commitment to community and ethical engagement.

4.5. Youth Formation Through Holistic Development: A Contemporary Framework

Jesus' mission in Luke 4: 18–19 is not merely a proclamation of spiritual liberation but a call to address the social, emotional, and physical dimensions of human existence. His declaration of good news to the poor, freedom for prisoners, and recovery of sight to the blind illustrates a holistic understanding of human flourishing. This is also Luke's perspective of salvation, finding its resolution even in human joy (see Luke 1: 44; 2:10–11 [joy for the birth of the Saviour]; 6: 23; 10: 17; 15: 7.10; 24: 52). This resonates with contemporary models of youth development, which emphasise the need to address the multifaceted nature of young people's growth.

The *Positive Youth Development* (PYD) model is one contemporary framework that aligns well with Jesus' mission. PYD finds its core in the Five Cs Model (competence, confidence, connection, character, caring/compassion, and contribution), representing a foundational framework within PYD theory, delineating five core psychological, behavioural, and social dimensions that signify optimal youth development. When these Five Cs reach high levels, they facilitate a transformative outcome, often conceptualised as a Sixth C, which encapsulates a youth's contributions to personal growth, community engagement, and societal advancement. Rooted in nearly three decades of developmental research, the Five Cs Model is among the most widely endorsed frameworks within PYD scholarship (Lerner et al. 2005a). This model prioritises positive attributes that empower adolescents to pursue fulfilling, health-promoting, and socially constructive lives, thereby enhancing their well-being and enabling meaningful contributions to their families, communities, and broader civil society. PYD posits that youth development should focus on building competencies, fostering healthy relationships, and promoting engagement in social and civic activities. Richard Lerner (2009), a leading scholar in PYD, argues that when young people are provided with opportunities to develop their abilities and connect with their communities, they are better equipped to contribute positively to society. Similarly, Jesus' mission in Luke presents a vision where individuals are not only recipients of healing and liberation, but are also empowered to participate in the transformation of their communities.

Similar models should be mentioned. For example, the *Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning* (CASEL 2021) framework promotes the idea of helping young people acquire skills in self- and social-awareness, self-management, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making. The *Youth Empowerment Theory* (YET 2013) emphasises the empowering of youth to take leadership roles, influence decisions, and engage actively in their communities. The *4-H Program* is a hands-on learning programme for youth development based on the motto "Head, Heart, Hands, and Health" (Lerner et al. 2005b). *4-H* embodies the principles of PYD in practise, particularly through experiential learning. One last example of a similar model is the youth programme of Jean Baptiste de La Salle, the founder of the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools, that emphasised providing accessible education to the poor while integrating faith formation and moral development. His innovative methods included teaching in the vernacular, structured classroom settings, and fostering a sense of community, discipline, and Christian values to prepare young people for both societal and spiritual responsibilities (Lozano 2019).

By applying this framework to contemporary youth, young people are called to engage with societal challenges such as economic inequality, climate change, and mental health crises. The holistic nature of Jesus' mission provides a model for youth to address these issues in a way that integrates their faith with action, leading to both personal growth and societal transformation.

4.6. Family, Education, and the Role of Tradition in Youth Formation

Jesus' upbringing in Nazareth underscores the importance of family and education in shaping young people's identity and faith. The synagogue, where he regularly participated in worship and learning, played a central role in his religious education. This communal aspect of education is echoed in modern studies on youth development, where family and

educational institutions are seen as critical environments for shaping values, beliefs, and social responsibility.

The research of sociologist James Coleman (1988) on the role of family and community in education highlights that young people who grow up in cohesive family and community settings tend to perform better academically and develop stronger moral compasses. This correlates with the Jewish tradition in which Jesus was raised, where the family and synagogue worked together to provide a comprehensive education that integrated religious instruction with everyday life. The regularity of Jesus' participation in synagogue life, as reflected in Luke's description, suggests that his religious education was not confined to formal lessons but was a lived experience, deeply embedded in his community and daily routines.

In contemporary contexts, the role of family in faith formation remains critical. Studies by Christian Smith and others (Smith and Denton 2005) in the field of the sociology of religion have established that family religious practises, such as regular worship, prayer, and scripture reading, are significant predictors of whether young people maintain their faith into adulthood. Jesus' upbringing serves as a model for the ways in which family and religious education can work together to shape the moral and spiritual identity of young people, empowering them for future engagement with societal issues.

Moreover, religious education today must adapt to the realities of a rapidly changing world. Many young people feel disconnected from traditional religious practises and institutions, seeking more dynamic and participatory ways to engage with their faith. Jesus' own practise of challenging and reinterpreting scripture (see Luke 4: 21 and 4: 24–30) within the synagogue context offers a model for how religious education can evolve to meet the needs of contemporary youth, encouraging critical thinking and active participation in faith communities.

4.7. Youth, Major Institutions, and Societal Transformation: A Call to Engagement

Jesus' engagement with the synagogue in Luke 4 presents a model for young people navigating their relationships with major societal institutions. His approach—honouring the traditions of his upbringing while delivering a transformative message of liberation—serves as an empowering example for youth today, who often feel disconnected from conventional religious, educational, and familial structures.

Sociologist Robert Wuthnow (2007), in his study of religion and young adults, notes that while many young people are disillusioned with institutional religion, they remain deeply interested in spirituality and social justice. This suggests that youth are not rejecting faith but are seeking new ways to live it out in the world. Jesus' mission, which integrates spiritual, social, and political liberation, resonates with this desire for a faith that is both meaningful and engaged with real-world issues.

For contemporary youth, Jesus' example offers a way to bridge the gap between tradition and innovation. Young people can draw on the strengths of their upbringing—whether in family, education, or religious communities—while also working to transform these institutions from within. This transformative engagement can take many forms, from advocating for social justice within religious communities to reforming educational systems to be more inclusive and equitable.

5. Conclusions

Luke 4: 16–22 offers a profound vision of Jesus' mission and its relevance for youth empowerment and social engagement today. Rooted in his upbringing and religious customs, Jesus launched a transformative mission that addressed the spiritual, social, and physical dimensions of human existence. By drawing on both biblical exegesis and contemporary studies of youth development and empowerment, this paper has endeavoured to demonstrate how Jesus' mission provides a model for youth today to engage with personal, social, and spiritual challenges in a holistic and transformative way.

In a world where youth face complex challenges—ranging from social inequality to personal identity struggles—Jesus’ mission of holistic liberation offers a guiding framework. By embracing their upbringing and using it as a foundation for societal engagement, contemporary youth can be empowered to bring about meaningful change in their communities. Inspired by Jesus’ example, they can address the challenges of their time with a vision of justice, freedom, and love, becoming transformative agents in their families, educational systems, and broader society.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Institutional Review Board Statement: Not applicable.

Informed Consent Statement: Not applicable.

Data Availability Statement: Not applicable.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

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